Covering rocket fireAt about 6:30am (03:30 GMT) Hamas [fired a huge barrage of rockets](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/palestinian-group-hamas-launches-surprise-attack-on-israel-what-to-know) into southern Israel with sirens heard as far away as Tel Aviv and Beersheba.Hamas said it launched 5,000 rockets in an initial barrage. Israel’s military said 2,500 rockets were fired.Smoke billowed over residential Israeli areas and people sheltered behind buildings as sirens sounded. At least one woman was reported killed by the rockets.“We announce the start of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and we announce that the first strike, which targeted enemy positions, airports, and military fortifications, exceeded 5,000 missiles and shells,” Mohammed Deif, head of the Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas.Dawn infiltration. The rocket attack served as cover for an unprecedented multipronged infiltration of fighters with the Israeli military saying at 7:40am (04:40 GMT) that Palestinian fighters had crossed into Israel.Most fighters entered through breaches in security barriers separating Gaza and Israel. But at least one Hamas soldier was filmed flying over in a powered parachute. A motorboat carrying fighters was seen heading to Zikim, an Israeli coastal town with a military base.One video showed at least six motorcycles with fighters crossing through a hole in a metal barrier. A photograph released by Hamas showed a bulldozer tearing down a section of fenceAt 9:45am (06:45 GMT) blasts were heard in Gaza and at 10am (07:00 GMT) Israel’s military spokesperson said the [air force was carrying out attacks in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/7/photos-israel-army-launches-air-attacks-on-gaza).Israel’s military said at 10am (07:00 GMT) that Palestinian fighters penetrated at least three military installations around the frontier – the Beit Hanoon border crossing (called Erez by Israel), the Zikim base, and the Gaza division headquarters at Reim.Hamas videos showed fighters running towards a burning building near a high concrete wall with a watchtower and fighters apparently overrunning part of an Israeli military facility and shooting from behind a wall.Saleh al-Arouri, deputy chief of Hamas in the occupied West Bank, issued a call to arms. “We must all fight this battle, especially the resistance fighters in the West Bank,” he said in a statement.Several captured Israeli military vehicles were later pictured being driven into Gaza and paraded there.

Border town raids

Fighters raided the Israeli town of Sderot, another community Be’eri, and the town of Ofakim, 30km (20 miles) east of Gaza, according to Israeli media.Residents of southern Israel fortified their homes to function as bomb shelters and were using them as panic rooms. Israel’s military ordered residents to shelter inside, saying on the radio, “We will reach you.”By late evening, Israeli troops were still working to clear communities overrun by Hamas fighters.

Casualties

Israel reports on Monday said some [700 people](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/sirens-warn-of-rockets-launched-towards-israel-from-gaza-news-reports) were killed. Israel’s Ministry of Health updated the number of Israelis wounded in the ongoing violence, saying 2,382 were treated in hospitals so far.In its latest bulletin, the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip said at least 413 people were killed, including 78 children, and more than 2,300 wounded.Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs accused Hamas fighters of going house-to-house and killing civilians.

Taking captives

Israeli media reported armed men seized hostages in Ofakim. Palestinian Islamic Jihad said it was holding Israeli soldiers, and Hamas social media accounts showed footage appearing to show captives being taken into Gaza.One video showed three young men in vests, shorts and flip-flops being marched through a security installation with Hebrew writing on the wall. Other videos showed female captives and Israeli soldiers being dragged from a military vehicle.

Israeli air attacks continued late Saturday night as did rocket fire into southern Israel.Israeli troops were still fighting Hamas fighters in 22 locations near the Gaza Strip – a startling sign of the breadth of the assault.Israel’s military said it is still fighting “hundreds” of Palestinian infiltrators

In the early morning hours of Saturday, October 7 Palestinians across the West Bank woke up to the sound of explosions.

No one really knew what was happening until reports started trickling in that fighters from Gaza had taken control of Beit Hanoun crossing – the only one through which Gaza residents may reach the rest of historic Palestine on the extremely rare occasions the occupier allows them to

Soon information appeared on social media that the wall that Israel had erected around the Gaza Strip to keep its 2.3 million people permanently imprisoned had been breached.

And then came [the images](https://twitter.com/MariamBarghouti/status/1710584616858402901) and footage of the broken wall. In one [video](https://twitter.com/N12News/status/1710595678320132140), showing a bulldozer bringing down the wall, a Palestinian man can be heard chanting in exhilaration Rest in peace, wall

It was unbelievable. It felt surreal. We wondered how it was possible that the people of Gaza had broken out of their prison.

Few in the world would understand our feelings in that moment. Perhaps political prisoners might

The vast majority of the Palestinian population remaining in historic Palestine has been born in prison and only knows prison. Gaza is completely sealed off from the rest of the world by Israel’s apartheid wall and subjected to a debilitating siege, in which its neighbour Egypt happily partakes

In the occupied West Bank, all entry and exit points of every Palestinian village, town, and city are controlled by the Israeli occupation forces; Palestinians unlike the Israeli settlers stealing their land have no freedom of movement.

Our imprisonment also features prison labour. With the Israeli occupation suffocating the Palestinian economy and the resulting high unemployment rate Palestinians are forced to seek work from their prison wardens. The Israeli authorities, of course, strictly control this process, issuing Palestinians work permits” and often arbitrarily revoking them

As in a real prison, we are also subjected to round-the-clock [surveillance](https://www.mei.edu/publications/nowhere-hide-impact-israels-digital-surveillance-regime-palestinians) through cameras in public places, drones, the tapping of phones and telecommunications, a network of infiltrators and spies

And of course, just like prisoners, we are punished for misbehaving In Gaza, punishment means indiscriminate bombardment of densely populated areas that always results in the mass killing of civilians.

In the West Bank, we are subjected to search-and-arrest raids on a nightly basis, where occupiers invade our homes, brutalise our loved ones in front of terrified children and take them away (sometimes the children themselves) to detain them indefinitely without charge. Shooting dead Palestinian civilians in those raids is, of course, a regular occurrence.

In this context, seeing those images and videos of the prison wall torn down in Gaza is liberating. Their symbolic power cannot be overstated.

We felt the same exhilaration back in 2021 when we heard the news that [six Palestinian political prisoners](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/6/six-palestinians-escape-from-high-security-prison-in-israel) had broken out of Israeli prison. They had dug a tunnel out of jail using spoons, pieces of metal, and loads of patience.

That prison break became an emblem of Palestinian perseverance. Palestinians cheered on the prisoners as they evaded their prison wardens for days. We celebrated their simple acts of savouring freedom – eating a prickly pear for the first time in 20 years, hugging a cow, walking in the hills of Nazareth. We breathed freedom with them, as if we were also free.

The liberating feeling of breaking out of prison has also come from our brave imprisoned hunger strikers. In 2011, Khader Adnan, who had been detained by the Israelis on and off without a charge for a decade, started a hunger strike against yet another unjust detention. He was joined by hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Despite threats and mistreatment, he persevered until enough pressure built up and Israel was forced to release him. We also celebrated Adnan’s freedom as if it were our own.

These brief moments of rupture in our reality of imprisonment are at once terrifying and exhilarating. Of course, they are always short-lived – brief instances of Palestinian triumph before the unbearable weight of Israeli military domination comes back crushing us.

The initial euphoria of seeing the apartheid wall come down in Gaza was quickly overtaken by the terrifying realisation of what would come next.

We knew war broke out the moment Palestinians in Gaza broke out of their Israeli prison. My conversations with peers and friends, my group chats, phone calls – all were dominated by the same dark premonition: “They are going to kill us all.”

We know, from direct experience, what Israel’s [policy of revenge](https://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20231010_revenge_policy_in_motion_israel_committing_war_crimes_in_gaza#:~:text=Acts%20of%20revenge%20are%20prohibited,towards%20Gaza%20for%20many%20years.) means. We also know that no matter what savagery its army commits, the West would “stand by” it and point to “Palestinian crimes”.

Israel had waged five wars on Gaza, each time mass killing Palestinian civilians as Western leaders justified the slaughter with the familiar mantra “Israel has the right to defend itself.”

And of course, that is exactly what is happening now. Israel is carpet bombing Gaza. It has imposed a full blockade on Gaza, with no water, electricity, food or medicine entering the Strip. Telecommunications infrastructure has been bombarded, effectively cutting off Palestinians in Gaza from the rest of the world. Meanwhile, the West Bank has been completely blocked; checkpoints closed all across, effectively paralysing the whole territory. Israeli soldiers are shooting Palestinians and encouraging settlers to do so as well.

And yet, the West is “standing by” its ally, Israel, and its “right to defend itself” from the people it brutally occupies and oppresses. Western nations are lapping up Israeli propaganda, that it is fighting “Islamic terrorism”, that “Hamas is ISIS”, that Palestinians are “sub-human”, that they are “beheading babies”. All pretences of morality, logic and truth have been dropped in order to justify the mass killing of Palestinians.

In the past seven days, the Israeli army has killed more than 2,200 Palestinians in Gaza, including 600 children. Its soldiers have murdered at least 53 Palestinians in the West Bank. Since the start of the year, 250 others have been killed, making it the most lethal year since the United Nations began documenting fatalities in 2004-2005.

All of this we expected. All of this still is painful and horrifying. All of this will go down into Palestinian history as yet another episode of resistance by the Palestinians and mass slaughter and ethnic cleansing by Israel.

However, unlike other moments in Palestinian history, something is different this time. Not only did Palestinians manage to break free from their prison in Gaza – albeit for a short while – but also for the first time, they dealt a blow that will have a far-reaching impact.

The Palestinians have struck Israel where it has struck Palestinians for more than 75 years: lives and land. The Israeli arrogance and sense of security that it can oppress, kill and steal land with impunity have been shattered.

We’ve been held hostage by Israel for decades. We’ve been prisoners in our land for generations. But this October, the wimpy kid finally got his punch and the bully is now shaken.

As our oppressors are out killing indiscriminately in blind rage, an uncomfortable feeling is creeping in among them that the prison they are holding us in is starting to crumble.

Israel and [Hamas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-tothe-palestinian-group) are locked in a new cycle of escalating violence, after a surprise attack on Saturday involving aerial, sea and ground operations, initiated by the Palestinian group from the Gaza Strip. Israel has responded with a deadly bombardment of the blockaded coastal enclave.

What happened and when?

* Early on Saturday morning, the Palestinian armed group Hamas [launched “Operation Al-Aqsa Flood”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/7/israel-palestine-escalation-live-news-barrage-of-rockets-fired-from-gaza) against Israel in the most serious escalation since their 11-day war in 2021.
* Hamas said it had fired 5,000 rockets, while Israel confirmed that the group’s fighters had entered its territory.
* Daniel Hagari, an Israeli army spokesperson, said that the group attacked from the land, sea and air.
* The [first round of rockets was fired](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/sirens-warn-of-rockets-launched-towards-israel-from-gaza-news-reports) at 6:30am local time (03:30 GMT).
* The Israeli army also said it launched “Operation Iron Swords” against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.
* The early-morning attacks occurred on Simchat Torah, a holiday which falls towards the conclusion of the weeklong Jewish festival known as Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles.

Where did the attacks take place?

* The rockets were fired as far north as Tel Aviv. Hamas also sent fighters into southern Israel.
* Israeli media said that gunmen had opened fire on passers-by in the town of Sderot, and footage circulating on social media appeared to show clashes in city streets as well as gunmen in jeeps roaming the countryside. One report claimed Hamas fighters had taken control of multiple Israeli civilian population centres, where residents were begging for help from their government.
* The Israeli army says dozens of fighter jets were carrying out attacks on Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip.

How many casualties in Israel and Palestine?

* The Palestinian health ministry in Gaza said that at least 413 people had been killed and nearly 2,300 wounded so far in Israeli attacks.
* The Israeli death toll due to Hamas attacks rose to at least 700 people, according to the latest reports by [Israeli media](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/8/israel-palestine-escalation-live-israeli-forces-bombard-gaza).
* Israel’s health ministry has updated the number of Israelis wounded in the ongoing violence, saying 2,382 have been treated in hospitals so far.

Why did Hamas attack Israel?

* Hamas [spokesperson Khaled Qadomi](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/7/israel-palestine-escalation-live-news-barrage-of-rockets-fired-from-gaza) has told Al Jazeera that the group’s military operation is in response to all the atrocities the Palestinians have faced over the decades.
* “We want the international community to stop atrocities in Gaza, against Palestinian people, our holy sites like Al-Aqsa. All these things are the reason behind starting this battle,” he said.
* “This is the day of the greatest battle to end the last occupation on Earth,” Mohammed Deif, the Hamas military commander said, adding that 5,000 rockets were launched.
* “Everyone who has a gun should take it out. The time has come,” Deif said, according to reports.
* Hamas called on “the resistance fighters in the West Bank” as well as “our Arab and Islamic nations” to join the battle, in a statement posted on Telegram.
* Osama Hamdan, senior spokesperson for Hamas, told Al Jazeera that the group [was not attacking civilians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-tothe-palestinian-group) even though the group’s own videos have shown its fighters taking elderly Israelis hostage during the fighting on Saturday.
* “You have to differentiate between settlers and civilians. Settlers attacked Palestinians,” Hamdan said.
* Gun battles are ongoing in several towns in southern Israel.

What is the Israeli government saying?

* Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said his Security Cabinet has declared the country at war following the attack.
* The decision, announced on Sunday, formally authorises “the taking of significant military steps”, it said in a statement.
* “The war that was forced on the state of Israel in a murderous terrorist assault from the Gaza Strip began at 6:00 yesterday,” it said.

What is the latest on the ground?

* Israel battered Palestinians in Gaza on Sunday, and in a sign that the conflict could spread beyond blockaded Gaza, Israel and Lebanon’s Hezbollah [exchanged artillery](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/israel-hezbollah-exchange-fire-raising-regional-tensions) and rocket fire.
* On Monday, gun battles continued between Hamas fighters and Israeli forces in three main areas in southern Israel – at a kibbutz in Karmia and in the cities of Ashkelon and Sderot.
* Our correspondent, Charles Stratford, who is in Israel’s Ashdod, said he received reports of an “ongoing hostage situation” in the settlement of Kfar Aza, east of Gaza.
* Israeli air attacks and shelling aimed at houses and apartment buildings have displaced some 123,538 Palestinians in Gaza, according to the UN humanitarian relief agency.
* Israel’s military, which faces questions over its failure to prevent the attack, said it was still fighting but had regained control of most infiltration points along security barriers.
* Follow all the [latest updates on our Live page](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-live-news-gaza-under-non-stop-bombardment).

What are the international reactions so far?

* People around the world have taken to the streets of their cities in support of both Palestine and Israel as fighting continues. Some of the countries where people were seen waving flags in support of Palestine include Spain, South Africa and Syria.
* In North America, protests took place in support of Palestine in the US cities of Chicago and New York and the Canadian city of Ottawa.
* Meanwhile, the European Union’s foreign chief, Josep Borrell, expressed solidarity with Israel.
* The French foreign ministry said France condemned the “terrorist attacks under way against Israel and its population” and that France expressed its full solidarity with Israel.
* The UK “unequivocally condemns” the surprise attack by Palestinian group Hamas on Israel on Saturday, Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said.
* Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was “deeply shocked by the news of terrorist attacks in Israel” and that India stands “in solidarity with Israel at this difficult hour”.
* Egypt warned of “grave consequences” from an escalation in a statement from the foreign ministry carried by the state news agency on Saturday. It called for “exercising maximum restraint and avoiding exposing civilians to further danger”.
* Lebanese group Hezbollah issued a statement on Saturday saying it was closely following the situation in Gaza and was in “direct contact with the leadership of the Palestinian resistance”.
* An adviser to Supreme Leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei said Iran supported the Palestinians’ attack, the semiofficial ISNA news site reported.

On October 7, Hamas launched a massive military operation into Israeli territory. The shooting of thousands of rockets into Israel was followed by an attack by land, air and sea, with fighters penetrating deep into territory under Israeli control. They attacked military installations and temporarily took over various settlements. The death toll among Israelis has exceeded 1,200, including more than 120 soldiers; dozens of Israeli hostages were also taken into the Gaza Strip.

The planning of the operation took somewhere between a few months and two years, per different accounts from Hamas leaders. The depth and magnitude of the attack were unprecedented and took Israel by surprise. It was a reaction to changing regional dynamics and growing Israeli aggression.

While Hamas may appear to have fulfilled its declared short-term goals of deterring Israeli violations of Al-Aqsa Mosque and taking hostages to bargain for the release of Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli jails, it does not appear to have a long-term end game. A heavy-handed response by Israel is ongoing – already claiming more than 950 Palestinian lives – but sooner or later it will have to end with mediation.

Why did Hamas attack now?

Hamas’s move was triggered by three factors. First, the policies of the far-right Israeli government enabling settler violence in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem led to a sense of desperation among Palestinians and growing demands for a reaction. At the same time, the rising tensions in the West Bank caused by these policies necessitated the shift of Israeli forces away from the south and into the north to guard the settlements. This gave Hamas both a justification and an opportunity to attack.

Second, the Hamas leadership felt compelled to act due to the acceleration of Arab-Israeli normalisation. In recent years, this process further diminished the significance of the Palestinian issue for Arab leaders who became less keen on pressuring Israel on this matter.

If a Saudi-Israeli normalisation deal had been concluded, it would have been a turning point in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which may have eliminated the already weak chances of a two-state solution. This was also part of Hamas’s calculations.

Third, Hamas was emboldened after it managed to repair its ties with Iran. In recent years, the movement had to reconsider the political position it assumed in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011, in opposition to Iran and its ally, the Syrian regime.

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has said that he was personally involved in improving the relations between Hamas and Damascus. A Hamas delegation visited Damascus in October 2022 and its political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh travelled to Beirut in April and Tehran in June. Just last month, Nasrallah hosted the Secretary-General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Ziad al-Nakhalah and the deputy chief of Hamas’s political bureau Saleh al-Arouri.

Will there be a united front around Hamas?

Iran has denied direct involvement in Hamas’s operation but it has expressed support for it. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps general Yahya Rahim Safavi [said](https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/support-proud-operation-adviser-to-iran-supreme-leader-rahim-safavi-backs-hamas-attack-on-israel-4459372) “we support this operation, and we are sure that the resistance front also supports this issue”.

However, Hamas’s realignment with the “resistance axis” does not necessarily mean there will be a united front on the ground confronting Israel. Hezbollah, for example, has not joined the fight. Currently, domestic politics in Lebanon are not conducive to a conflict with Israel, which is holding the Lebanese group back.

What Hezbollah is trying to do is to deter the Israeli army from going too far in its revenge against Hamas in Gaza, hence it is increasing the pressure on the Lebanese border. Its shelling of Israeli positions is most probably meant to have a psychological effect than a military one. It has also chosen not to overreact in relation to the killing of three of its members by Israeli bombardment.

However, both Israel and Hezbollah are on alert and tensions are high, which means miscalculations can happen.

What is Hamas’s end game?

Three days into Hamas’s surprising and overwhelming attack, it is not clear what its end game is and what it can do to reap long-term benefits. Its priority has seemed to be to take both military and civilian hostages to help deter aggressive Israeli retaliation and later exchange them for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

However, Israel does not appear to be deterred. Hamas spokesperson Abu Ubaida has said that Israeli bombardment has killed four Israeli citizens held in Gaza. He has also [warned](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/10/hamas-says-will-kill-hostages-if-israeli-attacks-on-gaza-civilians-continue) that the movement will start killing hostages if Israel strikes civilian homes in Gaza without warning; this might backfire against Hamas if implemented.

The Hamas leadership has said that the objectives of the attacks are ending “Israeli violations”, securing the release of Palestinian prisoners, and “returning to the project of establishing a state”. Hamas may be able to secure a prisoner swap deal with Israel, although, in the past, many of those released from Israeli prisons had been quickly rearrested. But the group does not have a clear roadmap for moving forward on “establishing a state” and it cannot have one separately from the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank.

What is next?

Israel has struggled to recover from the attack. It has intensified its bombardment of the Gaza Strip and announced a total blockade on the coastal enclave, turning off electricity and blocking humanitarian aid. Netanyahu’s government was already facing domestic turmoil before the attack due to its judicial reforms; its stability will now be tested even further.

Israel will have to decide whether to undertake a ground invasion and if it is worth the military and political costs. Whether it proceeds with it or not, sooner or later its military operation, including the excessive bombardment of the strip, will have to come to an end. At that point, Israel will have to ask for Egypt to mediate some kind of conclusion of this escalation and a deal to exchange prisoners.

When the Israeli assault ends, Hamas, which has gained more legitimacy in Gaza and the West Bank with its operation, will also face the challenge of translating it into policies and governance that would serve the Palestinians in the long term.

The United States, for its part, will have to put its normalisation mediation plans on hold for now. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was expected in Israel and Saudi Arabia later this month to discuss normalisation talks, but his plans have changed and now include a visit to Jordan.

Given the current public mood in the Arab world after the Gaza attack, it would be too complicated to advance talks on a Saudi-Israeli deal. Most probably, these talks will be put on the shelf by the Saudis in the short term but not necessarily fully cancelled.

These developments work in Iran’s favour. With the progress of Arab-Israeli normalisation halted, Tehran can now pressure the US into re-entering a nuclear deal of some kind that would take some of the sanctions pressure off the Iranian economy.

Whatever mediation happens between Israel and Hamas eventually, it is unlikely to address the root causes of the conflict. There does not seem to be any political will within Israel to address issues like the imprisonment of Palestinians, the freezing of Palestinian funds, the dire socioeconomic conditions in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, or the continuing settlement expansion. This means the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will continue to fester and produce cycles of violence.

The Israeli authorities seem to have been caught off-guard by Hamas’s [Operation Al-Aqsa Flood](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/sirens-warn-of-rockets-launched-towards-israel-from-gaza-news-reports) on Saturday. Besides launching rocket fire, the Palestinian faction also sent its fighters from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel, where they attacked military targets, briefly took control of some Israeli settlements and took dozens of civilians and soldiers hostage.

Some have called Hamas’s attack a “colossal failure” of the Israeli military and intelligence apparatus. Others, mostly diplomats and political leaders from the West and beyond, have labelled it an “unprovoked” “terrorist” act while insisting that Israel has the “right to defend itself”.

But nothing about this operation is surprising or unprovoked. Neither is it just the result of gaps in Israeli security measures. It is a response that is to be expected from the Palestinian people, who have faced Israeli settler colonial rule and occupation for decades.

International law prohibits states from “any military occupation, however temporary”. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 37/43 also reaffirms that people struggling for independence and liberation from colonial rule have the right to do so using “all available means, including armed struggle”. In other words, Operation Al-Aqsa Flood is part of the armed Palestinian struggle provoked by the Israeli occupation and colonialism.

It is also not surprising that the Palestinian armed factions rely on asymmetric tactics and stealth. That is because they are up against one of the most sophisticated and well-funded armed forces in the world.

That the operation was launched from Gaza is also not surprising. The late Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said once called Gaza the “essential core” of the Palestinian struggle. It is an impoverished, congested place inhabited largely by Palestinian refugees expelled from their homes during the Nakba of 1948. It previously gave birth to the first Intifada and has been hosting the bulk of the Palestinian armed resistance over the past few decades.

Gaza has also been under debilitating siege for 16 years, which has taken a heavy toll on its people but has failed to destroy their will to resist. The blockade was imposed after Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in 2006, but its Palestinian rival, Fatah, along with Israel and its backers conspired to prevent it from taking power.

After several months of fighting, Hamas was able to take full control of Gaza in June 2007, for which Israel and its partners decided to collectively punish the Palestinians living there.

For more than 16 years, the residents of Gaza have had [no freedom of movement](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/6/24/gaza-blockade-15-years). They can leave through the Israeli-controlled checkpoints if they have an Israeli work permit or in rare cases if they have been given special permissions by Israel to receive medical treatment in the occupied West Bank for life-threatening conditions. To leave for any other part of the world, they must have a valid visa, which is difficult to obtain by stateless people, and then navigate the Egyptian authorities’ arbitrary decisions to close the Rafah border crossing and deny entry to Palestinians.

The blockade has brought the economy of Gaza [nearly to a standstill](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/24/impoverished-gaza-economy-struggles-under-israeli-blockade). Today close to half the population is unemployed. Among the young, the unemployment rate is more than 60 percent. The food supply is also limited by the siege. From 2007 to 2010, Israeli authorities kept a calorie count of Palestinians’ nutritional needs to narrowly avoid malnutrition while restricting access to food for the people in Gaza.

Today, according to the World Food Programme, a significant portion of the population is food insecure. In 2022, 1.84 million people across Palestine – one-third of the population – did not have enough food to eat. Among these people, 1.1 million were considered “severely food insecure”, 90 percent of whom lived in Gaza.

The strip also suffers from an energy crisis. The Israeli ban on the entry of fuel into Gaza means that electricity production is severely limited. In 2023, Gaza has had only 13 hours of electricity a day. In 2017 and 2018, this was down to seven hours a day.

This has in turned caused severe problems with water provision and sanitation. The constant blackouts have prevented water treatment plants from functioning properly. As a result, untreated sewage simply flows into the Mediterranean Sea.

Gaza’s aquifers, the main source of its water, are also nearly depleted and contaminated by sea- and wastewater. A significant portion of all reported diseases in Gaza is caused by [poor access to safe water](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/12/gaza-undrinkable-water-slowly-poisoning-people).

The blockade has also taken a toll on the strip’s medical facilities. Hospitals lack basic supplies, equipment and infrastructure and are unable to handle severe cases or provide proper care for the chronically ill.

Then there are the [routine Israeli military campaigns](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/8/the-names-and-faces-of-the-15-children-killed-in-gaza). Israel justifies its onslaughts on the enclave by claiming they are in pursuit of Palestinian fighters. Yet it systematically targets civilians and non-military civilian infrastructure like residential buildings, hospitals, schools, water treatment plants, etc, making life in Gaza all the more unbearable.

The [psychological impact](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-stream/2022/6/23/what-is-trauma-doing-to-young-people-in-gaza) of all of this cannot be understated, especially among the young, who feel a heightened sense of hopelessness and mental distress. As a Palestinian youth in Gaza told me during an interview in 2013: “Every day here is a struggle to stop yourself from losing your mind. You will notice that the youth in Gaza often go to university and then on the side they do internships, volunteer or set up organizations. All this is done to remain occupied mentally and delay the inevitable point when you lose it.”

But all these years of tragedy and suffering have not killed the Palestinian spirit of resistance.

The formal justification for the operation Hamas gave was the desecration by Israelis of Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam’s third holiest site, and increased settler violence against the Palestinians. But considering how well-planned it looks, it is likely that Operation Al-Aqsa Flood has been in the works from before the recent events in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

In fact, what appears to be the largest military response by Palestinians in decades was an inevitable development, an act of resistance and a reaction to the suffering of the people of Gaza under a brutal blockade and occupation. It is part of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, and it solidifies Gaza’s place at the heart of it.

An Israeli lawmaker has told Al Jazeera that his party warned about events like Saturday’s Hamas attack on Israel if the country’s government continued its illegal occupation of Palestinian lands.

Hamas launched a multipronged assault at dawn on Saturday with thousands of rockets fired at Israel, and the Gaza-based group’s fighters infiltrating Israeli towns and illegal settlements.

The attack left at least 600 Israelis dead, including dozens of soldiers, with bodies strewn on roads. Meanwhile, at least 313 Palestinians have been killed and more than 1,700 others wounded in Israeli bombardments of the besieged Gaza enclave.

Ofer Cassif, a member of the Knesset and leftist Hadash coalition, said he warned the situation would “erupt” if the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not change its policies towards Palestinians. Hadash has four seats in the 120-member Knesset.

“We condemn and oppose any assault on innocent civilians. But in contrast to the Israeli government that means that we oppose any assault on Palestinian civilians as well. We must analyse those terrible incidents [the attacks] in the right context – and that is the ongoing occupation,” Cassif said

“We have been warning time and time again… everything is going to erupt and everybody is going to pay a price – mainly innocent civilians on both sides. And unfortunately, that is exactly what happened,” he said

“The Israeli government, which is a fascist government, supports, encourages, and leads pogroms against the Palestinians. There is an ethnic cleansing going on. It was obvious the writing was on the wall, written in the blood of the Palestinians  – and unfortunately now Israelis as well,” he added.

More than 20,000 Palestinians have left Gaza’s border region to head further inside the Hamas-controlled territory to seek refuge in UN schools, according to UNRWA, the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees.

Previously, conflicts between Israel and Hamas resulted in extensive devastation in Gaza and days of rocket attacks on Israeli towns. The current escalation appears to be even more precarious than normal, as Israel’s far-right government grapples with the unprecedented security breach, while Palestinians are mired in despair due to the ongoing occupation in the West Bank and the suffocating blockade in Gaza.

“The only thing Netanyahu cares about is not the well-being of the citizens of Israel, let alone of Palestinians in the occupied territories,” Cassif said. “He is interested in surviving. He just wants to stay out of prison. That is the only motivation and incentive that drives [him].”

Netanyahu is facing numerous [legal troubles](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/22/explainer-what-are-the-allegations-against-israels-netanyahu) at home with the country’s attorney general filing several charges against him, including fraud, breach of trust, and corruption. The Israeli leader has strongly denied the charges.

The latest escalation [raises](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/israel-hezbollah-exchange-fire-raising-regional-tensions) the prospect of a broader regional conflict. On Sunday, Hezbollah, a powerful armed group backed by Iran, said it had launched guided rockets and artillery onto three posts in Shebaa Farms “in solidarity” with the Palestinian people.

Shebaa Farms, which is claimed by Lebanon, was captured by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War.

The Israeli military said on Sunday it fired artillery into an area of Lebanon from where cross-border mortar fire was launched. Israel’s military said one of its drones struck a Hezbollah post in the area of Har Dov, an area in Shebaa Farms.

“I’m afraid that some of the elements like Hezbollah are going to join this war. I hope not, of course. Indeed, for the sake of all people, of all civilians, Palestinians and Israelis alike, I hope that that this is going to end as soon as possible,” Cassif said, adding that “the only way to stop the bloodshed of both peoples is to put an end to the occupation”.

On Sunday, an Egyptian policeman [opened fire](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/egyptian-policeman-kills-israeli-tourists-in-alexandria-reports) on tourists in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, killing at least two Israeli nationals and one Egyptian, according to local media reports.

Extra News television channel, which has close ties to Egyptian security agencies, quoted an unidentified security official as saying that another person was wounded in the attack at an Israeli tour group in Pompey’s Pillar site in Alexandria.

“This morning during a visit of Israeli tourists in Alexandria, Egypt, a local opened fire at them, murdering two Israeli citizens and their Egyptian guide,” Israel’s foreign ministry said in a statement.

“In addition, there is a wounded Israeli in moderate condition,”

As the fighting between the Israeli army and Hamas rolled into its [second day](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/8/israel-palestine-escalation-live-israeli-forces-bombard-gaza), Tel Aviv began to wake up from its daze.

Biking through the streets was eerie, and people looked at one another with fear and even veiled suspicion on their faces.

While beaches and public spaces remained mostly empty, a few residents could be seen walking their dogs, going for a bike ride or just taking a walk.

Curious people stopped and gathered around crews working to clear rubble from the side of a road. Two buildings had been struck by a [Hamas rocket barrage](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-tothe-palestinian-group) on Saturday night, injuring four people.

Most restaurants have remained closed.

A few reopened their commercial kitchens for the [war effort](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/8/intense-battles-as-israel-declares-state-of-war), such as a pizzeria that had a pick-up truck outside with hundreds of pizza boxes stacked in its bed, ready for delivery to soldiers.

The pizzeria has stopped selling to the public, making food only for soldiers.

People approach the volunteers preparing food for delivery to the south, asking how they can help and offering to donate.

Some restaurants are still serving Tel Aviv, and some food delivery scooters sped down the empty streets, bringing food to the many Israelis who are still indoors, glued to their televisions and watching the news unfold.

Police patrols pass by, stopping people here and there to inquire about where they are going.

Last flight out

On Saturday night, Israelis and tourists alike flocked to Ben Gurion Airport to try to snag a last flight out of Israel. On Sunday, major airlines cancelled flights to the country.

On Saturday night, those who had confirmed tickets waited anxiously to see if their flight would take off.

Others came to see if they could buy a last-minute ticket.

One traveller described the scene, saying that there were many more people in line at check-in, waiting to see if they could get a ticket, than there were past the security lines at the boarding gates.

Many people are bewildered and frightened, made more so by the official declaration of a state of war by the Israeli cabinet on Sunday.

A day earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had told Israelis in a video statement: “We are at war. … I call on all citizens of Israel to unite, to achieve our highest goal – victory in the war.”

Since Hamas’s surprise attack on Israel on Saturday morning, various sectors of Israeli society have seemingly put their differences aside and focused on the war declaration.

For now, the people of Tel Aviv are slowly shaking off their caution and venturing out to try to connect with each other again.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday declared that his country was [“at a war”](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/8/intense-battles-as-israel-declares-state-of-war) after Hamas, the Palestinian group that governs Gaza, sent dozens of its fighters into Israel in one of the deadliest attacks in decades.

“We are at war. Not an ‘operation,’ not a ‘round,’ but at war,” Netanyahu said, adding that “the enemy will pay an unprecedented price”.

More than 700 Israelis, including dozens of soldiers, have been killed after Hamas fighters went on a rampage inside Israeli territory, taking many of them captive. Israel soon launched air strikes on Gaza killing more than 400 Palestinians.

Netanyahu has ordered mobilisation of more than 100,000 Israeli forces as it prepares for possible ground invasion of Gaza, which has remained under an Israeli air, land and sea blockade since 2007.

Since [Israeli troops and settlers withdrew from Gaza in 2005](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/7/timeline-israels-attacks-on-gaza-since-2005), the besieged territory – home to two million people – has faced several rounds of deadly Israeli assaults. More than 2,000 Palestinians were killed in Israeli assaults in 2014. At least 73 Israelis, including 67 soldiers killed in the seven-week war.

What does the war declaration mean?

Israel has launched military offensives in Gaza and Lebanon before, without a formal declaration. The declaration now essentially greenlights Israel’s intensified military action against Hamas.

Mohammed Jamjoom, Al Jazeera’s correspondent in West Jerusalem, said the Israeli cabinet’s approval of Netanyahu’s declaration of war means: “The prime minister and the defence minister can essentially make decisions going forward without having to consult the cabinet when it comes to every specific action.”

“It essentially formalises it, legalises the war going forward,” he said.

Meanwhile, Francesca Albanese, the United Nations special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, has warned of a [“dangerous” narrative](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/necessary-to-stand-with-both-israelis-palestinians-un-rapporteur) about the Israel-Hamas conflict that ignores the history of violence against Palestinians.

Could a ground offensive follow?

In his war declaration, Netanyahu told Israelis: “We will bring the fight to them with a might and scale that the enemy has not yet known,” with observers suggesting a land invasion by Israel could be imminent.

On Monday, Israel said a “total blockade”, including a ban on admitting food and fuel, would be imposed on the Palestinian enclave raising concerns about the well-being of its residents who have been facing incessant bombardments in the past two days

More than 120,000 people in the besieged Palestinian enclave have been displaced due to the intense bombardment.

Al Jazeera’s senior political analyst, Marwan Bishara, warned that the situation between Israel and the Palestinians “is going to get much worse” in the coming days, with the possibility of an Israeli ground operation coming to a head.

Saleh al-Arouri, a Hamas leader, told Al Jazeera, they were ready for “the worst-case scenario”.

“We will continue to fight until we are rewarded with victory, freedom and independence,” he said.

“This is not a [hit-and-run] operation; we started an all-out battle. We expect fighting to continue and the fighting front to expand. We have one prime target: our freedom and the freedom of our holy sites,”

Al-Arouri said Palestinians have a right to freedom, to fight the Israeli occupation and to safeguard their holy sites.

Hamas does not recognise Israel and has been calling for Israel to end the 16-year blockade of Gaza. It wants the future Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders. Israel captured large swathes of Palestinian territories in that war

How have other nations responded to the war?

The rest of the world does not need to recognise or respond to a declaration of war in order for war to happen. Western nations led by the US have stood in solidarity with Israel while being mute on the decades of Palestinian suffering under occupation.

[The US rushed to support](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/us-to-hike-military-aid-send-military-ships-and-aircraft-closer-to-israel) its ally by ordering its naval vessels the Ford carrier strike group, laden with warplanes, to sail to the Eastern Mediterranean.

[Regional countries have called](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/we-are-at-war-reactions-to-palestinian-hamas-surprise-attack-in-israel) for “an immediate halt to military operations in Gaza” and “the cycle of armed confrontation between the two sides” while China has urged both sides for “calm”.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Sunday met behind closed doors in an emergency session amid the war between Israel and Hamas but failed to achieve the unanimity needed for a joint statement. A statement needs to be agreed upon by consensus.

Diplomats said members led by Russia were hoping for a broader focus than condemning Hamas.

Russia’s ambassador to the UN, Vasily Nebenzya, told The Associated Press that long-stalled negotiations between the two sides need to resume, whilst China’s ambassador, Zhang Jun, said it was important to come back to a two-state solution, where Israel and Palestine live side by side.

Saudi Arabia, a country that has been taking steps to normalise relations with Israel, also called for a peaceful two-state solution with an immediate cessation of the fighting.

Are all wars always officially declared?

No, since World War II, there have been very few declarations of war.

Previous assaults on Gaza and neighbouring Lebanon by Israeli forces have not been preceded by a declaration of war as is the case this time.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has never declared a state of war with Ukraine, but instead referred to the 2022 invasion, that continues today, as a special military operation.

The US didn’t declare going to war in Vietnam, justifying it as helping one side in an already existing civil war. The UK also did not declare the Falklands War (against Argentina) as it was seen as an act of self-defence which is a legal right under the UN convention.

Amer Ashour’s pregnant wife started having labour pains just as Israel began to bombard the besieged Gaza Strip on Saturday night.

They rushed to a nearby maternity hospital where the couple was blessed with a baby boy, their second child. But what they did not expect was to return home and find no trace of it except for a pile of rubble and stones.

Israel’s forces bombed the 11-storey building the couple lived in, in the Al-Nasr neighbourhood in the west of Gaza City, after the Palestinian [armed group Hamas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-tothe-palestinian-group) launched an unprecedented attack inside Israel earlier on Saturday.

“What I feared most when the escalation began was that my wife was about to give birth. I was worried how we would get to the hospital in light of the continuous bombing,” Ashour told Al Jazeera. “But I did not at all expect my house will be bombed and destroyed.”

Israel on Sunday [declared a “state of war”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/8/israel-palestine-escalation-live-israeli-forces-bombard-gaza) and approved “significant military steps” after Hamas’s surprise attack. The fierce battles that followed have killed more than 1,000 people – including at least 400 in Gaza – and wounded thousands on both sides.

Approximately 80 families inhabited the building in Gaza City Ashour lived in.

“Today, all of us, our children and women, are homeless,” he said as he pulled his belongings from the rubble. “Where will we go in these difficult times?”

Shadi Al-Hassi and his elder brother fled their home in the east of the Gaza Strip after it was damaged following an air strike on a building behind their house. They went to their parents’ apartment in Al-Watan Tower in downtown Gaza City.

“At four o’clock in the morning, I was surprised by calls to us to evacuate the tower, which had been threatened with Israeli bombing,” Al-Hassi told Al Jazeera.

Civil defence vehicles and ambulances rushed to evacuate the building’s residents minutes before it was bombed, causing panic among the families that lived there.

“Until this moment, I am still in shock that the tower was targeted. A residential and civilian tower par excellence, with clinics, companies and a beauty centre? Where is the military activity that Israel claims?” Al-Hassi told Al Jazeera.

“Now all of us, my brother and my family, were rendered homeless within hours and we don’t know what’s coming next.”

Youssef Al-Bawab, who lived in a building opposite the Al-Watan Tower, told Al Jazeera they received a warning from Israeli forces at 5pm local time (14:00 GMT) to evacuate their house.

“We felt very frightened. The tower is only a few metres away from us and it is a civilian tower. We did not notice any resistance activities in it as Israel claimed.”

The building in which Al-Bawab lived with 150 other people was badly damaged and became uninhabitable. Several other houses and buildings around the Al-Watan Tower were also severely damaged after the bombing.

“Israel says it is targeting resistance fighters, military sites and buildings belonging to Hamas, but the truth is otherwise. I believe Israel is deliberately targeting civilians and displacing them to put more pressure on Hamas,” Al-Bawab said. “But what is our fault? Where do we go?”

Mohammed Salah, from Beit Lahia neighbourhood in the north of Gaza, said he left his home and took shelter in a United Nations-run school with other families from the area.“Last night, Israeli aeroplanes randomly bombed our area. The situation was very dangerous, so I left my home with other families,” “Israeli bombs don’t differentiate between civilians and resistance fighters. In every war, we leave our homes because of the indiscriminate bombing.” “We have been living in this for years, with no one defending or standing for us. We have the right to resist our occupier,”

The Palestinian armed group Hamas [on October 7 launched a surprise attack](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/what-happened-in-israel-a-breakdown-of-how-the-hamas-attack-unfolded) into Israel in one of the most serious escalations in the Israel-Palestinian conflict in years.

Hamas fighters [entered Israeli territory](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/palestinian-group-hamas-launches-surprise-attack-on-israel-what-to-know) from the Gaza Strip, killing more than 1,400 people and sending shockwaves across Israel.

The latest conflict has thrown a spotlight on Israel’s [16-year blockade of the Gaza Strip](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/whats-the-israel-palestine-conflict-about-a-simple-guide) and its policy of settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has launched a brutal military offensive in Gaza, killing more than 4,600 people as he promised to finish Hamas.

So what is Hamas, the group at the centre of it all? Here is what to know:

What is the group Hamas?

Hamas stands for the Islamic Resistance Movement and in Arabic means “zeal”.

The group politically controls the Gaza Strip, a territory of about 365sq km (141sq miles) that is [home](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/7/the-gaza-strip-explained-in-maps) to more than two million people but is blockaded by Israel.

Hamas has been in power in the Gaza Strip since 2007 after a brief war [against Fatah forces](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/10/12/hamas-and-fatah-how-are-the-two-groups-different) loyal to President Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

When was Hamas formed and what is its aim?

The Hamas movement was founded in Gaza in 1987 by an imam, Sheikh Ahmed Yasin, and his aide Abdul Aziz al-Rantissi shortly after the start of the first Intifada, an uprising against Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The movement started as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and created a military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, to pursue an armed struggle against Israel with the aim of liberating historic Palestine.

It also offered social welfare programmes to Palestinian victims of the Israeli occupation.What are the Palestinian group’s principles?

Unlike the PLO, Hamas does not recognise Israel’s statehood but accepts a Palestinian [state on 1967 borders](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/5/2/hamas-accepts-palestinian-state-with-1967-borders).

“We shall not waive an inch of the Palestinian home soil no matter what the recent pressures are and no matter how long the occupation,” Khaled Meshaal, the leader-in-exile of the Palestinian group said in 2017.

Hamas violently opposes the Oslo peace accords negotiated by Israel and the PLO in the mid-1990s.

It is formally committed to establishing a Palestinian state within its own borders. [It has pursued](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/1/26/hamas-the-new-political-force) this aim through attacks on Israeli soldiers, settlers and civilians both in the occupied Palestinian territories and in Israel.

The group as whole or in some instances its military wing is designated as a “terrorist” organisation by Israel, the United States, European Union, Canada, Egypt and Japan.

Who are its allies and supporters?

Hamas is part of a regional alliance that also includes Iran, Syria and the group Hezbollah in Lebanon, which opposes US policies towards the Middle East and Israel.

[Hamas and Islamic Jihad](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/11/israels-prime-target-what-is-palestinian-islamic-jihad), the second-largest armed group in the region, are often united against Israel and are the most important members of the joint operations room that coordinates military activity among the various armed groups in Gaza.

The relationship between the two groups has been tense when Hamas has exerted pressure on Islamic Jihad to stop attacks against Israel.

What prompted Saturday’s attack on Israel?

Hamas [spokesperson Khaled Qadomi](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/7/israel-palestine-escalation-live-news-barrage-of-rockets-fired-from-gaza) told Al Jazeera that the group carried out its military operation in response to atrocities that Palestinians have faced over decades.

“We want the international community to stop atrocities in Gaza against Palestinian people, our holy sites like Al-Aqsa [Mosque]. All these things are the reason behind starting this battle,”

Hamas also called on other groups to join the fight, saying Saturday’s attacks were just the beginning.

Is Hamas targeting civilians?

Osama Hamdan, senior spokesperson for Hamas, told Al Jazeera that the group was not attacking civilians even though the group’s own videos have shown its fighters taking elderly Israelis hostage during the fighting on Saturday.

Rights groups such as Amnesty International have also pointed out that Israeli civilians had been killed by Hamas.

But Hamdan insisted that the group was attacking only settlers living in illegal settlements, whom he described as legitimate targets.

“You have to differentiate between settlers and civilians. Settlers attacked Palestinians,” Asked whether civilians in southern Israel were also considered settlers, Hamdan said: “Everyone knows there are settlements there.”

“We are not targeting civilians on purpose. We have declared settlers are part of the occupation and part of the armed Israeli force. They are not civilians. How was the group able to carry out the attack?

Hamas said its fighters took several Israelis captive in the enclave, releasing videos of fighters dragging bloodied soldiers. It said senior Israeli military officers were among the captives.

The videos could not immediately be verified but matched geographic features of the area. Fears that Israelis have been kidnapped evoked memories of the 2006 capture of soldier Gilad Shalit, whom Hamas-linked fighters seised in a cross-border raid. Hamas held Shalit for five years until he was exchanged for more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Hamas also sent paragliders flying into Israel, the Israeli military said. The attack recalled a famous assault in the late 1980s when Palestinian fighters crossed from Lebanon into northern Israel on hang-gliders and killed six Israeli soldiers. In golf carts, vans and on motorbikes, Hamas fighters have taken dozens of Israeli civilians and soldiers back to the Gaza Strip after their attack on Israel on Saturday.

As Israel’s fighter jets bomb the Gaza Strip in retaliation against the surprise Hamas assault, the Palestinian group has said that it plans to use the captured Israelis to strike a deal for the [release of Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/hamas-says-it-has-enough-israeli-captives-to-free-all-palestinian-prisoners) in Israel’s prisons. But just how many Palestinians are currently in Israeli custody? And how many of them are children?

The Palestinians in Israel in prisons

Many would argue that all of Gaza is effectively an open-air prison — 2.2 million people blockaded by Israel in a tiny coastal enclave.

But the number of Palestinians who have actually spent time in Israeli jails too is of a similar order. Since 1967, when Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, it has arrested an estimated one million Palestinians, the United Nations [reported](https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/07/special-rapporteur-says-israels-unlawful-carceral-practices-occupied-palestinian) last summer.

One in every five Palestinians has been arrested and charged under the 1,600 military orders that control every aspect of the lives of Palestinians living under the Israeli military occupation. That incarceration rate doubles for Palestinian men — two in every five have been arrested. By comparison, in the United States, the country notorious for the world’s largest prison population, one in 200 people is imprisoned. The imprisonment rate among Black Americans is more than three times the overall rate — but even then is a tiny fraction of an average Palestinian’s likelihood of spending time in jail.

Palestinian Prisoner rights group Addameer has described the Israeli prison system as a “complex of monstrous machinery in form, laws, procedures, and policies…designed to liquidate and kill”.

Today, the number of Palestinians currently behind Israeli bars is 5,200, including 33 women and 170 children. If tried, Palestinian prisoners are prosecuted in military courts.

So, why are there so many prisoners?

Two months after Israel occupied Palestinian and Arab territories in the 1967 war, its government issued Military Order 101 which essentially criminalised civic activities under the basis of “hostile propaganda and prohibition of incitement”.

The order, which is still in use in the occupied West Bank, outlaws the participation and organisation of protests, printing and distributing political material, waving flags and other political symbols, and any activity that demonstrates sympathy for an organisation deemed illegal under military orders.

Three years later, another military order (378) was issued by the Israeli government. This established military courts, and basically outlawed all forms of Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation as “terrorism”.

Hundreds of other military orders have been issued and implemented since then to curtail any Palestinian civic and political expression. How many Israeli prisons are there detaining Palestinian prisoners?

There are 19 prisons within Israel and one inside the occupied West Bank that hold Palestinian prisoners.

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, it is against international law for an occupying power to transfer an occupied people from the occupied territory.

“It is unlawful and cruel and the consequences for the imprisoned person and their loved ones, who are often deprived from seeing them for months, and at times for years on end, can be devastating,” Amnesty International has [previously](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2017/04/israel-must-end-unlawful-and-cruel-policies-towards-palestinian-prisoners/) said.

What is administrative detention?

There are 1,264 Palestinian administrative detainees, which means that they are held indefinitely behind bars without facing trial or any charges. This practice, a remnant of the British Mandate era, can be extended indefinitely based on “secret evidence”, meaning that a detainee can spend months if not years in prison without being charged.

While Israel says the procedure allows authorities to hold suspects while continuing to gather evidence, critics and rights groups say the system is widely abused and denies due process.

How many Palestinian children have been arrested by Israel?

Since the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, more than 12,000 Palestinian children have been detained by Israeli forces.

At least 700 Palestinian children under the age of 18 from the occupied West Bank are prosecuted every year through Israeli military courts after being arrested, interrogated and detained by the Israeli army. Addameer describes the arrest and imprisonment of children as systemic and part of a collective punishment campaign.

The most common charge is throwing stones, which is punishable by a maximum punishment of 20 years.

The children are often subjected to [physical and psychological torture](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/10/palestinian-children-abused-in-israeli-detention-ngo), according to child rights groups. They are interrogated without the presence of a parent or lawyer, and critics have accused Israel of exploiting their detention to turn them into informants and to extort their families financially by forcing them to pay huge fines.

What are some of the Israeli military orders against Palestinian children?

Military Order 1726 states that children can be held in preventative detention for 15 days before an indictment is submitted and that a military court can extend that detention by 10 days each time for a maximum of 40 times.

Military Order 1745 stipulates that interrogation sessions of children should be audiovisually recorded in a language understood by children, but excludes children arrested under security pretexts which refers to all Palestinian child detainees.

Under Military Order 132, Palestinian children aged 16 and older were previously tried and sentenced by Israeli military courts as adults.

Furthermore, Palestinian children continue to be charged according to their age at the time of sentencing, instead of their age at the time of the alleged offence, as provided by international law.

In August 2016, Israel changed its law that stated that children under 14 could not be held criminally responsible. This was done after Israeli authorities waited for [Ahmed Manasra](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/13/calls-grow-release-palestinian-prisoner-ahmad-manasra), who was 13 years old at the time of his arrest, to turn 14 before charging him with attempted murder and sentencing him to 12 years – which was later commuted down to nine.  Our peaceful Gaza morning was abruptly shattered by relentless streaks of fire and thunderous explosions, enveloping more than 2.3 million residents in a cloud of distress and bewilderment.

As the sound of [hovering warplanes grew louder](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/world-is-watching-fears-grow-of-a-massive-gaza-invasion-by-israel), my anxious family and I sought refuge, huddled together in a dimly lit room, hoping – foolishly perhaps – that it was the safest place in our home

Beside me, my wife, wide-eyed and trembling, held onto my side as we descended the stairs to the room. She repeatedly reassured us that we were safe but the tremor in her voice betrayed the anxiety gripping her.

Even as I tried to convey a sense of hope, I couldn’t ignore the fear etched on my family’s faces and the tangible vulnerability that hung in the air. My mother, a woman whose wrinkles bore witness to a lifetime of battles with Israel, clung to my two-year-old son, her only grandchild, attempting to shield him from the deafening roar outside. Her whispered words of comfort were a gentle effort to drown out the noise of [F-16s soaring overhead](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/7/israel-palestine-escalation-in-pictures).

In that room, we all gathered – my parents, wife, son and sister. Our voices, once filled with morning laughter and curiosity, now spoke in hushed tones with suppressed tears and silent prayers.

Beyond our shelter, the news brought haunting [images of destruction](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/sirens-warn-of-rockets-launched-towards-israel-from-gaza-news-reports), with residential buildings crumbling like ancient ruins and clouds of dust and smoke choking the air. Each explosion sent tremors through the ground beneath us, while the cries of people in the streets and the roar of fighter jets above amplified our collective concern

In that surreal moment, I clung to the belief that my voice was not only my lifeline but also a connection to the world that had often turned a deaf ear to our struggle. As a journalist and writer who miraculously survived five destructive wars with Israel, I know my voice is a link to a world that can, at least, help amplify our calls for safety.

Throughout the day, every couple of hours, we exchanged phone calls, reaching out to loved ones across the city. Neighbours checked on one another and even strangers shared words of solidarity and encouragement. As I write this, I continue to stay strong, even though I am deeply worried inside that we could be a [target at any moment](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/israel-flattens-palestine-tower-amid-deadly-gaza-bombardment). Anytime.

But beneath this display of courage, after enduring a day of relentless confrontations, we can’t deny the toll of psychological exhaustion that has settled in. Fear still lingers in the eyes of those who have witnessed the early hours of the conflict and the echoes of explosions haunt our hearts.

Every moment is now a battle against grief and the weight of uncertainty presses heavily upon us.

Yet, in Gaza, unity and resilience have become the people’s only solace. Amid the fear and destruction, voices of hope and determination whispered as the night unfolded. It is a testament to the unwavering spirit of Palestinians – who are standing together across the occupied territories, united against the occupier attacks.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has met behind closed doors in an emergency session amid the war between Israel and Gaza but failed to achieve the unanimity needed for a joint statement.

At least 1,100 people have already been killed since Hamas, the Palestinian group that controls the blockaded Gaza Strip, launched an assault on Israeli towns on Saturday and took hundreds of people hostage.

Israel retaliated by declaring a [state of war](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/8/intense-battles-as-israel-declares-state-of-war) and pounding densely-populated Gaza, killing hundreds of people.

The United States called on the council’s 15 members to strongly condemn [Hamas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-tothe-palestinian-group).

“There are a good number of countries that condemned the Hamas attacks. They’re obviously not all,” senior US diplomat Robert Wood told reporters after the session.

“You could probably figure out one of them without me saying anything,” said Wood, in a reference to Russia, whose relations with the West have deteriorated sharply since its invasion of Ukraine.

The council met for about 90 minutes and heard a briefing from the UN Middle East peace envoy Tor Wennesland.

Diplomats said members led by Russia were hoping for a broader focus than condemning Hamas.

A statement needs to be agreed upon by consensus.

“My message was to stop the fighting immediately and to go to a ceasefire and to meaningful negotiations, which was told for decades” by the Security Council, said Vassily Nebenzia, Russia’s UN ambassador.

“This is partly the result of unresolved issues,” he said.

The United Arab Emirates, which [normalised relations with Israel](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/13/israel-uae-announce-normalisation-of-relations-with-us-help) as part of a landmark 2020 deal, said it expected more UNSC meetings on the crisis.

“I think everyone understands that today, the situation is one of grave concern,” said the UAE Ambassador Lana Zaki Nusseibeh.

“Many members of the Council believe that a political horizon leading to a two-state solution is the only way to finally solve this conflict,”

‘Path to peace’

Neither Israel nor the Palestinian Authority (PA), based in the West Bank and a political rival to Hamas, attended the meeting because they are currently on the Security Council.

The Palestinian Ambassador Riyad Mansour called on diplomats to focus on ending the Israeli occupation.

“Regrettably, history for some media and politicians starts when Israelis are killed,” he said.

“This is not a time to let Israel double down on its terrible choices. This is a time to tell Israel it needs to change course, that there is a path to peace where neither Palestinians nor Israelis are killed.”

In an open letter sent to UNSC members ahead of the meeting, three Palestinian human rights organisations said the UN’s inaction had enabled the latest violence and meant its members were “complicit” in what had happened.

The Palestine-based organisations – Al-Haq, Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights – called on UN member states to address the “root causes and protect the Palestinian people from Israeli attacks”

Meanwhile, ahead of the meeting, Israel’s UN Ambassador Gilad Erdan showed graphic pictures of Israeli civilians being taken captive by Hamas.

“These are war crimes – blatant, documented war crimes,” Erdan told reporters.

“This unimaginable, unimaginable atrocity must be condemned. Israel must be given steadfast support to defend ourselves – to defend the free world

Home to some 2 million people and measuring about 365sq km (141sq miles), the [Gaza Strip](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/7/the-gaza-strip-explained-in-maps) has been ruled by Hamas since 2007 since a brief war with forces loyal to the PA.

Its assault in Israel coincides with US-backed moves to nudge Saudi Arabia towards normalising ties with Israel in return for a defence deal between Washington and Riyadh. “We don’t see any reason that should be off the table,” said Erdan. “We still want it to happen. We’ll do everything that we can to live in co-existence with all of our neighbours.”

The Palestinian [group Hamas has launched](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/7/israel-palestine-escalation-live-news-barrage-of-rockets-fired-from-gaza) the biggest attack on Israel in years with many killed, hostages taken, and fighting raging after a surprise assault that included gunmen entering Israeli towns after a barrage of rockets fired from the Gaza Strip.

United States President Joe Biden has pledged unwavering support for Israel as its military [pummels Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/10/israel-hamas-war-live-appeals-for-safe-corridor-gaza-toll-goes-past-700) with bombardment, in the wake of an unprecedented [attack](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/what-happened-in-israel-a-breakdown-of-how-the-hamas-attack-unfolded) from the Palestinian group Hamas over the weekend.

In a White House speech on Tuesday, Biden said that Washington will provide additional military assistance to Israel, which has since declared war on Hamas.

He also underscored the brutality of Saturday’s attack — which killed hundreds of people and saw others taken captive — and compared Hamas to ISIL (ISIS), accusing it of “terrorism”.

“This is what they mean by human tragedy, an atrocity on an appalling scale,” Biden said. “We’re going to continue to stand united, supporting the people of Israel who are suffering unspeakable losses and opposing the hatred and violence of terrorism.”

The US president, however, did not provide details about the Israeli war in Gaza or its aims — only backing what he called Israel’s “duty to respond to these vicious attacks”.

Here, Al Jazeera looks at five key takeaways from Biden’s address:

Biden pledges more military aid to Israel

Biden pledged more military assistance for Israel, which already receives $3.8bn in US military aid.

“We’re surging additional military assistance, including ammunition and interceptors to replenish the Iron Dome,” he said referring to Israel’s anti-missile system.

“We’re going to make sure that Israel does not run out of these critical assets to defend its cities and its citizens.”

The US president called on Congress to take “urgent action to fund the national security requirements of our critical partners”, likely referring to both [Israel and Ukraine](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/10/ukrainians-stand-with-israel-despite-grievances-tensions), the latter of which is fending off a full-scale invasion from Russia.

“This is not about party or politics. It’s about the security of our world, the security of the United States of America,” he said.

Biden added that his administration is in “near constant communication” with Israeli partners.

According to the White House, Biden has been closely following the situation with daily briefings from his security team. Earlier on Tuesday, he spoke to Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/10/netanyahu-says-gaza-bombardment-have-only) for the third time in as many days.

Americans amongst Hamas captives

Biden confirmed that Americans are among the captives held by Hamas without specifying the number. He also said that 14 US citizens have been killed in the attack

“I’m directing my team to share intelligence and deploy additional experts from across the United States government to consult with and advise Israeli counterparts on hostage recovery efforts because as president, I have no higher priority than the safety of Americans being held hostage around the world,”

No mention of Palestinian civilians or broader conflict

With the [death toll mounting](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/8/israel-palestine-escalation-live-israeli-forces-bombard-gaza) in Gaza as Israeli jets relentlessly bomb the densely populated territory, Biden did not mention Palestinian casualties.

Instead, he focused on Israeli victims of Hamas’s attack.

The only time Biden mentioned Palestinians was to slam Hamas. “Hamas doesn’t stand for the Palestinian people’s right to dignity and self-determination,” he said. “Its stated purpose is the annihilation of the state of Israel and the murder of Jewish people.”

Hamas’s 2017 charter counters Biden’s claim, rejecting the “persecution of any human being or the undermining of his or her rights on nationalist, religious or sectarian grounds”.

Biden also did not address the root causes of the conflict.

Hamas leaders have said they launched the attack in response to Israeli violations [at Al-Aqsa Mosque](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/17/israeli-forces-attack-palestinian-worshippers-at-al-aqsa-mosque) in Jerusalem, near-daily violence against Palestinians in the West Bank and the nearly 20-year blockade on Gaza.

Leading rights groups have accused Israel of imposing a [system of apartheid](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/1/israel-carrying-out-apartheid-against-palestinians-amnesty) on Palestinians.

US warns against ‘taking advantage’ of war

Biden, apparently addressing Iran and the Lebanese group Hezbollah, warned other parties in the region against “taking advantage” of the war in Gaza

“To any country, any organisation, anyone thinking of taking advantage of the situation, I have one word: Don’t. Our hearts may be broken but our resolve is clear,” he said.

The US president said Washington has “enhanced its military force posture” in the region to “strengthen deterrence”.

The Pentagon had announced plans to send additional [military ships and aircraft](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/us-to-hike-military-aid-send-military-ships-and-aircraft-closer-to-israel) to the Eastern Mediterranean after the Hamas attack.

“We stand ready to move in additional assets as needed,” Biden said on Tuesday.

The US has not participated directly in the attacks on Gaza, and a White House spokesperson said on Monday that Washington has “no intention to put US boots on the ground”.

Unqualified political support for Israeli response

Biden offered unqualified political support to Israel’s military response despite fears for the more than 2.2 million people who live in Gaza.

Israeli leaders have [already declared](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/10/un-condemns-complete-siege-of-gaza-2) a “complete siege” on the Palestinian enclave, pledging to prevent food and other essential supplies from entering the territory, raising concerns from rights advocates and the United Nations.

“Like every nation in the world, Israel has the right to respond, indeed has a duty to respond to these vicious attacks,” Biden said on Tuesday.

“Let there be no doubt: The United States has Israel’s back. We’ll make sure the Jewish and democratic state of Israel can defend itself — today, tomorrow, as we always have. It’s as simple as that,” he added.

Biden said he told Netanyahu that, if the US had experienced a similar attack, its response would be “swift, decisive and overwhelming”.

“We also discussed how democracies like Israel and the United States are stronger and more secure when we act according to the rule of law,

The third attack on the Rafah crossing in 24 hours consisted of “four missiles” that targeted the Palestinian side of the crossing, local Egyptian group Sinai for Human Rights said on Tuesday

Witnesses had said the second attack hit the no-man’s land between the Egyptian and Palestinian gates, damaging the hall on the Palestinian side. The Israel military said it could “neither confirm or deny” any attack on the crossing “at this point”, the AFP news agency reported.

NGO Sinai for Human Rights said Tuesday’s attacks prompted the closure of the crossing, but there was no immediate confirmation from either side.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Israeli military revised a recommendation by one of its spokespeople that Palestinians fleeing its air raids in Gaza head to Egypt.

Rafah is the sole possible crossing point into Sinai for Gaza’s 2.3 million residents. The rest of the 40km-long (25-mile-long) strip of land is surrounded by Israel and the sea. The passage of people and goods is strictly controlled under a blockade of Gaza enforced by Egypt and Israel.Meanwhile, Israel’s assault on Gaza has reportedly caused alarm in Egypt, which has urged Israel to provide [safe passage for civilians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/rafah-crossing-between-gaza-and-egypt-disrupted-by-israeli-air-raids) from the besieged enclave rather than encouraging them to flee southwest towards Sinai, two Egyptian security sources told the Reuters news agency on Tuesday.Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on Tuesday said the [escalation in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/10/israel-gaza-war-which-international-actors-can-play-peacemaker) was “highly dangerous” and that Egypt was pushing with regional and international partners for a negotiated solution to the violence.

Egypt would not allow the issue to be settled at the expense of others, el-Sisi said in comments reported by state news agency MENA, an apparent reference to the risk that Palestinians could be pushed into Sinai.

Egypt, the first Arab country to normalise relations with Israel, has mediated between Israel and Palestinian factions during previous conflicts in Gaza and has pressed to prevent further escalation in the current fighting.

Israel has been [pounding Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/10/the-bombs-raining-down-on-gaza-are-beyond-scary-beyond-crazy) with the fiercest attacks in the 75-year history of its conflict with the Palestinians, after Hamas launched a deadly and unprecedented incursion into Israel on Saturday.

On Monday, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant ordered a [“total blockade” of Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/israel-announces-total-blockade-on-gaza), cutting access to water, food, fuel and electricity. Such a siege of Gaza by the Israeli army, with the intent to starve a population, is a war crime under United Nations statutes.

“What it seems to me is that the measures taken, including the bombing of the Rafah crossing, hints to an intention to really starve and kill the people who are innocent inside the Gaza Strip,” UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese told Al Jazeera, adding that Palestinians in Gaza are concerned that they could experience something akin to a [“second Nakba”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/15/nakba-mapping-palestinian-villages-destroyed-by-israel-in-1948) in the days ahead.Gaza’s health ministry on Tuesday said at least 830 people, including women and children, have been killed and more than 4,250 wounded since Saturday. At least 900 Israelis have also been killed since the unprecedented attack by Hamas.

The siege of Gaza has also raised fears that Palestinian civilians could find themselves facing an enormous onslaught, or even an Israeli ground invasion, with nowhere to flee.

Gaza’s Hamas-run interior ministry said Israeli bombardments on Monday and Tuesday hit an entry gate on the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing. The crossing was also closed from the Egyptian side and Palestinians planning to travel to Gaza retreated to north Sinai’s main city of Al Arish, Egyptian sources said.

The latest attack on Rafah follows a similar incident on Monday that partially disrupted operations at the border, though Egyptian security sources said access for registered travellers and humanitarian activity had been restored by Tuesday morning.

On Monday, about 800 people left Gaza through the Rafah crossing and about 500 people entered, though the crossing was closed for the movement of goods, according to the United Nations humanitarian office.

As I write this, I no longer believe we will get out of this alive.

On Wednesday, I woke from my sporadic sleep to the sound of the bombardment that has continued nonstop for the past four nights. Each day we wake up in a different house. But each day the sounds and smells we wake to are the same. Our home was badly damaged on the first night of the bombardment. So we moved to my parents’ home. Then on Tuesday, a missile strike that destroyed a home just one building away left my parents’ home uninhabitable. So we came to the home of my in-laws. Now, there are 40 of us here. It feels as though the missiles are following us – getting closer with each strike – and we are running out of places to run to.

I prayed fajr, the pre-sunrise prayer, and then lay down beside my two-month-old son as he slept. I couldn’t smell his skin, his hair through the stench of gunpowder, smoke and dust that seems to permanently fill the air.

It was just a few minutes later that the windows blew in, covering us with shards of glass. I instinctively covered his tiny body with my own. Then, I grabbed him and ran, all the while crying out for my eight-year-old daughter.

“Banias! Where is Banias?” I pleaded as everyone ran, all of us calling out for our children, our parents amid the mayhem. When I found her, she was crying and shaking. My husband and I took turns hugging her to comfort her as best we could, knowing that there was so little comfort to be found.Still shaken, we ran downstairs to the ground floor, so we could leave if needed, but then, the bombardment appeared to stop. Outside, the air attacks had levelled yet another home, just metres from where we were. It was hit without prior warning. Oftentimes, a small strike is followed by a larger one. Thankfully, the people who lived there were not inside when it struck. When we were still at my parents’ home, we had similarly run downstairs amid the shouts and cries of neighbours warning one another to take cover after a strike hit a nearby building. The moments waiting for the second, bigger strike to hit were unbearable. I held my baby tightly and turned his face towards my chest as though I could shield him from the dust and the fumes from the explosives.

Hours passed. Then on Tuesday evening, a big missile hit, flattening the building. Our screams filled the air amid the sound of shattering glass and objects. About 10 minutes later after the dust had settled, we saw my parents’ front door and windows had been destroyed and the furniture was covered in debris. We quickly packed our belongings and left.I thought my parents’ home would be safe. I thought my in-law’s place would be safe.But where do we go next? There is not a home in Gaza that is safe.

On October 7, Hamas launched a massive military operation into Israeli territory. The shooting of thousands of rockets into Israel was followed by an attack by land, air and sea, with fighters penetrating deep into territory under Israeli control. They attacked military installations and temporarily took over various settlements. The death toll among Israelis has exceeded 1,200, including more than 120 soldiers; dozens of Israeli hostages were also taken into the Gaza Strip.

The planning of the operation took somewhere between a few months and two years, per different accounts from Hamas leaders. The depth and magnitude of the attack were unprecedented and took Israel by surprise. It was a reaction to changing regional dynamics and growing Israeli aggression. While Hamas may appear to have fulfilled its declared short-term goals of deterring Israeli violations of Al-Aqsa Mosque and taking hostages to bargain for the release of Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli jails, it does not appear to have a long-term end game. A heavy-handed response by Israel is ongoing – already claiming more than 950 Palestinian lives – but sooner or later it will have to end with mediation.

Why did Hamas attack now?

Hamas’s move was triggered by three factors. First, the policies of the far-right Israeli government enabling settler violence in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem led to a sense of desperation among Palestinians and growing demands for a reaction. At the same time, the rising tensions in the West Bank caused by these policies necessitated the shift of Israeli forces away from the south and into the north to guard the settlements. This gave Hamas both a justification and an opportunity to attack.

Second, the Hamas leadership felt compelled to act due to the acceleration of Arab-Israeli normalisation. In recent years, this process further diminished the significance of the Palestinian issue for Arab leaders who became less keen on pressuring Israel on this matter. If a Saudi-Israeli normalisation deal had been concluded, it would have been a turning point in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which may have eliminated the already weak chances of a two-state solution. This was also part of Hamas’s calculations. Third, Hamas was emboldened after it managed to repair its ties with Iran. In recent years, the movement had to reconsider the political position it assumed in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011, in opposition to Iran and its ally, the Syrian regime.

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has said that he was personally involved in improving the relations between Hamas and Damascus. A Hamas delegation visited Damascus in October 2022 and its political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh travelled to Beirut in April and Tehran in June. Just last month, Nasrallah hosted the Secretary-General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Ziad al-Nakhalah and the deputy chief of Hamas’s political bureau Saleh al-Arouri.

Will there be a united front around Hamas?

Iran has denied direct involvement in Hamas’s operation but it has expressed support for it. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps general Yahya Rahim Safavi [said](https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/support-proud-operation-adviser-to-iran-supreme-leader-rahim-safavi-backs-hamas-attack-on-israel-4459372) “we support this operation, and we are sure that the resistance front also supports this issue”.

However, Hamas’s realignment with the “resistance axis” does not necessarily mean there will be a united front on the ground confronting Israel. Hezbollah, for example, has not joined the fight. Currently, domestic politics in Lebanon are not conducive to a conflict with Israel, which is holding the Lebanese group back. What Hezbollah is trying to do is to deter the Israeli army from going too far in its revenge against Hamas in Gaza, hence it is increasing the pressure on the Lebanese border. Its shelling of Israeli positions is most probably meant to have a psychological effect than a military one. It has also chosen not to overreact in relation to the killing of three of its members by Israeli bombardment.

However, both Israel and Hezbollah are on alert and tensions are high, which means miscalculations can happen.

What is Hamas’s end game?

Three days into Hamas’s surprising and overwhelming attack, it is not clear what its end game is and what it can do to reap long-term benefits. Its priority has seemed to be to take both military and civilian hostages to help deter aggressive Israeli retaliation and later exchange them for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

However, Israel does not appear to be deterred. Hamas spokesperson Abu Ubaida has said that Israeli bombardment has killed four Israeli citizens held in Gaza. He has also [warned](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/10/hamas-says-will-kill-hostages-if-israeli-attacks-on-gaza-civilians-continue) that the movement will start killing hostages if Israel strikes civilian homes in Gaza without warning; this might backfire against Hamas if implemented.

The Hamas leadership has said that the objectives of the attacks are ending “Israeli violations”, securing the release of Palestinian prisoners, and “returning to the project of establishing a state”. Hamas may be able to secure a prisoner swap deal with Israel, although, in the past, many of those released from Israeli prisons had been quickly rearrested. But the group does not have a clear roadmap for moving forward on “establishing a state” and it cannot have one separately from the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank. What is next?

Israel has struggled to recover from the attack. It has intensified its bombardment of the Gaza Strip and announced a total blockade on the coastal enclave, turning off electricity and blocking humanitarian aid. Netanyahu’s government was already facing domestic turmoil before the attack due to its judicial reforms; its stability will now be tested even further.

Israel will have to decide whether to undertake a ground invasion and if it is worth the military and political costs. Whether it proceeds with it or not, sooner or later its military operation, including the excessive bombardment of the strip, will have to come to an end. At that point, Israel will have to ask for Egypt to mediate some kind of conclusion of this escalation and a deal to exchange prisoners.

When the Israeli assault ends, Hamas, which has gained more legitimacy in Gaza and the West Bank with its operation, will also face the challenge of translating it into policies and governance that would serve the Palestinians in the long term.

The United States, for its part, will have to put its normalisation mediation plans on hold for now. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was expected in Israel and Saudi Arabia later this month to discuss normalisation talks, but his plans have changed and now include a visit to Jordan.

Given the current public mood in the Arab world after the Gaza attack, it would be too complicated to advance talks on a Saudi-Israeli deal. Most probably, these talks will be put on the shelf by the Saudis in the short term but not necessarily fully cancelled. These developments work in Iran’s favour. With the progress of Arab-Israeli normalisation halted, Tehran can now pressure the US into re-entering a nuclear deal of some kind that would take some of the sanctions pressure off the Iranian economy. Whatever mediation happens between Israel and Hamas eventually, it is unlikely to address the root causes of the conflict. There does not seem to be any political will within Israel to address issues like the imprisonment of Palestinians, the freezing of Palestinian funds, the dire socioeconomic conditions in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, or the continuing settlement expansion. This means the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will continue to fester and produce cycles of violence.

Gaza’s interior ministry says an [Israeli airstrike](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/11/israel-hamas-war-live-gaza-faces-growing-humanitarian-catastrophe) on a residential building in a refugee camp has killed at least 45 people and wounded dozens of others. The Israeli military on Thursday bombarded the centre of the densely-populated [Jabalia camp](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/we-will-never-be-safe-a-day-of-bombing-in-gazas-jabalia-refugee-camp), ministry spokesperson Eyad Bozum said. The building was packed with dozens of people who had fled heavy bombing from other parts of the Gaza Strip and taken refuge there. Bozum said the death toll was likely to rise because civil defence workers were still pulling bodies from the rubble and counting the dead. The Anadolu Agency said the victims included members from two families, identified as Shihab and Abu Hemdan.“Medics transferred the bodies of 44 Palestinians to morgues after the Israeli attacks,” a source told Anadolu, adding that children and elders were among those killed. Israeli forces on Saturday launched a [sustained military campaign](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/12/photos-show-scale-of-the-destruction-of-israeli-air-attacks-on-gaza) against the Gaza Strip in response to an attack by the Palestinian group Hamas inside the Israeli territory. At least 100 people were also taken hostage by Hamas during its assault. Hamas said the unprecedented attack was in retaliation for the storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem and Israeli settlers’ growing violence against the Palestinians.

Gaza’s health ministry on Thursday said 1,537 Palestinians, including 500 children and 276 women, have been killed and 6,612 others wounded in Israeli air strikes on the blockaded enclave.

Israel has imposed a total siege on Gaza, cutting the enclave’s water and electricity supplies and further worsening the living conditions in an area that has effectively been an open-air prison since 2007.

Israel’s Energy Minister Israel Katz on Thursday said electricity, water and fuel will not be provided to Gaza until all its hostages are freed. The Israeli siege is considered a war crime under international law.

Al Jazeera’s Tareq Abu Azzoum, reporting from Gaza, on Thursday said another night of Israeli bombardment has started in the besieged territory.

“Different areas of the Gaza Strip were bombarded by the Israeli air forces, specifically in the al-Saftawi neighbourhood where a residential building was levelled to the ground without prior warning,”

International rights experts are raising the alarm over the indiscriminate nature of the Israeli military offensive in Gaza that has killed 1,100 Palestinians and destroyed schools and hospitals while the besieged enclave remains under a blockade.

Activists say the Israeli government’s decision to cut power, water and fuel supply to the enclave amounts to collective punishment of its entire population of 2.3 million people and violates international laws. Israel says no water and fuel will be restored until Hamas returns Israeli captives taken on Saturday following the deadliest attack inside Israel carried out by the Palestinian armed group.

At least 1,200 Israelis have been killed and 3,000 injured after Hamas fighters entered Israel using paragliders and went on a gun rampage in neighbourhoods close to the Gaza border fence. An estimated 150 people have been taken as captives by the Palestinian fighters. US President Joe Biden has announced to send munitions to Israel after promising “unwavering” support to the country in the wake of the Hamas attack. According to media reports, in a phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Biden held back from urging Israel to exercise restraint during its military offensive.

“We uphold the laws of war,” said the US president in a speech that same day. But what, precisely, are the laws of war? And are they being upheld as Israeli bombing has killed at least 260 children and 230 women?

What are the laws of war?

According to Human Rights Watch, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is regarded as an “ongoing armed conflict” under international humanitarian law, governed by Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Convention, supplemented by the Additional Protocols of 1977.

These laws of war forbid collective punishment of a population. At their most basic level, they say warring parties must:

* Distinguish between combatants and civilians
* Preserve civilian infrastructure, such as homes, schools and hospitals
* Give prior warning of attacks if civilians are present in targeted locations
* Refrain from harming medical staff and depriving medical facilities of electricity and water
* Allow the passage of impartial humanitarian aid
* Leave civilians and captured combatants unharmed. Murder, cruel treatment, torture and the taking of hostages are forbidden

Power imbalances between parties are not taken into account, meaning that Hamas and the Israeli government would be judged solely on the basis of their actions.

Hamas’s killing of civilians have been widely condemned. Now, international attention is turning to Israel’s indiscriminate hammering of the entrapped population of the Gaza Strip, the suffering set to escalate further with the impending ground offensive.

Is Israel breaking the laws of war?

Israel’s actions over the past few days have raised alarm bells.

On Monday, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant called Palestinians a “[beastly people](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/is-total-gaza-blockade-a-collective-punishment-against-palestinians)”, ordering a “complete siege” of the Gaza Strip – “no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed”. Tuesday’s air strikes on the Rafah border post with Egypt reportedly impeded trucks with fuel and food from entering Gaza

Gallant told troops massed at the border with Gaza that he had “released all restraints”. “Hamas wanted a change in Gaza, it will change 180 degrees from what it thought,” he threatened. Gaza, he said, would never return to what it was.

Gaza, already under blockade for the past 16 years, has indeed hit new lows, plunged into darkness after the territory’s only power station ran out of fuel. Aerial targets include refugee camps, residential blocks, and critical infrastructure such as the telecommunications company, hospitals and schools that provide the sole form of shelter for displaced Gazans ­– 340,000 and rising fast.

Deprived of electricity and running out of medicine, the territory’s hospitals are unable to treat the wounded – 5,339 people at the last count.

“We are suffering … and the world is not moving a finger. This is an SOS to the whole world,” said a representative of al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on Wednesday. Marwan Jilani, director general of the Palestine Red Crescent Society, spoke of a “deliberate targeting” of four emergency workers.

“Crucial life-saving supplies – including fuel, food and water – must be allowed into Gaza. We need rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access now,”

On Tuesday, UN rights chief Volker Turk called the conflict “an explosive powder keg”. “The imposition of sieges that endanger the lives of civilians by depriving them of goods essential for their survival is prohibited under international humanitarian law,” he said.

“There’s history here that makes Israel’s actions especially egregious,”

The laws applied equally to Hamas and Israel, he said. But, he added, Israel’s decision to deprive the Gaza Strip’s population of basic commodities carried particular weight because of its historic role as enforcer of a blockade against the coastal enclave. He considered the total siege to be a clear violation of international humanitarian law. Under the court’s statute, starvation under siege is considered a war crime. One example is Bashar al-Assad’s “kneel or starve” strategy to force the opposition to buckle during the civil war. Currently, human rights lawyers are mounting a dossier against Russia’s weaponisation of food in Ukrainian towns Chernihiv and Mariupol to submit to the court.

The UN’s Human Rights Council announced it already has “clear evidence” of war crimes committed by both sides. On Gaza, it said: “The Commission is gravely concerned with … Israel’s announcement of a complete siege on Gaza … which will undoubtfully cost civilian lives and constitutes collective punishment.” An Independent International Commission of Inquiry is investigating.

Reuters reported on Wednesday that Egypt was discussing plans with the US and others to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, but rejected moves to set up safe corridors for refugees fleeing Gaza. One of the sources said this was to protect “the right of Palestinians to hold on to their cause and their land”

Sami Abou Shehadeh, a former member of the Israeli Knesset, has blamed Biden and other leaders for giving Israel “a green light for ethnic cleaning”.

Writing in the London-based al-Araby al-Jadeed, he said: “Israel is not killing the Hamas leadership; they are not getting revenge out of Hamas. There is collective punishment for 2.2 million people.”

 As the war rages on [in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/11/israel-hamas-war-live-gaza-faces-growing-humanitarian-catastrophe), the United States has moved one of the largest aircraft carriers in the world and an accompanying strike group to the Eastern Mediterranean, bringing its military might to the tense region. US officials have framed the move as aimed at deterring Hezbollah and Iran from “taking advantage” of the conflict between Israel and Hamas. But with that stance, analysts say President Joe Biden is effectively threatening to enter the war on Israel’s side should a broader conflict break out. Still, many believe it is highly unlikely that the US military would directly take part in the hostilities. “The administration judged it to be important to take a step that would make it as clear as possible to Hezbollah and Iran that there is the danger of US military intervention on behalf of Israel,” said Steven Simon, a senior research analyst at the Quincy Institute, a Washington-based think tank. “I’m pretty sure that President Biden does not want to get involved in this war. But sometimes you have to do these things to buttress deterrence,” added Simon, who previously served in senior positions on the White House National Security Council and in the State Department. [Biden said](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/10/biden-pledges-military-aid-political-support-for-israel-amid-gaza-war) this week that his administration had enhanced its “force posture in the region to strengthen our deterrence” as a warning to any country or organisation considering an attack on Israel. Days earlier, when the US announced it would send the USS Gerald R Ford Carrier Strike Group to the region, a defence official put Washington’s position more bluntly. “These posture increases were intended to serve as an unequivocal demonstration in deed and not only in words of US support for Israel’s defence and serve as a deterrent signal to Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah and any other proxy across the region who might be considering exploiting the current situation to escalate conflict,” the official [said](https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3551962/senior-defense-official-holds-a-background-briefing-on-us-force-posture-changes/). “Those adversaries should think twice.”

USS Ford a ‘political and strategic’ signal

The status quo in the region was upended on Saturday when the Palestinian group Hamas launched a [highly coordinated attack](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-conflict-list-of-key-events-day-3-after-surprise-attack) against Israel from the besieged Gaza Strip, killing hundreds of people and taking dozens captive. Israel has responded by placing Gaza under a total blockade, preventing fuel and water from entering the strip. It has also bombed the territory relentlessly, as the Israeli military appears to prepare for a ground invasion. Paul Salem, president of the nonprofit Middle East Institute, said the scale and brutality of Hamas’s attacks facilitated a “much clearer American response” in support of Israel than in previous [Gaza conflicts](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/whats-the-israel-palestine-conflict-about-a-simple-guide).“Having the aircraft carrier there is major political and strategic signalling,” But he added that a US military intervention would be “far-fetched”.

“Definitely they’re signalling to Hezbollah and Iran: ‘Do not get involved. If you do get involved, you might have to deal with us,'” Salem said.“It’s not clear what that would mean. And keeping in mind that Biden is entering an election year, it’s not great for him to enter a war in the Middle East. So he has political constraints as well.”On Thursday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated US commitment to Israel’s security during a news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.“You may be strong enough on your own to defend yourself. But as long as America exists, you will never ever have to. We will always be there by your side,” Blinken told Netanyahu.Israel, which has been accused by major rights groups like Amnesty International of imposing a [system of apartheid](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/1/israel-carrying-out-apartheid-against-palestinians-amnesty) on Palestinians, already receives $3.8bn in US aid annually. The Quincy Institute’s Simon explained that while Israeli forces are capable of fighting on several fronts, the potential for US attacks against Hezbollah would help Israel in a possible war.

He noted that the USS Ford carries 90 combat aircraft that could keep up “serious operational tempo”, including intercepting communications. “If the United States says to Israel, ‘We’ll pick up a little bit of a burden against Hezbollah, so you can continue to focus on Hamas,’ then I think the Israelis would be very happy, The Lebanese front

Experts say it likely will not come to that. Since the war broke out, there have been skirmishes between [Hezbollah and Israel](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/hezbollah-fires-on-israel-after-several-members-killed-in-shelling), but they have stayed contained in the Lebanese-Israeli border area.

Salem, the president of the Middle East Institute, said Hezbollah is trying to draw some of Israel’s military focus from Gaza to the Lebanese border without igniting a full-on conflict.

“They’re playing that game of making it hot enough to get Israel’s attention and to force them to pay attention to the northern front in order to weaken the forces in the south, but not so much that it immediately triggers a war in Lebanon, on Lebanon,” he said.

Still, Salem added that the calculus of Hezbollah and its Iranian backers may change depending on the trajectory of the [war in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/world-is-watching-fears-grow-of-a-massive-gaza-invasion-by-israel).

“If there’s a huge Israeli retaliation, yes, it’s going to kill a lot of people. But if it doesn’t defeat Hamas and if it [the conflict] ends in a few weeks, then Hezbollah wouldn’t need to open a second front,” he told Al Jazeera.

“But if Israel does ‘really well’ and is careening through Gaza and is about to completely knock out Hamas, I think there will be a lot of pressure strategically from Iran and others. They don’t want to lose Hamas as an asset, so they might have to act

For his part, Imad Harb, director of research at the nonprofit Arab Center Washington DC, said Lebanon’s internal [financial and political](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/22/lebanese-take-to-streets-as-anger-over-economic-meltdown-grows) crises also cap the chances of a war with Israel.

The country’s economy has been in free fall since late 2019, with its currency losing more than 90 percent of its value. A [political deadlock](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/14/lebanons-parliament-fails-to-elect-president-for-12th-time) has also prevented the election of a new president since Michel Aoun’s term expired nearly one year ago.

“Lebanon cannot take another war. Hezbollah’s constituency cannot take a war, and neither are the Arab states ready to assist Lebanon if Lebanon gets in a war with Israel and in the process gets destroyed

Hezbollah’s response

Hezbollah has dismissed the arrival of the US military to waters not far [from Lebanon’s shore](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/10/fears-of-war-with-israel-growing-in-lebanon).

“Sending aircraft carriers to the region to boost the morale of the enemy [Israel] and its frustrated soldiers shows the weakness of the Zionist military machine despite the massacres and crimes it is committing and therefore its need for constant outside support,” the Lebanese group said in a statement.

“Thus, we stress that this move will not scare the people of our nation and the resistance groups that are ready for confrontation until total victory.”

Harb said Hezbollah’s response is unsurprising, and it doesn’t mean the group is rushing to war. “This is all rhetoric. I mean, these guys — the Israelis, Hezbollah, the Iranians, the Americans — all of them are rhetoricians,” he said. Harb added that the US is not eager to go to war either. While Biden wants to be seen as standing with Israel, Harb explained that Americans have grown weary [of war](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/4/5/iraq-war-20-years-on-visualising-the-impact-of-the-invasion), and a battle with Hezbollah and Iran could quickly spiral out of control. “This is why a message like this is only a message,” Harb said of the US military move. “Maybe Biden is just simply trying to take a stand, but I really don’t see the United States getting really involved in a war of this nature.”

The new Israeli unity government is a sign of how the Hamas offensive has brought together a fractured political scene. It put a stop to weekly antigovernment protests that threatened to topple a government among the most radical in its history, and for Israelis, it has prompted grief, outrage, and an unrestrained military response. Now, Israel’s military is preparing a record 300,000 army reservists for a ground war in Gaza. But anger over Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s failure to protect its citizens remains. So as the country prepares for more conflict, where will that anger go?

[Israeli](https://www.wsj.com/video/this-is-israel-911-says-israeli-ambassador-to-the-united-nations/EEB7D0D5-81CF-480D-A3E3-7B2FE666EE29.html) and [American](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTpsg4yHc20) officials, like many of their supporters, have called the Hamas incursion on Saturday “Israel’s 9/11”, drawing parallels between Hamas and al-Qaeda and between Israel and the United States.

“If the United States experienced what Israel is experiencing,” President Joe Biden said, “our response would be swift, decisive and overwhelming.”  The “brutality” and “the bloodthirstiness” of Hamas, he added, “brings to mind the worst rampages of ISIS”. He even [repeated](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/biden-deliver-remarks-roundtable-jewish-community-leaders-rcna119865) the sensationalist and [unsubstantiated](https://theintercept.com/2023/10/11/israel-hamas-disinformation/) claims that Hamas fighters had “raped women” and “beheaded babies”. Major European capitals reinforced the false analogy of 9/11 and the dangerous notion of “us vs them” by draping their most iconic buildings in Israeli flags as if to declare “they are all Israelis” just like they declared – with disastrous consequences – that “they are all Americans” after the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, DC.

Like a well-rehearsed orchestra, Western powers condemned the “unprovoked” attacks on civilians and voiced their unconditional support for the fanatical Israeli government to do whatever it takes as long as it takes to “defend” its people against “evil”. The degree of hysteria and the hypocrisy are as mind-boggling, as they are reckless.

Some of the images from Israel are no doubt gruesome – but the images from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Libya, etc have been no less horrific. Two decades of Western and Israeli wars in the Middle East have led to not thousands, but millions of Arab and Palestinian casualties

In the eyes of the West, it seems, Israel has a “duty” to defend its people, but the Palestinians don’t have the right to protect themselves as if they are people of a lesser god! Israel seemingly also has a right to defend and even expand its occupation and apartheid regime, but the Palestinians have no right to express their frustration or struggle for freedom and justice after seven decades of dispossession, oppression and siege.

For European Commission President [Ursula von der Leyen](https://twitter.com/vonderleyen/status/1582630271287021570?lang=en), “Russia’s attacks against civilian infrastructure, especially electricity, are war crimes. Cutting off men, women, children of water, electricity …  are acts of pure terror.” But Israel doing the same against Palestinians in Gaza is legitimate self-defense! That’s the very embodiment of hypocrisy and double standard.

To be clear, Hamas is an Islamist group that has routinely used and is still using controversial and unsavoury methods to further its agenda. But like other anti-colonial movements that employed questionable methods, it is first and foremost, a nationalist movement that long condemned al-Qaeda and ISIL, and never staged an attack outside historical Palestine. Unlike al-Qaeda, Hamas has won a majority in parliament in Gaza’s last legislative elections in 2006, and  – after surviving [an American orchestrated coup](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2008/04/gaza200804) – it has acted as the de facto government of the besieged strip. Above all else, the hysterical comparisons between Hamas’s operation on Saturday and 9/11 are reckless and utterly dangerous, for they serve to manufacture the case for a wider war, as we witnessed prior to the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq on false pretences. Such comparisons help demonise Palestinian leaders and dehumanise Palestinian people, paving the way for a genocidal war, starting in Gaza. To be sure, demonising other leaders is ugly politics, but dehumanising a whole people, is racism, pure and simple. In that way, this false and hysterical analogy amounts to a green light for Israel to follow up its unlawful siege and indiscriminate bombardment of the Gaza Strip with an even more horrifying land invasion that would devastate the more than two million Palestinians living there.

Indeed, after failing to diminish Hamas with four wars and a 17-year-long siege, the Israeli government now seems determined to annihilate Hamas, both politically and militarily, through an invasion and reoccupation of Gaza.

For that purpose, it has already recalled some 350,000 military reservists and [amassed](https://time.com/6322493/israel-hamas-ground-war-gaza-military/) 100,000 soldiers as well as a number of tanks on its southern border. Meanwhile, the attempts to create a humanitarian corridor to ship people from Gaza into the Sinai to keep them “safe” and to make it easier for Israel to invade are bound to be [rejected](https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/10/israel-hamas-war-what-an-israeli-ground-offensive-in-gaza-could-look-like) by Palestinian and Arab leaders alike as no more than a pretext to expel Palestinians from their homeland, again.

The anticipated ground invasion of densely populated Gaza with no escape routes provided for the people who live there, is bound to cause tens or hundreds of thousands of casualties among Palestinians over weeks or months of fighting, especially if, as expected, Israel uses heavy weapons and severe bombardment to try to reduce casualties among its own forces. Indeed, Israel’s looming invasion of Gaza is bound to turn into the most bloody urban conflict since the Second World War – an armageddon with disastrous regional implications. Even if Israel successfully reoccupies the Gaza Strip, albeit at a high cost, and dismantles the military and administrative infrastructure of Hamas, what then? Will it simply hand it over to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah after Israelis paid a high price for taking it over, as it did in the past? Will it hold the Gaza Strip permanently, providing food and services to its inhabitants? Will it be able to end the idea of Hamas as a resistance movement against occupation?

Israel does not seem to have any answers to these thorny questions about “the day after”. Indeed, there is no telling what will happen after such a genocidal invasion and occupation in Gaza, Palestine or the region in general.

There are already signs of the war spilling over to the north and east, forcing, or rather allowing, Israel to widen its circle of destruction. This could easily lead to the United States and its newly deployed naval armadas being drawn into yet another destructive regional war, as if two decades of forever wars were not enough.

Israel and the United States must not repeat the same blunders again and again as if they learned nothing from decades of war, occupation and human suffering caused by their bungles. It is high time for Western powers to start acting like grown-ups and stop parroting Israel’s debunked lies and cliches. Make no mistake, there is no military answer for the Palestine tragedy, only a political and diplomatic solution

We thought perhaps a short ceasefire had been reached, but we didn’t have any internet, so we couldn’t confirm.

A little later, a cousin managed to catch an internet signal and shouted happily: “Al-Qassam has released a mother and her children!”

That raised our hopes, too. If Hamas’s armed wing had released a hostage and her children to the Israelis, maybe this goodwill gesture would bring about at least a pause in the relentless attacks.

We all rushed to him, huddling around his mobile to see the news ourselves.

Connectivity was still bad, so someone dusted off an old radio and fiddled with its dials until we got some reception, but even the radio station didn’t seem to have much news beyond the hostage release.

The mothers uttered sighs of relief and sent up quick prayers that the war might end soon or that a ceasefire would be reached.

With a little more hope and energy in us after this news, we, the mothers, started getting the kids ready for bed. We set up the mattresses on the floor, making sure to drag them well away from the windows so shattering glass wouldn’t hurt our babies if a bomb landed close enough to blow them out. Better safe than sorry.

After the kids fell asleep, we sat a little way away from them, chatting. I think in the back of our minds we were wondering if this calm was a ceasefire or the calm before the storm. “I don’t like it,” said my sister-in-law about the “tense calm” around us. I didn’t say anything, still trying I tried to connect to the internet to see what was going on out there. “Let’s have a coffee,” my sister-in-law said suddenly, probably trying to break the tension, and got up to go into the kitchen. I followed her in and stood with her as the coffee bubbled. As she poured it into two cups, I rummaged in my bag for some biscuits to share. We had only had a sip or two when a massive explosion hit, then a second, then the third. “It’s back,” my sister-in-law said, practically tossing her coffee cup on the table next to mine as we rushed to check on our kids. She seemed resigned, frustrated, scared. The house was shaking so hard, it was actually difficult to keep walking towards where the kids were sleeping. The thought of all of them being blown out and filling the house with shards of glass was too much, so I told my husband to take all the windows down. We spent the next few hours in complete darkness as the booming seemed to grow louder by the second. With no internet, we didn’t know where the bombs were landing. I think the internet and power outages were fairly widespread because, even when we caught a bit of internet, there were no updates to be had on messaging groups, no news, no updates. Eventually, we found out that the bombing was on three civilian neighbourhoods in northwest Gaza: al-Karama, al-Maqosi and al-Mukhabarat. But for the rest of the night and well into the morning today, the bombing was nonstop. It was so violent and intense, that I often thought it was on our house. I jumped up more than once to run towards where my infant son was sleeping, ready to grab him and run. They say no news is good news, but for the people of Gaza under war, no news can spell the end.

A [power blackout](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/11/why-is-gaza-out-of-fuel-and-what) in the Gaza Strip caused by Israel’s “total blockade” of the besieged enclave has prompted condemnation and calls from international rights groups for urgent action as “hospitals risk turning into morgues” amid heavy Israeli bombardment.

On Wednesday, Gaza’s sole power plant ran out of fuel and shut down after Israel’s decision to cut off supplies following a multi-pronged attack by Hamas, the group running the enclave

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a medical charity, on Thursday called the escalation “abhorrent”, imploring Israel and Hamas “to reduce the suffering of civilians”.

“As Gaza loses power, hospitals lose power, putting newborns in incubators and elderly patients on oxygen at risk. Kidney dialysis stops, and X-rays can’t be taken. Without electricity, hospitals risk turning into morgues,” Fabrizio Carboni, the ICRC’s regional director for the Near and Middle East, said in a statement.

“Families in Gaza are already having trouble accessing clean water. No parent wants to be forced to give a thirsty child dirty water,”

Israel’s bombardment of Gaza following Hamas’s attacks on southern Israel has [killed](https://twitter.com/swilkinsonbc/status/1712074980152754675?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1712074980152754675%7Ctwgr%5Eb182574cd7dc6c60d560189c0033d871356205bb%7Ctwcon%5Es1_c10&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.middleeastmonitor.com%2F20231011-israel-jets-bomb-headquarters-of-palestinian-red-crescent%2F) four ICRC staff in the enclave, according to the charity’s spokesman

A representative from al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on Wednesday said that Israeli authorities have targeted first responders assisting civilians, and appealed to the global community for assistance.

“We are suffering … and the world is not moving a finger. This is an SOS to the whole world … you must help us,” he told reporters after it was announced that Gaza’s sole power plant has run out of fuel.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch, a global rights organisation, said Israeli authorities, the occupying power over Gaza, under international law must ensure that the basic needs of the population are met.

“Instead, they have since 2007 run Gaza as an ‘open-air prison’, imposing sweeping restrictions on the movement of people and goods. In the wake of the weekend attacks [by Hamas], authorities are now closing those prison walls in further,” it said.

It also said Hamas should be brought to justice for the killings of civilians in Israel, “but depriving the entire population of Gaza of electricity and fuel for the actions of individuals is a form of collective punishment”.

“Israel’s Minister of Energy and Infrastructure [has made it clear](https://twitter.com/Israel_katz/status/1712083122227909116) the recent Hamas attacks are ‘why we decided to stop the flow of water, electricity and fuel’. These tactics are war crimes, as is using starvation as a weapon of war,” the HRW said.

But on Thursday, Israeli Energy Minister Israel Katz pledged his country would not allow basic resources or humanitarian aid into Gaza until Hamas released the people it seized during its surprise weekend attack.

“Humanitarian aid to Gaza? No electric switch will be turned on, no water tap will be opened and no fuel truck will enter until the Israeli abductees are returned home,” he said in a statement.

About 150 Israelis, foreigners and dual nationals were taken to the Gaza Strip by Hamas fighters as part of the Saturday attack that killed more than 1,200 people in Israel, according to Israeli officials.

Israel has in turn launched a relentless air campaign on Gaza, killing more than 1,200 people so far, Palestinian health officials say.

Dozens of Palestinians have been killed in Israeli air raids while trying to flee the northern Gaza Strip, according to Hamas officials, after the Israeli military ordered more than one million residents to evacuate in a demand rejected by the United Nations as “impossible”.

The media office of Hamas, the Palestinian group that governs the besieged Gaza Strip, said 70 people, mostly women and children, were killed in the air raids on cars leaving Gaza City. It said the vehicles were targeted in three places. Thousands of Palestinian civilians began to flee to southern Gaza on Friday under a relentless barrage of air strikes after the [Israeli military](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/fear-confusion-as-israel-issues-evacuation-order-for-northern-gaza) order although there were few signs of a mass exodus.

Israeli Defence Minister [Yoav Gallant](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/9/israeli-defence-minister-orders-complete-siege-on-gaza) said any Palestinian who wants to “save their lives” must heed the order to move south as Israel prepares for an expected ground assault on the besieged coastal enclave.

About 1.1 million of Gaza’s 2.3 million people live in the northern part of the strip, which includes Gaza City, the most populated urban area.

Several rights groups have denounced the order and warned that a potential forced transfer of the civilian population would be a violation of international law

Many Palestinians said they would not heed the order.

“The feeling is that there is no hope, that no one cares about Gaza or what’s happening to the people,” Gaza resident Mansour Shouman told Al Jazeera on Friday.

“If we’re going to die here, we’re going to die in our homes. We’re going to die in the north or the south. We’re going to die with our heads up high, standing on our lands, standing with our rights and holding strong to our faith

The Gaza Ministry of Health said on Friday that at least 1,800 people — more than half of them women or people under the age of 18 — have been killed as Israel pounds the strip with air strikes that have levelled entire neighbourhoods.

Hamas has told people to stay put, and many of the enclave’s residents already believe there is nowhere safe they can go.

“The noose around the civilian population in Gaza is tightening. How are 1.1 million people supposed to move across a densely populated war zone in less than 24 hours?” UN aid chief Martin Griffiths wrote on social media.

“Despite the occupation’s threats to shell; the decision has been made. We have not left and will not leave,” the medical organisation Palestinian Red Crescent said in a social media post. “Our medics will carry on their humanitarian duties. We won’t leave people to face death alone.”

Israeli ground raids

An Israeli military spokesman said Israeli soldiers and tanks on Friday conducted their first ground raids into Gaza since Hamas fighters carried out a devastating attack on southern Israel on Saturday, killing at least 1,300 people and injuring more than 3,000.

More than 100 people, including Israelis and foreigners, are also being held captive by Hamas.

Israeli authorities say the soldiers in the initial raids targeted Palestinian rocket crews and tried to gain information about the captives. The small-scale operations are a likely prelude to an anticipated [ground invasion](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/analysis-israels-gaza-invasion-could-test-its-occupation-of-the-west-bank).

Hospitals overwhelmed, given hours to evacuate

A combination of Israeli air raids and an Israeli siege that has cut off access to water, electricity, food and fuel has devastated health facilities in the beleaguered strip, where [medical workers](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/war-crime-gaza-medics-say-israel-targeting-ambulances-health-facilities) now say they face impossible choices under the evacuation orders.

The international medical group Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), also known as Doctors Without Borders, issued a statement on Friday saying Israeli authorities had given it just two hours to evacuate a hospital in northern Gaza.

“Our staff are still [treating patients](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/israels-evacuation-order-for-gaza-death-sentence-for-patients-who-says). We unequivocally condemn this action, the continued indiscriminate bloodshed and attacks on health care in Gaza. We are trying to protect our staff and patients,” the group said in a social media post.

In a meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Jordan on Friday, Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), based in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, said the forced displacement of Palestinians in Gaza would constitute a repeat of 1948 when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to flee from their homes in what is now Israel. Most Gazans are the descendants of such refugees.

[Blinken](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/us-top-diplomat-blinken-visits-israel-urges-protection-of-gaza-civilians) later stopped in the Qatari capital, Doha, where he said the US had called on Israel to take “every possible precaution” to avoid harming civilians.

Blinken shuttled among Saudi, Jordanian and other Arab leaders on Friday after meeting with Israeli leaders in Tel Aviv the day before. He heard Arab demands for aid corridors to be opened for the Palestinians trapped in Gaza and fears that any Israeli ground offensive could push countless Gaza residents into their countries.

The United Nations refugee agency for Palestinians has said water has now become a “matter of life and death” for people in the Gaza Strip after [Israel cut their water supplies](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/israel-announces-total-blockade-on-gaza).

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said on Saturday that more than two million people are now at risk as water runs out.

“It has become a matter of life and death. It is a must: fuel needs to be delivered now into Gaza to make water available for two million people,” said UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini.

No humanitarian supplies have been allowed into Gaza for a week now, according to the agency.

Clean water is running out in the Gaza Strip as its water plant and public water networks stopped working. Palestinians are now forced to use dirty water from wells, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases.

Israel has also enforced an electricity blackout on Gaza since Wednesday, which has impacted the water supply. Meanwhile, thousands have moved out of northern Gaza after Israel ordered them to do so amid its air attacks, something the UN called “impossible”. Nearly one million people have been displaced since last week. “We need to truck fuel into Gaza now. Fuel is the only way for people to have safe drinking water. If not, people will start dying of severe dehydration, among them young children, the elderly and women. Water is now the last remaining lifeline. I appeal for the siege on humanitarian assistance to be lifted now,” added Lazzarini.

Last Friday, the Palestinian armed group Hamas launched a surprise multi-pronged assault on Israel, which killed at least 1,300 people.

Israel then began pounding the enclave of Gaza, dropping thousands of bombs that have killed at least 2,215 Palestinians.

UNRWA also said its shelters in Gaza are no longer safe, something it called “unprecedented”.

“Wars have rules. Civilians, hospitals, schools, clinics and United Nations premises cannot be a target. UNRWA is sparing no efforts to advocate with parties to the conflicts to meet their obligations under international law to protect civilians including those seeking refuge in UNRWA shelters,” it said.

“This war should be no exception. Protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure including UN buildings applies to this conflict, too.”

Efforts are under way by organisations and governments to deliver humanitarian assistance to many, including hundreds of thousands of children, who urgently need it

Former Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon has told Al Jazeera that people in Gaza should evacuate their residences and relocate to the Sinai Desert in Egypt, where temporary tent cities could be established for them, amid the ongoing fighting between Israel and Hamas. The [interview](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/upfront/2023/10/13/are-israel-and-hamas-guilty-of-war-crimes) has been shared widely on social media, with Ayalon receiving widespread criticism for his comments, which many said were a call for “ethnic cleansing”. “We told the Gazan people to clear the area temporarily, so we can go and take Hamas out, and then, of course, they can come back,” said Ayalon, speaking to Marc Lamont Hill on an episode of UpFront that aired on Friday.

“We don’t tell Gazans to go to the beaches or drown themselves … No, God forbid … Go to the Sinai Desert. There is a huge expanse, almost endless space in the Sinai Desert just on the other side of Gaza.” “The idea is for them to leave over to the open areas where we and the international community will prepare infrastructure … tent cities, with food and with water, just like for the refugees of Syria,” Moreover, the former deputy foreign minister said everything will be “restored” in Gaza, if there is an “immediate surrender, unconditional surrender of Hamas”, which Lamont pointed out was a “textbook” definition of collective punishment.

On October 9, Israel announced a [total blockade](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/is-total-gaza-blockade-a-collective-punishment-against-palestinians) of the Gaza Strip, including the stoppage of fuel and gas deliveries, two days after fighters from Hamas carried out deadly attacks inside Israel.

The decision to cut basic supplies to Gaza, which has already been under an Israeli siege for 16 years, was condemned by the United Nations, which said it was an act of “collective punishment” and prohibited under international law

Reaction

“Danny Ayalon is actually advocating for ethnic cleansing in front of the global public, secure in the knowledge that there’s little to stop him in terms of international pressure or rebuke,” Marc Owen Jones, an associate professor at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar, posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Another user said that based on Ayalon’s remarks, Israel’s goal was seemingly the “repurposing of Gaza into settlements while banishing what remains of the local population into refugee camps in the desert”.

Others said Ayalon was calling for a second “Nakba” or “catastrophe”.

The “Nakba” refers to the [ethnic cleansing of Palestine](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2015/05/ethnic-cleansing-palestine-150514130231067.html) and the near-total destruction of Palestinian society in 1948. Zionist military forces expelled at least 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and lands and captured 78 percent of historic Palestine. The remaining 22 percent was divided into what are now the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Lamont Hill also spoke on the episode with Osama Hamdan, a Hamas senior spokesperson. Hamdan avoided answering questions about whether the killing of Israeli civilians was justified, and instead referred back to the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian people.

Speaking about Hamas’s attack on October 7, Hamdan said: “The Israelis were shocked, these [were] the main troops attacking Gaza for the last 10 years … They want to get back the image of the Israeli army.”

In the first seven days of the war, approximately one million residents of Gaza have been forced to leave their homes, as reported by the United Nations agency assisting Palestinian refugees. Humanitarian organisations have described the conditions in the besieged coastal enclave as “dire” or “catastrophic”. Israeli air attacks have claimed the lives of more than 2,329 Palestinians, with 724 of them being children. Meanwhile, more than 1,300 Israelis, including 286 soldiers, have been killed.

Police in the United States have charged a 71-year-old man with murder and hate crime for fatally stabbing a six-year-old boy and seriously wounding his 32-year-old mother, alleging he singled out the victims because of their faith and as a response to the [war between Israel and Hamas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/14/israel-hamas-war-live-us-moves-second-aircraft-carrier-to-mediterranean).

“Detectives were able to determine that both victims in this brutal attack were targeted by the suspect due to them being Muslim and the on-going Middle Eastern conflict involving Hamas and the Israelis,” the Will County Sheriff’s Office in suburban Chicago said in a statement on Sunday. Officers found both victims on Saturday morning at a home roughly 65km (40 miles) southwest of Chicago.

The boy, who was pronounced dead at the hospital, was stabbed 26 times with a large military-style knife, according to an autopsy on Sunday, the sheriff’s office said.

The mother had more than a dozen stab wounds on her body. She remained hospitalised on Sunday but was expected to survive.The suspect, whose identity has not been revealed by the authorities, was found on Saturday, “sitting upright outside on the ground near the driveway of the residence” with a cut on his forehead

 He was in custody on Sunday and awaiting a court appearance. Police charged him with first-degree murder, attempted first-degree murder, two counts of hate crimes and aggravated battery with a deadly weapon.

“Our hearts are heavy, and our prayers are with the darling boy and his mother,” Ahmed Rehab, the executive director of the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) for the Chicago chapter, said in a statement on their website.

The organisation identified the victims as Wadea Al-Fayoume, a Palestinian-American boy who had recently turned six, and his mother Hanaan Shahin.

“As we await the official investigation of the local authorities, what we can confirm at the moment is that we have a murdered child in his own home, a six-year-old who had just celebrated his birthday a couple of weeks ago, and a mother lying in the hospital in serious condition, both stabbed over a dozen times,” said the CAIR statement.

Rehab said that CAIR had testimony from the surviving mother as to how the incident unfolded. “We have full confidence in the authorities to investigate this heinous incident as a hate crime and to do so swiftly,” he said in the statement. The family had lived on the ground floor of the house for two years, according to the organisation. The suspect was their landlord, reports said. Citing text messages from the mother to the boy’s father, the suspect reportedly yelled, “You Muslims must die!” ahead of the stabbing, according to CAIR-Chicago, which called the crime “our worst nightmare” and part of a disturbing spike in hate calls and emails since the [outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/15/will-we-return-for-my-palestinian-family-history-is-repeating-itself).

On October 9, two days into the current [Israel-Hamas war](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/11/israel-hamas-war-live-gaza-faces-growing-humanitarian-catastrophe) – in which the Israeli army appears intent on semi-obliterating the Gaza Strip – the website of the New York-based magazine Women’s Health published some guidelines on “How To Cope With The Trauma Of Violent Images And Videos Of Hamas’ Attack on Israel”.

It is unsurprising, of course, that the potential for trauma has been detected solely as a reaction to Hamas’s surprise attack on Israel and not to, say, the past 75 years of Israeli violence and ethnic cleansing of Palestine – the cumulative depraved barbarity of which is what prompted Hamas’s actions in the first place.

After all, Israel’s carefully crafted monopoly on victimisation and the attendant dehumanisation of Palestinians means that footage of the ongoing [Israeli terrorisation of Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/8/12/israel-normalising-terror-one-dawn-at-a-time) has never compelled US media outlets to prescribe “steps to protect your mental health”.

And yet the Women’s Health intervention constitutes a novel sort of twist on the victimisation theme, in which even the vicarious trauma that is allegedly intermittently experienced by US audiences trumps the unmitigated trauma suffered by the people upon whom Israel wages perpetual war. The article quotes a clinical psychologist in New York on why it can be so upsetting to encounter violent images in one’s social media feed: “We’re empathetic people. We can picture ourselves in someone else’s shoes.” But selective empathy is not empathetic at all. This is particularly the case when “empathy” for Israel happens to be so politically expedient in terms of justifying obscene quantities of US military aid to that country and the slaughter of folks whose existence complicates the US-Israeli vision of the world.

In the United States, my estranged homeland, the very emotion of empathy has been under sustained assault by a [politico-economic system](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/10/10/mental-health-day-us-capitalism-is-bad-for-your-mind) that thrives on alienation and the eradication of communal bonds. When empathy can be weaponised, however, leaders from across what passes as a political spectrum in the US come out in droves to “stand with Israel”.

To be sure, the Israeli monopoly on victimisation defies logic and reality – and casting the state of Israel in the role of pre-eminent victim is a bit like granting the status of victimhood to an assault rifle.

Recall that the foundational episode of the whole “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” consisted of [Israel’s violent self-invention on Palestinian land](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/15/nakba-mapping-palestinian-villages-destroyed-by-israel-in-1948) in 1948, which entailed the destruction of some 530 Palestinian villages, the killing of 15,000 Palestinians, and the expulsion of three-quarters of a million more.

And the bloody pattern has only continued since, with Palestinians consistently dying in disproportionate numbers even while being cast as the aggressors and victimisers. Take Operation Protective Edge in 2014, when the Israeli army killed 2,251 people in the Gaza Strip in 50 days, including 299 women and 551 children. Six Israeli civilians were killed and 67 soldiers. In Operation Pillar of Defence in November 2012, the Israeli army killed 167 Palestinians while suffering six fatalities in return. In [Operation Cast Lead](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2010/1/19/what-the-gaza-war-meant-for-israel), which Israel launched in Gaza at the end of 2008, more than 1,400 Palestinians were killed, primarily civilians. Among them were 400 children. Three Israeli civilians were also killed along with 10 soldiers.

After the 2012 Israeli assault on Gaza, Israeli journalist Gideon Levy took to the pages of the Haaretz newspaper to remind readers that, “since the first Qassam rocket fell on Israel in April 2001, 59 Israelis have been killed – and 4,717 Palestinians”. Noting that this proportion was “horrifying”, Levy ventured that “it ought to disturb every Israeli”. Of course, “ought” is still the operative word. But to be “disturbed” by the horrifying context in which Palestinians have now existed for more than seven and a half decades would require empathy – which would in turn require an acknowledgement of Palestinian humanity, rather than the propagation of a pernicious US-backed narrative affirming the infinitely superior value of Israeli over Palestinian life.

Also highly disturbing is that, while this narrative dehumanises Palestinians to the point of effectively denying them the right to emotional and psychological suffering, Israel plays up its emotional casualties as a means of garnering additional empathy. Following Operation Cast Lead, for example, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs [broadcast](https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/operation-cast-lead-israel-strikes-back-against-hamas-terror-in-gaza) a total of 770 Israeli casualties, of which no fewer than 584 were victims of “shock and anxiety syndrome”. Similarly, following the 34-day Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006 that killed some 1,200 people in that country, the Israeli Health Ministry reported that out of the 4,262 Israeli civilians who had been “treated in hospitals for injuries” a full 2,773 were suffering from “shock and anxiety”. While the Israeli state’s obsession with air raid sirens and apocalyptic discourse is no doubt useful in helping to generate general anxiety, a tally of “shock and anxiety” victims in the Gaza Strip would presumably produce a number in the vicinity of 2.3 million, the current population of the Palestinian enclave. As former Oxfam spokesman Karl Schembri once mused: “How can you talk about post-traumatic stress interventions in Gaza when people are still in a constant state of trauma?” Constant anguish has been ensured by all manner of external stimuli, including the asphyxiating Israeli siege of Gaza, regular Israeli massacres, the pulverisation of apartment buildings and neighbourhoods, and the use of drones and [sonic booms](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/1/2/israeli-sonic-booms-terrorising-gaza) to obliterate any potential for even a moment of peace. Now, as the Israeli army goes about carpet-bombing Gaza and a horrifying amount of blood remains to be spilled, “empathy” remains firmly entrenched in Israel’s arsenal – and it is a deadly weapon indeed.

The Palestinian health care professional had taken a quick glance at the news, but in the rush to make it to work in time, she had not fully understood the magnitude of what was happening in the country: an attack by the Palestinian armed group Hamas on southern Israel that would leave [at least 1,300 people](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/we-are-at-war-reactions-to-palestinian-hamas-surprise-attack-in-israel) in Israel dead. In response, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has launched a deadly bombing campaign on the Gaza Strip that has killed more than 2,300 Palestinians, and enforced a [complete siege](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/10/why-bomb-schools-gaza-families-have-no-safe-space-amid-israeli-attacks) on the enclave, blocking supplies of food, medicines and fuel. A ground invasion appears imminent. But on Saturday morning, Noura had no knowledge of any of this. Palestinian armed groups periodically fire rockets into southern Israel that are mostly intercepted by the country’s missile defence system, known as the [Iron Dome](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/whats-the-israel-iron-dome-defence-system-and-is-it-effective-all-to-know).

So, when a visibly shaken co-worker spoke to Noura about what had happened, she responded by telling her, “This is not the first time” — a response she now recognises lacked empathy.

But as more details began to come through, and the unprecedented nature of the attack became clearer, Noura was summoned to her manager’s office, told to leave her work and not come back until further notice – because of that earlier conversation with her colleague. “I felt very insulted, I couldn’t believe this is happening to me,” said Noura, who is one of 1.2 million Palestinians who are citizens of Israel – about 20 percent of the country’s population.

“I feel [discriminated against](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/15/in-jerusalems-old-town-israel-soldiers-do-what-they-want-to-palestinians),” she continued. “Day by day, you don’t feel it. But you feel it when something like this happens. You know that automatically you turn from a friend to an enemy.”

Shortly afterwards, she received a letter from the hospital’s management, which Al Jazeera has reviewed, in which she was called to a hearing to formalise her suspension on grounds that she had violated the institution’s disciplinary code, by allegedly supporting the Hamas attack.

Noura denied ever uttering the words she was accused of saying.

“What insulted me the most is that when they called me for the meeting, they had their mind set, the decision had been made. They didn’t want to listen,” Noura said of the hearing, which is expected soon.

‘Dozens’ of complaints

Noura is not alone. Lawyers and human rights organisations in Israel have received dozens of complaints from both workers and students who, since last Saturday, have been abruptly suspended from schools, universities and workplaces over social media posts or, in some cases, conversations with colleagues.

Letters sent by some of their institutes or offices, reviewed by Al Jazeera, cited posts written on social media and alleged support for “terrorism” as the reason for the immediate suspension “until the matter is investigated”. In some cases, recipients have been summoned to appear before a disciplinary committee.

“People who have been working for three, four, five years found themselves getting letters saying don’t come to work because of what you published,” Hassan Jabareen, the director of Adalah, the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, told Al Jazeera from Haifa, a city in the country’s north.

In some of the cases, “they say hearings will be held at a later date, but they don’t [specify] when,” he said. “The hearing should be held before you get the decision.” Adalah is aware of at least a dozen workers who were suspended since last Saturday in similar circumstances, mostly over social media posts. It also [received](https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/10903) complaints from around 40 Palestinian students at Israeli universities and colleges who have received letters of expulsion or suspension from their institutions.

Wehbe Badarni, director of the Arab Workers’ Union in the northern city of Nazareth, also told Al Jazeera that the union is following up on more than 35 complaints, including students as well as workers in hospitals, hotels, gas stations, restaurants and call centres.

In one letter seen by Al Jazeera, a company had summoned an employee to a telephone hearing to “examine the possibility of terminating the employment with the company” over “posts that support terrorist activity and incitement”.

“Incitement to terrorism is a serious charge that would need to be proven in court,” said Salam Irsheid, a lawyer with Adalah. “In our opinion, what is happening right now is not legal.”

‘Atmosphere of terror’

Another health worker Al Jazeera spoke to in Tel Aviv said he was doing everything he could to keep a low profile, for fear of retribution. “No one is talking about the situation, I’m being faced with grumpy and angry faces every morning considering I am the only Palestinian working there,”

“The news is horrifying but when I’m at work I try to put a face that everything is just news. I can’t really express or talk about what’s going on,” he said. “Since the last war [in 2021] everyone is keeping a low profile.”

Physicians for Human Rights Israel, a non-profit founded more than three decades ago in Jaffa, has handled several cases of suspensions of medical workers since 2021, after the last war between Hamas and Israel, according to board chairperson Dr Lina Qassem Hasan.

In one high-profile [case](https://www.972mag.com/ahmad-mahajna-palestinian-doctor-smear/), Ahmad Mahajna, a doctor at Jerusalem’s Hadassah hospital, was suspended for offering sweets to a Palestinian teenager who was under police custody at the hospital, where he was being treated for gunshot wounds after an alleged attack. “There is an atmosphere of terror, people are afraid,” Dr Qassem told Al Jazeera.

She was scheduled to go on a bi-monthly visit to Gaza with her human rights group on October 12. That visit by physicians and psychologists this month was cancelled after the Hamas attack. Instead, she found herself treating patients evacuated from their homes in southern Israel.

A local radio station interviewed her on her visit. “In this interview, I said that what Hamas did is a war crime in my eyes, and also that I see that what Israel does in Gaza is a war crime,” she said. “Two hours after the interview, I got a call from my employer,” said Qassem, who also practices as a physician at a clinic. She wasn’t asked to stop speaking to the media, but “it was like a warning for me that I have to be careful, you know, that [they] follow what [I] do.”

Palestinian citizens of Israel have historically faced systemic discrimination, including chronic underinvestment in their communities and — according to Adalah — more than 50 laws that are [prejudiced against them](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/7/19/five-ways-israeli-law-discriminates-against-palestinians).

Yet “racism has accelerated” further, attorney Sawsan Zaher told Al Jazeera. “What we are seeing now is something that we haven’t seen before.”

“The mere fact that you express your opinion, even if it’s not necessarily incitement based on the criminal code… it’s enough now to express any kind of support for not only Hamas, but the Palestinian people,” she added.

Zaher said people were increasingly “afraid to speak Arabic” in public.

Keeping her head down is what Noura usually does too, she said.

“In every situation where there is an incident or something that happens, we try not to talk about it at all. We try to just to forget it, put it in the back of our heads because we know we will get judged if we say a word,” Noura said.

“This time, it was my mistake that I replied.”

Israel has been in near-constant armed conflict with Palestinians since that state was proclaimed [in 1948](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2023/5/15/recreating-a-palestinian-village-75-years-after-the-nakba). For three-quarters of a century, the two sides have been trying to outsmart and outgun each other. The first step in that is to know one’s enemy.

The conventional belief was that Israel was so successful in penetrating Arab political and military structures that everybody discounted the possibility of a strategic surprise like the one it suffered in the [October War of 1973](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/10/8/the-october-arab-israeli-war-of-1973-what-happened) when Egyptian and Syrian armed forces launched a surprise coordinated attack against it.

Totally shocked Israel was on the brink of defeat but managed to recover, with significant aid from the United States, which sent over 8,000 tonnes of military supplies by air in less than a week. Israel vowed not to get caught unaware ever again and invested heavily in agents, informants, moles, analysts, and sophisticated surveillance and spying techniques.

Then came Saturday, October 7, 2023, which brutally sent to the scrapheap Israeli reputation of omnipotence and the notion that it would know in advance every move Palestinians would make. The Israeli defence and security establishment will study that failure for years, and all Israelis know a huge mistake was made and everyone hopes it will be the last one. They may be wrong. The evacuation directive may be a sign that Israel has not fully consolidated and that the order was not preceded by deep scrutiny.

In most conventional military situations, sowing panic among a civilian population will unavoidably reflect on the military. Soldiers seeing their relatives, friends and neighbours flee in panic inevitably ask themselves: “Who am I then to fight for?”

Once civilians leave, the military wonders if it is worth dying for empty land. Thus, one aim of the evacuation order could have been the desire to produce that trigger effect.

When civilians flee in panic they block communication lines, making it difficult for the fighting units to manoeuvre, bring reinforcements from the rear and keep the front line supplied with ammunition.

Gaza Strip is what its name says – a thin sliver of land less than 10km (6 miles) wide in the northern part, with an extremely dense network of unplanned and unregulated housing and traffic that is chaotic traffic even without war.

Israel dropped leaflets telling civilians to use the two main north-south roads, the coastal road and Salah al-Din Road further inland. Crowds on those thoroughfares would deny the Palestinian fighters the ability to move towards the north, against the human flow.

Either aim, creating demoralisation or denying military movement, follows classic military logic, so whichever Israel intended as the main purpose would be a good military move in a fight with a regular army that operates on standard military practices. In the case of Hamas, they are almost worthless militarily and indicate a deep and worrying planning failure. The armed wing of Hamas operates like a guerrilla unit, not a regular army. Its soldiers are not stationed in classical barracks from where they would deploy as needed through public infrastructure. There is no rear in the military sense, a safe territory well behind front lines with warehouses full of military hardware. Hamas shares almost nothing with regular armies, and Israel should know it.

The Palestinian fighters are of the people. They only wear uniforms when they want to send a propaganda message, like during the incursion into Israel. In Gaza, they move around unnoticed when they are walking around. But they don’t need to do that very often – they enjoy an enormous network of tunnels that offers solid protection from explosions and is invisible to surveillance aircraft and drones. Even when they run away, worried for their lives due to indiscriminate bombing by the Israeli air force, the civilians of Gaza do not appear to fall into the ultimate stage of fear, a collective panic that defies any reasoning. If Israel wanted to create that uncontrollable fright as a primer to defeat and surrender, it failed. If the rationale of the order was to impede Hamas and make it militarily ineffective, it also failed.

Ten days of relentless bombing of Gaza by Israel has caused widespread destruction to schools and hospitals and displaced nearly a million people, with aid agencies warning of a “catastrophic” shortage of medical supplies in the besieged enclave.

Israel has justified its brutal assault in the wake of Hamas attacks on October 7 that left at least 1,300 Israelis dead. It has since cut off water, power and fuel supplies, trapping 2.3 million people.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) described the situation in Gaza as “abhorrent” as residents scramble for basic necessities such as food and water and struggle to get medical care in hospitals at the breaking point.

Israel has ordered 1.1 million people to move from the north to the south, causing panic and misery to tens of thousands in a territory that has been facing [economic stagnation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/24/impoverished-gaza-economy-struggles-under-israeli-blockade) due to 16 years of Israeli blockades.

Here’s what we know about how recent Israeli attacks have made daily life in Gaza even more difficult:

Medical services

The United Kingdom-based Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) group says hospitals in Gaza are facing a “catastrophic” shortage of medical supplies, amid Israel’s “total blockade”.

“Emergency, trauma and surgical supplies are rapidly running out at hospitals and health partners’ warehouses, with the entry of humanitarian supplies still not possible,” MAP’s advocacy and campaigns manager in the West Bank, Aseel Baidoun, told Al Jazeera.

“There is a shortage of blood. Medicine is in short supply.”

Suffering from a Gaza-wide power outage, hospitals are running on external generators – a backup that is [ticking](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/12/time-running-out-for-gaza-families-with-hospitals-facing-power-blackout) towards its last few hours, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

This would place thousands of patients at [immediate risk](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/who-warns-hospitals-in-besieged-gaza-strip-are-at-breaking-point), many of them already straddling the line between life and death such as kidney and cancer patients.

Currently, 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza cannot access health facilities as several hospitals have been bombed, according to the UN Population Fund.

Newborns in incubators at hospital are also at [immediate risk](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/gaza-hospitals-risk-turning-into-morgues-rights-groups-call-for-action) if power runs out, according to Fabrizio Carboni, the ICRC’s regional director for the Near and Middle East.

“The hospital can’t operate much longer. The electricity is still off. The hospital’s fuel-based generators will be going off soon. The health system will collapse. The hospital will change to a graveyard,” Mohamed Kandil, director of the emergency department at Nasser Hospital

Kandil added that the hospital, situated in Khan Younis, was receiving a new patient every minute following an already continuous flow of patients over the past week.

There is a shortage of body bags for the dead, according to UNRWA, and people have resorted to storing dead bodies in [ice-cream trucks](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/14/ice-cream-trucks-being-used-to-store-bodies-as-israel-bombs-gaza).

Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesperson for Gaza’s health ministry, appealed to people to head to the Shifa Hospital, the largest in the enclave, to donate blood.

“If the hospital stops working, the whole world will be responsible for the lives of hundreds and thousands of patients who rely on our services, especially from Shifa,” said al-Qidra.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said hospitals are “overflowing” as people seek safety.

Direct damage through air strikes has been inflicted on 24 health facilities, including six hospitals, while 15 health workers have been killed, another 27 injured, and 23 ambulances have been damaged, according to WHO.

Another 23 governmental and NGO facilities that are only partially operational are treating an average of 1,000 patients a day – well beyond their capacity, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Gaza’s health sector was already crumbling under years of Israeli occupation. According to the World Bank, Gaza has 1.3 hospital beds for every 1,000 people – as compared to 3.3. per 1,000 in Israel. Concerns about the spread of epidemics are rising due to the influx of people in hospitals while children there are already contracting smallpox, according to [UNRWA](https://twitter.com/UNRWA/status/1713465609634144482).

Food

UNRWA said that nearly half a million people have been unable to [access food](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/under-israeli-bombs-gazas-palestinians-worry-they-may-die-of-hunger) rations due to the closure of their food distribution centres since the start of Israeli attacks on October 7.

“People spend their days looking for water and some basic foodstuffs, mostly bread and rice,” said Safwat Kahout, an Al Jazeera producer in Gaza.

An OCHA report on Sunday warned that with only one of five mills functioning, wheat flour reserves may be depleted in less than a week.

Air strikes have also directly damaged livestock, especially poultry, and agricultural land.

Israel’s closure of Karem Abu Salem crossing – the only commercial crossing, known to Israelis as Kerem Shalom – has also put a stop to the passage of animal feed for livestock.

Although farmers are unable to access their land, power outages mean that they cannot utilise the necessary irrigation, machinery, incubation devices, or refrigeration to salvage their crops.

Areas in the south such as Khan Younis are bearing the brunt of damage to agriculture.

With the current displacement and blockade, basic food supplies such as eggs, bread, and vegetables are severely short now, according to Euro-Med Monitor. Residents in Gaza have reported a scramble for available food, with children getting first priority. In a post shared to their X, formerly Twitter, account on Sunday, the World Food Programme (WFP) said that flights carrying 20 metric tonnes of their high-energy biscuits had landed near the Rafah border in Egypt, and were waiting for [humanitarian access](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/egypt-says-israel-seeks-to-empty-gaza-rejects-corridors-for-civilians) so that they could deliver the emergency assistance to families.

Gaza had already been experiencing high levels of [food insecurity](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/28/wfp-cuts-aid-to-200-000-palestinian-families) under Israeli occupation. Sixty-three percent of the population of 1.84 million people have been food insecure, according to the WFP.

Drinking water

Drinking water has become even [more scarce](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/14/water-a-matter-of-life-and-death-for-gaza-strip-says-un-agency) in Gaza.

Kahout reported that families were going around for hours, water bottles in hand, to search for water.

When people do find water, it is primarily through private vendors who are operating small desalination and water purification plants, mainly on [solar](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/30/high-technology-assists-gazas-contaminated-water-emergency) energy.

Others have to resort to drinking brackish water from agricultural wells, according to OCHA. This is triggering concerns about waterborne diseases such as cholera.

Reports on Gaza’s drinking water in recent years have shown that it has mostly remained [unsafe](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/12/gaza-undrinkable-water-slowly-poisoning-people).

A June report by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) stated that 96 percent of water is not fit for human consumption, leading most families to buy water from street vendors at a high cost – an added burden for a population where every second resident is poor, according to the [World Bank](https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_PSE.pdf).

Sanitation

On Sunday, OCHA said that Gaza’s last functioning seawater desalination plant had shut down due to fuel running out, while water and sanitation facilities, water wells, reservoirs, and pumping stations have [suffered damage](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/what-infrastructure-in-gaza-has-been-damaged-since-israels-assault) due to the incessant air strikes.

Spiking water pollution could dramatically increase kidney problems in the Gaza Strip, which already experiences a 13-14 percent increase in the number of kidney patients each year, according to Oxfam.

Israel reported that on Sunday that it was resuming water supplies to a line that is serving Khan Younis – one of the major areas to which people from north Gaza have moved. However, officials so far have stated that [no water](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/15/israel-hamas-war-live-gaza-hospitals-fuel-to-last-24-more-hours-un-says) has reached south Gaza.

Residents in Gaza have also noted that this would not have actual impact since water pipes have been destroyed by Israeli air strikes and residents traditionally need to fill up tanks to access water. Without fuel, residents cannot operate trucks needed to transport water or pump it.

Gaza’s last remaining operational wastewater treatment plant also shut down on Sunday, causing additional amounts of untreated sewage to be discharged to the sea, according to OCHA.

Sewage and solid waste has also been accumulating in the streets and posing health and environmental risks since most of the 65 sewage pumping stations have stopped operating without fuel.

Housing

Living in one of the most densely populated areas in the world, Gaza residents are further being pushed to a corner.

Israeli air strikes and evacuation orders have displaced an estimated 600,000 people to the southern half of Gaza, with almost 400,000 of them crowding into UNRWA emergency shelters. These numbers have likely increased significantly since the October 14 count, according to UNRWA, and are likely to create breeding grounds for disease.

“Large numbers of people are taking shelter here and in schools in total disorder, and no hygiene. It will cause epidemics across Gaza and beyond,” Muhammad Abu Salamiya at Shifa Hospital told Al Jazeera.

As of October 13, at least 7,000 housing units have been destroyed while another 4,887 are uninhabitable, according to the Gaza Ministry of Public Works.

Displaced people are staying in public facilities or with host families. who herself was staying in a 100m apartment with a host family, said that people in the south were hosting at least two to three other families in their homes, even families that they did not personally know.

But the housing crisis in Gaza does not end there. Many displaced people, including vulnerable individuals such as pregnant women, the injured, and children, are sleeping outdoors. The speaker system remains on and plays an endless loop of crackling elevator music – the gentle sound interrupted by the roar of aircraft overhead and several heavy thuds in the distance.

Several kilometres away lies the besieged Gaza Strip, which has been under intense Israeli bombardment for more than a week.

The impoverished enclave currently has no electricity. Fuel and water supplies are all but out. The medical system is on the brink of collapse.

Meanwhile, Israel has ordered 1.1 million people to leave the north of Gaza while it continues its air campaign

Omel, a stout 58-year-old man with a well-groomed grey beard, was born in the area and is one of the few remaining civilians to have stayed. He had come to find some food for his 87-year-old father and brothers but all the shops closed so he walks back to his car.

He speaks cautiously, in a sombre tone, saying this current war “feels different” for locals due to the deaths and kidnapping of civilians. He himself has friends who have died.

It is estimated that [1,400 Israelis were killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) in the attack by Hamas’s armed wing, including 286 soldiers. At least 2,750 Palestinians, a quarter of them children, have been killed in Israeli air raids on Gaza.

Omel’s grandfather had come from the Netherlands to a kibbutz before his birth, and now he says his family refuses to leave.

He says the attack by Palestinian fighters took locals in the area by complete surprise, leaving them still in a state of shock.

“We don’t know the future,” he says, hunching his shoulders, adding, “but, we know that the Israeli government and the army are very strong”.

Israeli military build-up by the border with Gaza

Three buses career into the car park alongside about a dozen military vehicles.

Young Israeli men dressed in military khakis disembark. The atmosphere is raucous, with plenty of back-slapping and sporadic chants. Many use the opportunity to smoke, others to take a toilet break in the unkempt shrubbery.

They appear to be some of the 360,000 reservists that Israel has called up after the surprise attack on southern Israel on October 7.

In the military vehicles, there appear to be more seasoned soldiers wearing stern expressions and kitted out in full combat gear; one of them removes himself from the crowd and begins a standing prayer.

After a 30-minute break, they depart and head onto the road towards the border with Gaza.

Some look straight ahead, others flick through their phones. One group throw an Israeli flag over the side of the vehicle as they swerve around the roundabout.

A few minutes later, rockets from the enclave fly through the air. Israeli air defences kick into action. Bright streaks of light snake their way across the blue sky. Heavy explosions ring out overhead.

The closer to the Gaza border you get, the more Israeli flags you see draped along the highway.

Speeding passenger cars filled with armed Israeli soldiers weave their way around a stream of gargantuan transport vehicles carrying tanks.

On one side of the highway, more than 100 tanks and military vehicles line up in rows facing the Gaza Strip.

The highway is chequered with makeshift checkpoints. Cantekerous soldiers order civilians to turn back and get away from the border.

On the ground, everything points to a looming [ground invasion by Israeli forces](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/14/we-will-come-from-the-ground-israels-goals-in-a-ground-invasion-of-gaza).

“We started the offensive from the air. Later on, we will also come from the ground,” Defence Minister Yoav Gallant had told Israeli troops last week.

As night falls, near the now-evacuated town of Sderot where, a week ago, Israeli troops clashed with Hamas fighters, local shops, including a small blue-lit pizzeria and a bric-a-brac hookah store, are doing a roaring trade as an endless trail of soldiers loads up on supplies.

A long row of idle tanks stand silent in a gated industrial complex.

The street lights are switched off along the country roads that straddle the border with the Gaza Strip; the signposts are covered up. GPS systems often stop working.

It has been only a week since Israeli forces fought Palestinian fighters in the area, and preparations have been made to avoid another incursion.

On October 12, after days of bombardments, the Israeli government ordered [1.1 million Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/israel-orders-1-1-million-people-in-gaza-to-move-south-what-to-know) living in the north of the Gaza Strip, which includes Gaza City, the most populated urban area, to move to the south of the besieged territory. It promised that for a 24-hour window, the roads would be safe for those wanting to flee the impending ground invasion. Many began to move towards the south immediately on foot, others climbed onto trucks and the “lucky ones” packed up their cars.

Israel has been bombing the roads in the northern part of the Strip for days, making any evacuation attempt slow and arduous. Worse yet, there were reports of the Israeli government breaking its promise and targeting convoys moving towards the south. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, an Israeli strike on the Salah al-Din Road, a main thoroughfare in the overcrowded territory temporarily declared “safe” by the Israeli military, killed 70 people attempting to flee towards the south on October 13.

In the end, many have evacuated, but many more have not been able to. Some are not in a condition to move, either because of disabilities or injuries. In several hospitals, doctors and nurses are [refusing to leave behind](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/14/the-gaza-medics-who-wont-give-in-to-israels-evacuation-demand) their immovable patients. There are also others who are refusing to leave because they fear permanent [exile](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-war-gaza-north-civilians-ordered-evacuate-south).

The trauma of Nakba in 1948, where 750,000 Palestinians were permanently exiled from their homes, has never left Palestinians. This feeling is especially palpable among Palestinians in Gaza, the majority of whom are from families displaced in 1948.

The Israeli government knows this. It also knows that moving 1.1 million people in a space like Gaza, in a matter of hours, is logistically impossible. But the evacuation order serves its purpose – it provides cover for the Israeli government to commit mass atrocities by using the age-old fallacy that Hamas is using human shields.

International agencies have made it clear that the evacuation order does not absolve the Israeli government of its obligations and responsibilities under international humanitarian law, and have called on Israel’s leaders to rescind the order.  On its part, however, the Israeli government has not made a huge effort to hide the fact that this evacuation order or its wider plans for Gaza is an attempt at ethnic cleansing. Various Israeli ministers and politicians have called for the wiping out of Gaza over the past week, using dehumanising language. Israel’s defence minister even called Palestinians in Gaza “human animals”. Meanwhile, the United States is pushing Egypt to allow for a humanitarian corridor between Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula through the Rafah border crossing. While it is imperative that all efforts are made to help people escape the bombardment, and for aid to be delivered, the fear is that anyone who is made to leave Gaza now may end up being permanently exiled. This is not an irrational fear – it is something which has been happening continuously throughout Palestinian history. Indeed, the Israeli government has persistently ignored various international conventions establishing the rights of refugees, including those that ascertain their right to return home. It is estimated that more than seven million Palestinians are currently living in permanent exile and not allowed to return to – and in many cases even visit – their homeland.

As Palestinians in northern Gaza make the impossible decision of whether to stay in their homes or risk attempting to evacuate, the Israeli government is preparing for a ground invasion. Hundreds of Israeli tanks have been moved to the Israeli fence that has caged Palestinians in Gaza in for so long.

Meanwhile, Israeli politicians and army generals are whipping up a rhetorical frenzy. They even brought in an Israeli war criminal, who was involved in the 1948 Deir Yassin massacre, to raise the morale among soldiers. He told them to “[erase](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-war-veteran-ezra-yachin-soldiers-erase-children) the memory of them … Erase them, their families, mothers and children. These animals can no longer live.”

Everything is telling us that the invasion is going to be ruthless. The pretext of wanting to wipe out the “top political and military leadership of Hamas” is just that – a pretext. The invasion will provide the Israeli government with an opportunity to take the northern part of Gaza and push Palestinians into a smaller prison or, for many thousands, beyond the borders of Gaza. Whichever way you look at it, the situation can only be described as ethnic cleansing and continuation of the Nakba that began in 1948.

More than 70 people have been killed in their homes after Israel conducted air raids on Gaza’s Khan Younis, Rafah and Deir el-Balah, according to the besieged Palestinian enclave’s Ministry of Health.

The deaths came overnight on Tuesday, about 10 days after Israel started its retaliation against the deadly attacks on southern Israel by Hamas, the armed group that rules Gaza.

The violence has killed at least 1,400 people in Israel and more than 2,800 in Gaza since October 7.

Many of those killed in the latest Israeli air raids were those evacuated from Gaza City and the northern part of the Gaza Strip as ordered by Israel, Safwat Kahlout reported from Gaza.

“Ambulances are transporting the injured to already overcrowded hospitals, and we are told that many people are still trapped in the rubble of the targeted buildings, awaiting rescue,” he added.

‘Targeting children’

Standing in front of Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, an employee of the Emergency Medical Services, who held the body of an infant in his arms, “Israel is targeting children.”

“We were all asleep and woke up [in the early morning before dawn] to pray. Immediately afterwards, our house with 40 people inside, old and young, was hit,” he said.

“Suddenly the entire neighbourhood was in ruins. The scenes I witnessed are indescribable, with bodies all around me,” he added.

Meanwhile, Israel is preparing for a ground offensive.

Teresa Bo, reporting from Israel’s southern city of Sderot, said the troops continued to move towards the barrier fence with Gaza.

“We have seen armoured vehicles, tanks and lots of soldiers. They’re also using vessels from the sea with precision-guided munitions,” she said.

“However, right now, the big question is when this [ground invasion] operation will take place.”

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip are facing a “real catastrophe”, United Nations officials warn, as Israel’s heaviest bombardment of the occupied enclave rages on for the 11th consecutive day.

In a report on Tuesday, the UN said the Israeli army continued pounding southern areas despite previously telling residents to move south ahead of a looming offensive by land, air and sea on the tiny coastal strip of land.

It also stressed that “water remains a key issue as people will start dying without water”, a warning that came hours after the World Health Organization said there are only “24 hours of water, electricity and fuel left” in Gaza.

Residents of the besieged Strip, home to more than two million Palestinians, have already been severely struggling with little to no water to drink, shower or do laundry. They are also facing grave shortages of basic supplies including baby formula and flour, with all supermarkets out of stock.

“Concerns over dehydration and waterborne diseases are high given the collapse of water and sanitation services, including today’s shutdown of Gaza’s last functioning seawater desalination plant,” the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said in Tuesday’s report. “Fuel reserves at all hospitals across Gaza are expected to last for an additional 24 hours only. The shutdown of backup generators would place the lives of thousands of patients at serious risk.”

More than 2,800 people, including at least 1,000 children, have been killed in Israel’s bombing campaign since October 7, according to Palestinian officials. Some 10,000 others have been wounded, with many remaining buried under the rubble.

The bombardment began after fighters from Hamas, the Palestinian armed resistance movement running the Strip, launched a surprise attack just outside the besieged enclave on Israeli territory. So far, at least 1,400 people in Israel have been killed and more than 4,000 injured, according to Israeli officials.

In the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israel has killed 61 Palestinians over the past 11 days in military raids and arrests in Palestinian neighbourhoods, towns and villages, the Palestinian health ministry said on Tuesday morning. At least seven of those were killed by settlers.

The latest deadly raid took place at dawn on Tuesday when the Israeli army killed 17-year-old Mohammad Melhem in a raid on the town of Halhul in Hebron in the southern occupied West Bank.

In Nablus, the health ministry also announced on Tuesday the death of 72-year-old Sameer Sabra after he sustained an Israeli army gunshot wound on Friday.

Meanwhile, Israel announced on Monday night that it would begin evacuating residents of 28 mostly Jewish-only communities located about 2km away from its northern border with Lebanon as tensions and exchanges of fire with the Hezbollah armed group continue, threatening a wider, more regional war.

The evacuation will be carried out by the Israeli army and those evacuated will be accommodated in hotels and guest houses paid for by the Israeli government.

Arrests and captives

In a video statement on Monday, Abu Obaida, spokesperson for Hamas’s armed wing, said the group was holding up to 250 captives in the besieged Strip. He noted that 22 captives have so far lost their lives in Israeli bombardment.

The group also said it was holding a number of non-Israeli captives that they were prepared to release when “on-the-ground circumstances permit it.”

Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal [indicated](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/former-hamas-chief-meshaal-says-israeli-captives-include-high-ranking-officers-2023-10-16/) on Monday that the captives were being held in hopes of releasing the roughly 6,000 Palestinians in Israeli prisons. He told Al Araby TV that Hamas “has what it needs to empty the prisons of all prisoners”.

In 2011, Israel released hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for one Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, who was held captive in Gaza for five years.

Late on Monday, Hamas released a recorded video statement from one of the captives, a 21-year-old French-Israeli citizen who identified herself as Mia Schem and pleaded to be returned to her family.

Separately on Monday night, Israeli police arrested Nazareth-based Palestinian singer and cultural icon Dalal Abu Amneh, who holds Israeli citizenship, over a Facebook post in support of Gaza. An Israeli court ruled to extend her detention on Tuesday morning.

The Palestinian Authority Commission for Detainees Affairs said on Tuesday that Israel has arrested 680 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem since October 7, adding that 25 percent of those arrested were children and elderly men.

At least 88 people were arrested overnight on Tuesday.

On October 13, Israel amended its military orders in the occupied territories to make it easier for soldiers to arrest Palestinians on mere suspicion under the Unlawful Combatants law.

As the siege and bombardment of Gaza continues at full force, killing hundreds each day, maiming many more and [wiping entire families out](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/when-a-family-dies-under-israels-bombs-part-of-gazas-history-disappears) of the civil registry, the international community is still watching idly by. The global conversation on the assault on Gaza is shifting towards the annexation of yet another part of historic Palestine by Israel, with countries around the world rushing not to prevent the injustice but to ensure Palestinians made into refugees as a result won’t end up coming their way.

Today, the fear of what comes next is looming larger for Palestinians than the cruelty of the world’s apparent indifference to their suffering

This time, the Nakba is being televised, and it has a stench of finality to it. What is happening in Palestine can no longer be described as genocide or even ethnic cleansing. It is beyond mass extermination – it is total erasure.

Alongside the deranged and morally rotten military campaign to extinguish the lives of innocent Palestinian civilians – most of whom are women and [children](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/gazas-terrified-children-all-too-aware-israels-bombs-stole-their-joy) – is the equally if not more sinister campaign to entirely erase their identity.

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Open Apple, Google or any other digital map. Type “Palestine”. You won’t find it. You will only find Israel. If you’re lucky, you may be directed to a small patchwork of what is called “Palestinian Territories” firmly embedded inside Israel lest anyone mistakenly think it is an independent nation-state. And of course, you will find nowhere on any map the keyword that precedes Palestinian Territories to lay bare the ugly, but necessary and harrowing truth: “Occupied.”

Every single Palestinian alive today has had either the brutal experience of being rendered stateless and/or homeless, or waking up to the reality that the homeland of their parents is apparently fictional. I will never forget the experience as a young boy born and raised in Louisiana when my mom had to explain to me why my second-grade teacher said “Palestine doesn’t exist.” Suddenly all the maps, flags, pictures, culture, and even old coins from prior to 1948 that had “Palestine” written on them were supposedly a lie. This, even though my father is five years older than the state of Israel. Everything about us is supposedly non-existent.

It’s not just the Palestinian people or the name of the country that’s disappearing, but the word Palestine itself. Palestine is being deliberately erased from our consciousness and discourse, during war and even in peace.

The [Abraham Accords](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/18/the-utter-failure-of-the-abraham-accords), the supposed blockbuster deal brokered by the United States to normalise relations between Arab states and Israel, somehow manages to exclude the main aggrieved party: the population of Palestine. One would assume that the plight of the Palestinians, which has supposedly been the single biggest impediment to peace between Arab states and Israel, would have made the Palestinian people a critical – if not the central – stakeholder in such a monumental deal. Yet, as far as the Abraham Accords are concerned, the Palestinians are non-existent.

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And now, the current genocidal campaign being waged by the occupying state of Israel against Palestinians is being universally – and erroneously – described as “a war between Israel and Hamas”. Somehow the Palestinian people, who have been subjected to Israeli occupation and oppression for 75 years before October 7, no longer matter. This sinister public relations move is deeply problematic for two reasons.

First, it allows for a simplistic story of good vs evil, where Israel takes on the role of the peace-loving, civilised democracy minding its own business and Hamas the inexplicably evil and barbaric militia group – decorated with all the anti-Muslim trimmings and tropes imaginable – that attacks it out of the blue. This despite the fact that according to Human Rights Watch, Amnesty and even numerous Israeli human rights organisations, Israel is in fact an apartheid state and illegal occupier that has implemented the most inhumane open-air incarceration system on earth. Israel may have dozens of political parties, but the oft-repeated claim that it is the only “democracy” in the Middle East cannot be taken seriously when its veteran prime minister, who is embattled with corruption charges, can undermine the judiciary and appoint to his government senior officials that openly refer to themselves as [fascists](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/12/21/netanyahu-is-the-godfather-of-modern-israeli-fascism).

Second, and far more disturbingly, by strategically erasing Palestine from the narrative, Israel entirely sidesteps any awkward questions about the attacks of October 7 being linked to its more than 70 years of occupying the Palestinian people.

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The simple truth is that the word “Palestine” is deeply damaging to Israel’s image on the international stage. The word “Palestine” carries with it so much universally recognised victimhood and so many stories of oppression, subjugation and genocide that when it is included in the conversation, Israel simply cannot dispute, however desperately it tries to, its crimes. The moral weight of Palestine is so heavy that every time the word is uttered, you can hear the deflating hiss from Israel’s PR bubble. No amount of beach resorts and tech unicorns can wipe the permanent stain of Palestinian blood off Israel’s hands.

Which is why the only way to get rid of the heavy moral burden of Palestine, Israel seems to think, is to literally get rid of “Palestine” altogether, and that includes totally erasing it from the map. And yet, it is Israel that stands in front of the United Nations, year after year, pleading to be protected from the “barbarian” nations that supposedly wish to erase it from the map. The irony may be hysterical, but the hypocrisy is real.

Life during this ongoing war is unpredictable and challenging. Every time I sit down to write this diary, I am interrupted by air raids, news of someone we know losing their life, reports of bombings near our location, or the daily struggle of securing water and an internet connection.

Yesterday, I ventured out for the first time since our displacement on Friday to [Deir el-Balah](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/15/will-we-return-for-my-palestinian-family-history-is-repeating-itself) to assess the situation and gather information on the conditions of those displaced to the south.

I was aware of the inherent risks, given the constant air raids. Both my husband and my brother accompanied me, using the opportunity to buy groceries for our family.

As we prepared to leave, many thoughts raced through my mind. I couldn’t shake the idea that one of us should stay with our children in case something happened to the other, to ensure their safety.

“Are you ready, Maram?” my husband called out as he waited for me. We began our journey on foot, as it seemed like the safer option and there was minimal traffic on the roads.

Turning onto the next street, a massive explosion shook the area, filling me with fear. The worries I had before leaving the house came rushing back, and our family immediately called us, urging us to return.We paused to watch the billowing smoke after the air raid. The street was crowded with people rushing to pick up essentials, but the atmosphere was far from normal. Tension hung in the air as people hurried to finish their errands.

We continued until we reached a market where people were buying essential groceries. The cashier was swarmed with customers and some shelves were already empty. The supermarket owner was diligently taking notes on his stock.

As a journalist, it’s challenging to talk to people in such circumstances. Everyone was in a hurry – men, women, children. The owner was willing to provide some information about the market, but for the customers, particularly the women, it was more difficult.

I noticed a woman entering the market with her children and thought she might offer valuable insights in an interview. I approached, asking her, “Are you displaced, or are you originally from Deir el-Balah?” She replied with a sad smile, “Displaced,” and we shook hands, sharing our common experience.

Throughout my journey, I encountered many people with similar stories. Some were hesitant to share, while others used the opportunity to express their thoughts and emotions. People were doing their best to continue with their lives, buying food to survive.

At one point, I saw people filling up with water at a nearby mosque. I tried to engage them in conversation, but they were too preoccupied to spare a moment to talk. I, too, was torn between my journalistic role and the need to collect water for my own family.

Later, my husband asked if I was ready to return home. His question reminded me that we are all in the same dire situation, regardless of our professions. Whether doctors, journalists, paramedics, or NGO workers, we are all under attack.

A few hours after returning home and while finalising my piece about the current challenges faced by those displaced to the south, devastating news broke about the [bombing of al-Ahli Arab hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/19/a-romance-a-birthplace-destroyed-memories-of-gazas-bombed-ahli-hospital), with the death toll surpassing 400.

The news left us in deep shock, our hearts pounding with disbelief. I closed my laptop, leaving the text unfinished.

The overwhelming grief I felt when I heard the news made me realise how unbearable this situation had become for people, and words cannot adequately express the immense pain gripping this coastal enclave.

Wiping away my tears and holding my children close, I sought refuge in my sleeping area. As the kids drifted off to sleep, my thoughts remained with those lost in the hospital, “Where will sleep come from?

The head of a hospital in the Gaza Strip has issued an emotional appeal calling for an end to Israel’s bombardment following an air raid that doctors said killed several infants.

“Look at these children. Who is killing these children,” asked Yousef al-Akkad, director of European Gaza Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis, standing behind the bandaged and bloodied bodies of the toddlers.

“Free world, where are you regarding these massacres committed against this bereaved and oppressed people?” al-Akkad continued, in a video released by the besieged enclave’s Ministry of Health on Wednesday.

At least nine people were killed, including seven children, in an Israeli air attack that struck the al-Bakri family house south of Khan Younis, Palestinian news agency WAFA said. Many were trapped under the rubble, it added

The news of the attack spread quickly on social media as images of children’s bodies lined up side by side on a hospital stretcher stirred outrage in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. Photographers swarmed the operation room of the European Gaza Hospital as women covered their eyes and doctors wept.

“This is a massacre,” al-Akkad said, his voice choking with emotion. “Let the world see, these are just children.”

Doctors and residents also confirmed that the children were killed in the attack and said the al-Bakri family was just one of many such cases on Wednesday, according to The Associated Press news agency.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military, which started a devastating air campaign on Gaza after an October 7 attack of Hamas, the group that rules the enclave, in southern Israel.

So far, at least 1,400 people have been killed in Israel and nearly 3,500 in Gaza, including 1,030 children.

Israeli politicians have been talking war so strongly that it is unimaginable that anything could persuade them to pause, stop or step back. Bitter political enemies have set aside their differences to demonstrate one mind, calling for retaliation, retribution and a solution to what they call the Hamas security problem.

Despite their tactical and strategic differences, nearly all Israeli politicians support a ground attack by Israeli forces on the Gaza Strip. They see that public opinion, in near-unison, calls for the humiliation of October 7 to be avenged in blood. So far, the payback has mostly been the blood of Palestinian civilians, but there is a desire to go into Gaza and kill as many fighters as possible.

So how does Israel plan to carry out a ground invasion – and what is it waiting for?

An attack takes time

It is difficult for an army that has suffered a tactical defeat and [had its plans compromised](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/11/analysis-why-did-it-take-israel-three-days-to-return-to-gazas-boundary) to act immediately. To be ready to attack, the Israeli military needs to plan, equip, deploy and supply, and this takes some time.

Several reliable open sources indicate that Israel is straining to secure crucial military supplies to sustain a campaign that could last weeks or months, like its stocks of aerial bombs that need to be replenished before any new attack.

Well-informed rumours – and without independent confirmation we must call them that – claim that although Israel manufactures most of the ammunition and bombs it uses, the warehouses are not as full as logistics commanders would want. This lull is thus useful for the hurried acquisition of vital military hardware.

Generals know that the situation with reserves and supplies will never be ideal, and they are trained to recognise the moment when they have enough to go with without delaying the action too much. The Israeli military is probably close to a state of operational readiness that would allow it to launch a full Gaza offensive. That could be a matter of days at the most.

Israeli politicians must be already biting their nails and cursing soldiers for not having gone in already. They know – especially Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who many Israelis blame for leading the country in the wrong direction for years and disgracing their famed security and armed forces – that time is not on their side.

On October 7, and for days after, terrible scenes of civilians and disarmed soldiers being killed and hostages being taken galvanised support for Israel, including that of world leaders. Had it been capable of launching the ground offensive within 24 hours, Israel may have enjoyed worldwide support or at least a lack of strong opposition.

But very soon, the Israeli air attacks on Gaza, killing civilians and shattering neighbourhoods under unprecedented volumes of bombs, eroded much of that support.

Every day, more voices say that this has to stop, that this much killing is enough. At least [3,785 Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/17/mapping-the-israel-palestine-war-major-events-on-the-ground) have been killed by Israeli bombardment; one-third of those were children.

After international outrage over the October 17 [explosion at the al-Ahli Arab Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/18/what-do-we-know-about-the-strike-on-the-hospital-in-gaza), which killed at least 471 people, Israeli decision-makers see their window of opportunity to act with international support rapidly closing and will probably attack soon, even if the military are not 100 percent ready.

A weekend ground invasion?

A possibly major factor influencing the decision when to attack is intelligence-gathering on the locations where captives are held.

Secret services want to scrutinise as many operational leads as possible and gather as much information as possible, but they know they cannot have all the time they want.

I don’t know when G-day will be and, taking an enormous gamble, I believe the main preparations are nearly complete and the attack may happen as early as the weekend.History has shown that cunning decision-makers, who know how world politics tick, try to launch military campaigns that will trigger a strong response in the international community, on Fridays or Saturdays.

Why then? For a banal and simple reason: if the attacked side or its supporters and allies demand that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) convene urgently, it is usually impossible to get the quorum before Monday morning New York time.

That gives the attackers more than two days before they may be cautioned or sanctioned by the UNSC, even though it usually does not act strongly in its first session.

The nature of the invasion is also predictable: It is likely to be a massive, coordinated land, air and sea attack from multiple directions, probably launched in the middle of the night.

After all, Israel will try to put its advantages to best use while countering the strengths of the Palestinian defenders.

Hundreds killed

The health ministry in Gaza says at least 471 people [were killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/17/gaza-authorities-say-hundreds-killed-in-israeli-air-raid-on-hospital) in the blast, by far the highest death toll of any single incident in Gaza during the current war between Israel and Hamas.

The ministry said hundreds of other victims remained under the rubble.

Hamas said the blast mostly killed displaced people.

The Palestinian Authority’s health minister, Mai Alkaila, accused Israel of carrying out “a massacre”.

Located [in central Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/18/israel-hamas-war-list-of-key-events-day-12), the hospital, which is run by the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, was struck while it was overwhelmed with thousands of Palestinians seeking shelter amid a campaign of brutal Israeli air attacks across much of the besieged Gaza Strip.

How has the world reacted?

World leaders have [denounced the bombing](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/17/world-reacts-as-gaza-officials-say-500-killed-in-israeli-strike-on-hospital), with leaders from across the Middle East issuing the firmest statements.

Protests have also erupted across the Middle East, including in Jordan and in the Israeli-occupied [West Bank](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/17/pa-forces-fire-tear-gas-at-west-bank-protesters-after-gaza-hospital-strike) where Palestinian protests have confronted the Palestinian Authority’s security forces.

Jordan has cancelled a planned summit in the capital of Amman with United States President Joe Biden and Arab leaders.

Jordan’s Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said the meeting would be held at a time when all present could agree to work towards ending the “war and the massacres against Palestinians”.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who had also been slated to attend the summit, said he condemned “in the strongest possible terms Israel’s bombardment” of the Gaza hospital.

Saudi Arabia also issued a firm statement, condemning “in the strongest possible terms the heinous crime committed by the Israeli occupation forces by bombing [Al Ahli Baptist Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/18/where-in-gaza-is-al-ahli-arab-hospital-the-site-hit-amid-war-with-israel) in Gaza”.

Western leaders did not blame Israel for the strike, with French President [Emmanuel Macron](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/france-bans-pro-palestine-rallies-cracks-down-on-protesters-amid-gaza-war) saying in a social media post that “nothing can justify a strike against a hospital” and adding that “all the light must be shed on the circumstances”.

Biden in a statement offered “deepest condolences for the innocent lives lost in the hospital explosion in Gaza”.

What does Israel say?

Israeli authorities said the hospital was hit by an errant rocket fired by [Palestinian Islamic Jihad](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/11/israels-prime-target-what-is-palestinian-islamic-jihad), which operates inside the Gaza Strip.

“An analysis of IDF [Israel’s army] operational systems indicates that a barrage of rockets was fired by terrorists in Gaza, passing in close proximity to the Al Ahli hospital in Gaza at the time it was hit,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a social media post.

“Intelligence from multiple sources we have in our hands indicates that Islamic Jihad is responsible for the failed rocket launch which hit the hospital in Gaza.”

Israeli military spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari told reporters rockets fired by the PIJ passed by the hospital at the time of the strike, which he said hit the facility’s parking lot.

Hagari claimed there was no direct hit on the facility and said military drone footage showed “a kind of hit in the parking lot”.

He said the military did have an Israeli Air Force operation in the area around the time of the hospital blast “but it was with a different kind of ammunition that does not … fit the footage that we have [of] the hospital.”o

What does PIJ say?

The PIJ has rejected the Israeli allegation that it was responsible for the strike.

“The Zionist enemy is trying hard to evade its responsibility for the brutal massacre he committed by bombing the Baptist Arab National Hospital in Gaza through his usual fabrication of lies, and through pointing the finger of blame at the Islamic Jihad movement in Palestine,” it said in a statement.

“We therefore affirm that the accusations put forward by the enemy are false and baseless,” it added.

Imran Khan noted that some observers have questioned Israel’s version of events, with some pointing to Israel’s history of falsely attributing acts carried out by its own forces to armed Palestinian groups.

“We’ve seen this type of thing before from the Israelis,” Khan said on Tuesday.

“Take for example the [killing of our colleague Shireen Abu Akleh](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/11/shireen-abu-akleh-israeli-forces-kill-al-jazeera-journalist). At the initial stages of that report, the Israelis blamed fighters within Jenin camp for her death. It was only later that they admitted it was one of theirs.”

“Our duty today is [to] fight and fight,” the Palestinian Islamic Jihad armed group said in a statement, adding that it was not the right time to discuss a potential ceasefire.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also dismissed [growing calls](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/27/united-nations-votes-overwhelmingly-in-favour-of-humanitarian-truce-in-gaza) for a ceasefire, saying that such action would constitute “surrender to terrorism”.

Israeli forces said that they “killed dozens of terrorists who barricaded themselves in buildings and tunnels and attempted to attack the troops”.Israel also announced that it [had freed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/30/israeli-military-says-it-freed-captured-soldier-in-gaza-ground-operations) a female Israeli soldier being held captive by the Palestinian armed group Hamas during its ground raids, which have expanded in recent days alongside its continuing [aerial assa](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/30/our-turn-to-die-a-gaza-blackout-the-roar-of-israeli-jets-and-screams)ult

More than 8,300 people, including more than 3,400 children, have been killed in the bombardment, according to Gaza officials, and UN officials and aid organisations have warned of a humanitarian catastrophe as Israel continues to impose a “complete siege” on the territory.

Numerous strikes lit up the north sky in northern Gaza on Monday. Colin Clarke, director of research at the Soufan Group, an intelligence and security consultancy, told Al Jazeera that the latest strikes could include large bombs meant to destroy a network of underground tunnels utilised by Hamas.

“This could be the use of bunker busters, where the Israelis are dropping bombs meant to penetrate what we call hard and deeply buried targets,” said Clarke, adding that it was impossible to be certain.

A [small amount of aid](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/29/biden-discusses-accelerating-aid-to-gaza-in-calls-with-netanyahu-el-sisi) has started to trickle into the beleaguered strip, with the Palestinian Red Crescent reporting that 26 trucks carrying aid entered through the Rafah crossing with Egypt

No sign of a ceasefire

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emphatically rejected [calls](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/27/united-nations-votes-overwhelmingly-in-favour-of-humanitarian-truce-in-gaza) for a ceasefire, saying that “this is a time for war”.

The embattled prime minister also shot down questions about whether he will resign, as he faces widespread outrage from an Israeli public that holds his government responsible for a failure to stop an attack by [Hamas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/palestinian-group-hamas-launches-surprise-attack-on-israel-what-to-know) on October 7 that killed more than 1,400 people, most of them civilians.

“The failure of the Israeli security apparatus, they [the Israeli public] will not forgive him for that,” Abdelhamid Siyam, professor of political science at Rutgers University, told Al Jazeera, adding that the public “believes in the army, but not in Netanyahu”.

Speaking in a televised address on Monday, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said that Hamas has two options: “die fighting or to surrender without any conditions”.

The UN Security Council was holding an emergency meeting to deliberate on Israel’s ground raids, with Al Jazeera’s Gabriel Elizondo saying that the session would receive a briefing from Philippe Lazzarini, director of the UN agency on Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.

“This was a meeting where the UNSC members want to get a firsthand assessment of the situation in Gaza right now, and that is what we expect that they’ll be hearing,” said Elizondo.

US national security adviser Jake Sullivan met with Saudi Defence Minister Khalid bin Salman Al Saud in Washington, DC, on Monday to discuss regional tensions.

Russian president says US responsible for Middle East ‘chaos’

Russian President Vladimir Putin blamed the United States for the “deadly chaos” in the Middle East in a televised address, calling the US a beneficiary of “global instability”.

Putin also blamed Ukraine and Western nations for an outbreak of violence in the Russian republic of Dagestan on Sunday night, in which an angry crowd [stormed an airport](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/29/pro-palestinian-crowd-enters-dagestan-airport-to-protest-israel-flight) in search of passengers scheduled to arrive on a flight from Israel.

Russian forces have themselves [been active](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/16/assad-will-welcome-new-russian-military-bases-in-syria) in the Middle East for years, assisting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad during the country’s bloody civil war and dispatching proxy forces such as the Wagner Group to the libya. sTurkey condemns targeting of hospital in Gaza

The Turkish foreign ministry has condemned “in the strongest terms” an Israeli strike on the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship hospital in Gaza, stating that it had shared the coordinates of the hospital with Israeli authorities in advance.

Sobhi Skeik, director of the Turkish-funded cancer treatment hospital, called the attack “the first direct hit on a medical facility”.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also warned that it is unable to help resupply Al-Shifa and Al-Quds hospitals due to high risks.

“It’s a disaster on top of a disaster. Health needs are soaring and our ability to meet those needs is rapidly declining,” said Rick Brennan, the agency’s regional emergencies director.

Brennan called for a ceasefire and said that one third of Gaza’s hospitals and more than 70 percent of clinics are now non-functioning.

On October 28, Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari took to X – the platform formerly known as Twitter – with an “urgent message” for the residents of the Gaza Strip. For their “immediate safety”, Hagari said in a message entirely in English, residents of northern Gaza and Gaza City were urged to “temporarily relocate south”.

The performance was grotesquely preposterous for a variety of reasons, not least of them that English is the official language of neither Israel nor Palestine – which suggests that the intended audience was not, in fact, the population whose “immediate safety” was supposedly of such concern to Hagari & Co

Indeed, if safety were actually a concern, the Israeli army would not have slaughtered more than 8,000 Palestinians in three weeks, among them more than 3,000 children. Nor would Israel have continued to carpet-bomb both northern and southern Gaza following its previous warning to Palestinians in the north of the enclave to evacuate south.

Just as critically, it is not clear how anyone in Gaza was supposed to see this “urgent message” from Hagari given the [total communications blackout](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/28/gaza-under-communications-blackout-amid-warnings-of-cover-for-war-crimes) that Israel had orchestrated the day before, leaving the territory without telephone or internet service. Anyway, the evacuation warning was presumably appreciated by the section of the online anglophone world that insists on believing that Israel tries really hard not to kill civilians.

Communications in the Gaza Strip have since been [partially restored](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/29/internet-phone-services-return-to-gaza-after-communications-blackout), a turn of events that The Wall Street Journal attributes to the United States’ pressure on Israel. To be sure, it is far more ethically important to keep the internet on in Gaza than to, say, stop funding Israel’s [genocide](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/14/this-is-genocide) of Palestinians.

The temporary blackout was, however, long enough to induce an all-penetrating sense of helplessness in a whole lot of people worldwide, particularly those with family in Gaza. The torturous uncertainty was captured in many social media posts such as this one from my Facebook friend Majed Abusalama: “Mama, Baba, Mohammed, Naya, Eliya, Asmaa and the rest are may be killed or alive.”

Majed, an [Al Jazeera contributor](https://www.aljazeera.com/author/majed_abusalama_191115121601001) who hails from Gaza’s Jabalia refugee camp but currently resides in Berlin, is himself a survivor of repeated Israeli aggression against Gaza, including having his [school hit](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/11/15/i-fear-for-gazas-children) with illegal white phosphorus munitions. Eliya is his six-year-old niece; his other niece Naya is just two months old, meaning she has spent nearly half of her life under Israeli bombs.

When my [father died](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/8/23/remember-that-i-love-you-most) of cancer in August of this year, Majed sent me a moving note expressing his heartfelt condolences and his own fear of losing his parents – a distinctly constant possibility given their place of residence. Once during an Israeli bombardment, he said, his mother had phoned him from Gaza to say goodbye.

Now, of course, the phone lines were down, and I found myself manically checking Majed’s Facebook page to see if any news had managed to pierce the void. He had already lost numerous relatives and friends to the Israeli onslaught, but his immediate family had thus far survived. When communications were partially restored on Sunday, they were still among the living – although many Palestinians were not.

The 36-hour blackout likely proved especially deadly as it [hindered the work](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/30/our-turn-to-die-a-gaza-blackout-the-roar-of-israeli-jets-and-screams) of rescue teams, who could not be contacted to extricate folks from the rubble and otherwise respond to those in need. Meanwhile, the communications shutdown naturally only further inhibited the efforts of journalists and Gaza residents – who already contend on a daily basis with shaky phone and internet service – to transmit the truth of a genocide happening in real time.

And while Gaza is currently precariously back online, the bloody offline interlude no doubt also metaphorically encapsulated Israel’s unspeakably sinister objective: to disappear Palestinians both physically and conceptually.

It is, in fact, hardly a stretch to argue that taking the Palestinians of Gaza off the online grid is a modern twist on the age-old phenomenon of forced disappearances, at least in terms of the lack of accountability for victims as well as the psychological effects on their families. Just as disappeared people cannot aspire to justice while being disappeared, their loved ones cannot aspire to emotional closure without knowing their whereabouts and fates.

As has been seen time and again over the decades in situations of mass [forced disappearance](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2016/8/30/in-latin-america-people-disappear-but-crimes-remain) from Argentina to [El Salvador](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/8/30/keeping-up-disappearances-in-el-salvador) and from [Spain](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2018/9/15/can-exhumation-kill-franco-once-and-for-all) to Sri Lanka, family members of disappeared people are often condemned to perpetual psychological limbo, unable to commence the necessary human grieving process while remaining in the dark as to what exactly befell the missing person.

Some years ago in the south Lebanese village of Maaroub, I spoke with a silver-haired man named Abed, whose younger brother Ahmed had been involved with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon and had disappeared in 1983, the year after an apocalyptic Israeli invasion of the country killed [tens of thousands](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/6/4/a-cosmic-stink-israels-invasion-of-lebanon-40-years-on) of Lebanese and Palestinians. According to Abed, one theory was that Ahmed had ended up in an Israeli prison, but the lack of any concrete information meant that his family members got to spend the rest of their existence in a state of emotional torture.

Obviously, Israel’s recent blackout experiment in Gaza was a more short-lived disappearing act. And yet in the context of the past 75 years of Israeli [ethnic cleansing](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/5/15/ethnic-cleansing-by-zionists-in-palestine) and massacres of Palestinians, it should send a fairly “urgent message” – to borrow those well-phrased words of Israeli spokesperson Hagari.

One recalls the notorious claim by late Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir that there was “no such thing as a Palestinian people”, which has certainly aided Israel’s history of butchery; after all, it is easier to bomb people if they don’t exist, right? And even more so, perhaps, if they are all offline.

But unfortunately for the state of Israel, neither the Palestinian people nor [Israeli war crimes](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/28/gaza-under-communications-blackout-amid-warnings-of-cover-for-war-crimes) are easily disappeared – and that in itself should be an urgent message for Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said his country’s war with Hamas has entered its “second stage” as Israeli troops and armoured vehicles push into Gaza in an expansion of ground operations.

In a press conference in Tel Aviv on Saturday night, Netanyahu told Israelis to prepare for a “long and hard” offensive, describing the campaign as the country’s “second war of independence” since 1948.

“This is the second stage of the war whose goals are clear – to destroy Hamas’s governing and military capabilities and to bring the hostages home,” Netanyahu told reporters.

“We are only at the start. We will destroy the enemy above ground and below ground.”

Netanyahu’s comments came as Gaza continued to be under a near-total communications blackout overnight amid intense Israeli bombardment thought to be aimed at clearing the way for troops to push into the enclave.

Palestinian media outlets on Sunday reported that telephone and internet communications were gradually being restored to the enclave.

Tareq Abu Azzoum, reporting from Khan Younis in Gaza, said on Friday that Israel’s bombardment of the enclave had intensified in the eastern and northern areas of the strip.

“These kinds of attacks are giving clear permission to the Israeli ground troops to keep going deeper into the territory,” Abu Azzoum said.

Israeli military officials have confirmed that troops and armoured vehicles have been operating in northern Gaza since Friday but have stopped short of calling the escalation in ground operations an “invasion”.

Israel’s military had until now restricted its ground operations to brief incursions by its forces into the enclave.

Still, the latest escalation did not point to a full-scale invasion following weeks of speculation that Israel would stage an overwhelming show of force after amassing more than 300,000 troops along the border.

The administration of United States President Joe Biden has urged Israel to delay launching a major ground offensive amid concerns about civilian casualties, regional escalation and the safety of captives held by Hamas.

Al Jazeera’s Alan Fisher, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, said that Israel has signalled that the ground war in Gaza is now under way.

“They’re fighting there,” he said. “They’re carrying out operations. This is not like the other night where they sent them in and pulled them back. They’re there now.”

The escalating campaign in Gaza comes amid growing fears of a humanitarian catastrophe in the enclave amid shortages of food, water and medicines.

Humanitarian organisations have also raised concerns that the lack of communications in the enclave could provide cover for war crimes and other human rights violations.

The United Nations Security Council is expected to meet on Monday to discuss the crisis.

“A humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding in front of our eyes,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Saturday.

Israel’s bombardment of Gaza, launched in response to Hamas’s unprecedented October 7 attacks on Israeli communities, has displaced more than 1.4 million people, according to the UN.

Israeli air strikes have killed [at least 7,703 Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker), including more than 3,500 children, according to authorities in the Hamas-governed enclave.Hamas’s multi-pronged attack on Israel killed more than 1,400 people, mostly civilians, according to Israeli officials.

On October 18, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P) published an open letter calling for an immediate ceasefire in Israel’s war on Gaza, which has put the territory on “the precipice of a humanitarian catastrophe”. Within a week, it was signed by more than 460 NGOs from all over the world.

Even before the latest Israeli war on Gaza, the GCR2P, which was founded in 2008 to promote the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), issued five warnings this year about atrocities being committed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories.

An August 31 report highlighted the “systematic nature of [Israel’s] human rights violations and inhumane acts” in the occupied Palestinian territories, amounting to crimes against humanity or war crimes, including collective punishments and the imposition of an “apartheid”.

Interestingly, some of the most fervent supporters of the R2P doctrine and backers of the GCR2P, the United States and European countries, do not seem to agree with the centre’s assessment of the situation in Gaza. Nor are they upholding the “responsibility to protect” in the case of the Palestinian people being indiscriminately killed by the Israeli forces. Rather they are actively aiding and abetting Israeli war crimes, flouting international legal principles they have spent decades rhetorically promoting.

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The emergence of R2P

The roots of the R2P doctrine can be traced back to the international reaction to the recurrence of mass atrocities in conflicts in Bosnia, Rwanda and elsewhere in the 1990s.

Given that the UN was established on the principle of deterring mass atrocities, such as the Holocaust, the proliferation of such crimes, even in the heart of Europe, rang alarm bells in the “never again” camp.

In the run-up to the adoption of R2P, many regional and international actors felt compelled to intervene in civil conflicts. From the early 1990s, the Organisation of African Unity (renamed the African Union in 2002), championed a more proactive stance towards promoting peace, security, democracy and development on the continent.

Sub-regional bodies such as ECOWAS in West Africa and IGAD in East Africa were already actively involved in tackling protracted conflicts in their neighbourhoods, often intervening militarily to end civil wars or reverse military coups. In Europe, the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 cited principles of international humanitarianism.

The UN has practised international interventions since its inception and continues to do so. However, the idea of R2P went beyond habitual international peacekeeping by making sovereignty, a cornerstone of the UN system, conditional.

This idea was first explored in a 1996 book, Sovereignty as Responsibility: Conflict Management in Africa, published by the US-based Brookings Institution. The lead author was the Sudanese-born scholar and diplomat, Francis Deng.

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It was further developed in a 2001 report entitled The Responsibility to Protect, published by the Canadian-sponsored International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), led by former Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans.

The report argued that international intervention to protect civilians from mass atrocities, including genocide and ethnic cleansing, should happen only when the relevant sovereign state fails to discharge this responsibility. In such a case, the international community should try to assist the affected state or intervene peacefully. Military intervention should be a last resort proportional measure, with good intentions and reasonable prospects of success.

In 2005, the World Summit was held at the UN headquarters in New York to address a number of pressing global issues. R2P was among the main commitments expressed in the World Summit Outcome Document, signed unanimously by 170 heads of state and government.

Since its adoption, the doctrine was invoked in quite a few UN Security Council resolutions, starting with Resolution 1706 on Darfur in 2006, followed by Resolutions 1970 and 1973 on Libya, Resolution 1975 on Côte d’Ivoire and Resolution 2014 on Yemen – all issued in 2011.

The resolution on Libya was followed by international intervention in its civil war, which provoked a strong backlash from Russia and China and raised fears that it was used to pave the way for wilful regime change rather than peace enforcement.

R2P failure in Palestine

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Article 139 of the Outcome Document stipulates: “We are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council … should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity”.

The case of Palestine clearly fits in this definition. For decades, there has been manifest and repeated failure by “national authorities” – in this case, the occupying power, Israel – to protect the population under its authority against the atrocities listed above. The situation in Gaza now should also call for the application of R2P.

Israel is committing a growing number of war crimes in the enclave: systematically targeting civilian residencies and killing whole families, forcibly displacing over a million people, deliberately bombarding hospitals and schools, and intentionally depriving the whole civilian population of water, food, medicines and fuel.

Gaza is practically a ward of the international community. As an occupied territory, with no independent statehood, no recognised government and no army, the state stipulated by R2P as the first line for civilian protection does not exist. The occupying power is the one perpetrating the atrocities, in contravention of all international norms, instruments and treaties.

Additionally, the international community as a whole, and the UN in particular, are doubly responsible for the current plight of the Indigenous Palestinian population. In 1947, the UN passed the resolutions that created Israel, but since then has failed to face up to the consequences of its actions, as Israeli governments have violated every provision in the international rule book.

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The resulting dispossession and continued victimisation of the Palestinians have not resulted in resolute international action. In fact, the proverbial “international community” is continuing to punish Palestinians for their misfortune, turning them into permanent refugees, in their homeland and everywhere else. Worse still, members of this international community are subsiding the Israeli efforts to evict Palestinians from their homes, but then refuse to welcome them as refugees.

Today, the international community is complicit in atrocities in Gaza, where civilians have nowhere to go to escape the bombing. There is nowhere to be “ethnic cleansed” to.

A failed doctrine?

Those who remain silent in the face of this televised barbarism are complicit. Those who aid and abet the Israeli crimes are directly responsible for them.

Repeating and endorsing the genocidal rhetoric of Israel’s most extremist government, parroting its incendiary propaganda, and offering weapons, cash and intelligence support for the genocidal assault on civilians are certainly criminal acts.

Reflecting on this reality, Crispin Blunt, a conservative member of the British parliament, has threatened to sue British government ministers for complicity in Israeli war crimes in Gaza. Victims of atrocities also could, and should, take their tormentors to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Ironically, the states that are enabling Israeli atrocities are also some of the erstwhile champions of the R2P doctrine and the ICC as the ultimate haven of justice against the most depraved of transgressors.

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Observing leaders of the most powerful countries ganging up to mobilise the world’s most formidable arsenals and fleets against the poorest and most oppressed inhabitants of the earth, is a lesson in moral blindness. It appears to vindicate critics of R2P who have been arguing that the doctrine has always been a subterfuge for thinly disguised imperialism under false moral pretence.

I beg to differ. I believe that the doctrine has emerged in a period where the West in general and Europe in particular felt they could afford to act ethically. The end of the Cold War, coupled with the so-called “revolution in military affairs”, generated a “surplus of security”, and made the West feel invincible. Like the superheroes of fiction, they could fly to the rescue of victims without fear of any consequences.

The October 7 attack by Hamas revived insecurities generated by Western misadventures in the region. What stands out in the Hamas attack was not so much its brutality, but its audacity. The resistance movement has perpetrated many brutal acts in the past, such as indiscriminate suicide bombings. Its recent operation on October 7, however, was marked by military professionalism and sophistication.

Not only did Hamas fighters breach the post-modern defensive systems of the world’s most paranoid state, but they also took full control of territory for a few days, with the Israeli army and state in total paralysis. The realisation of total vulnerability has caused Spartan Israel, currently under the control of its most militaristic mavericks, to lose it.

Interestingly, Israel and its core backers appear more convinced today than Hamas that the Israeli state is in real danger of collapse. As [I have argued elsewhere](https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/conference/papers/2016/Genocide%20as%20the%20Lesser%20Evil-PSA%202016-March_1.pdf), hysterical narratives of insecurity are what makes actors see genocide as the proverbial “lesser evil”. Ironically, it also sets them on the path of self-destruction.

When Joe Biden won the presidential election in the United States three years ago, there were some hopes within the pro-Palestinian movement that there would be a positive change in US policy on Palestine. Biden’s predecessor, Donald Trump, had headed a fascist administration that had fully adopted the programme and vision of Israel’s far right. It was believed to be the worst American government for Palestinians … until now.

Today, Biden has fully embraced Israel’s genocidal aggression on Gaza, approving of the complete blockade that has cut off electricity, water, food, and medicine, and justifying the daily slaughter of hundreds of Palestinian civilians.

He has covered up Israel’s war crimes and parroted Israeli propaganda, including the claim that its army did not [target al-Ahli Arab Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/18/al-ahli-hospital-bombing-israel-performing-its-usual-post-atrocity-routine), where more than 470 Palestinians were killed. He even [questioned the death toll](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/appalling-why-has-biden-cast-doubt-on-the-palestinian-death-count) in Gaza, atrociously implying that Palestinians are lying.

Biden has truly surpassed Trump in the fascist dehumanisation of Palestinians.

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But let us be realistic here: The US has never been an honest broker in what it calls “the Palestinian-Israeli conflict”. On the contrary, it has always maintained pro-Israel policies and completely disregarded the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people.

Washington has never tried to exercise its leverage to make any substantial progress towards achieving peace based on justice. Meanwhile, it has showered Israel with military aid to help its army strengthen its grip on occupied Palestine. Even the administration of US President Barack Obama, thought to be the most “progressive” American government headed by a person of colour, gave Israel a $38bn in military assistance package, the largest in US history.

Unconditional support for Israel has been a steady feature on both sides of the political divide in the US. During every presidential election season, there has always been a vicious competition between candidates to prove their “pro-Israel” credentials.

Even when US administrations have attempted to appear to attend to Palestinian demands and needs, they have never done so in the Palestinian interest. The Biden administration, for example, reversed its predecessor’s decision to deny funds to the Palestinian Authority, close the Palestinian mission in Washington and defund the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). But it did that with the aim of sustaining a multitiered system of oppression created by the Oslo Accords to relieve Israel of its responsibility under international law to provide for the Palestinian population it occupies.

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That the life and wellbeing of Palestinians is none of its concern was also made clear by the Biden administration’s decision to get directly involved in the unfolding genocide by financing it, arming apartheid Israel, vetoing any UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire, and even sending aircraft carriers to the region.

The US position vis-a-vis the Palestinians is, unsurprisingly, reminiscent of the attitude of its first European settlers towards the Native Americans.

How so? Let me elaborate.

The US does not care about the Palestinians. They are not seen as relevant to US foreign policy. Disturbing a core US alliance with the only nuclear power in the Middle East is not in the cards, certainly not over some “sordid little human rights issue”. The US does not imagine that Palestinians will ever get justice on their own terms.

The US does not care about the Palestinian people. They are only acknowledged as “troublemakers”. Hence, the US has never aimed to “solve” the “Palestinian problem”, but to get it out of the way.

So, while the US does realise that the “Palestinian problem” is destabilising the region, this is, in the view of its political elite, only because the Palestinians just won’t shut up and go away – in much the same way that Native Americans, Aboriginals, and other native nations were seen as a “problem” by European settler colonialists.

The US view is that Palestinians are fundamentally a pesky little native population that will not accept “reality” (colonisation) quietly so that the US-Israeli alliance can proceed undisturbed. That is why support for the genocide of the Palestinians is an acceptable policy in Washington. After all, the American nation was itself founded on the genocide of a native population.

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Undeniably, the US is entirely pragmatic about its foreign policy interests and pursuits. It does not think it needs the Palestinians who are, after all, poor, weak and geographically microscopic. Until the US is forced to see the situation differently, it will continue to disregard the Palestinian rights to life, justice and freedom.

Shifting the US policy towards Palestine requires two things: changing the international environment that shapes and steers US foreign policy options and prerogatives; and bringing pressure on the US government from within by strategically mobilising those pressure groups that have real leverage over the two main political parties.

As for us, the Palestinians, like any other people suffering from colonialism, occupation and apartheid, we should send a strong message to the colonialists, headed by the US, that the rules of the game have changed, and that we will return to the negotiating table only after apartheid Israel abides by international law.

First, Israel must withdraw its troops from the lands it occupied in 1967; second, it must revoke all laws discriminating against the native Palestinian population, including the Nation-State Law; and third, it must implement United Nations Resolution 194 allowing for the return of Palestinian refugees.

Israel is not expected to respond positively, as it has never done to these lawful demands. But neither did the apartheid regime of South Africa until the international community intervened and imposed sanctions against it and boycotted it.

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After this is done, we should proceed to dismantle the racist two-state solution and pave the way for the only democratic alternative: a secular democratic state on the historic land of Palestine that gives equality to all its citizens, regardless of religion, ethnicity, and gender.

On October 7, the Palestinian armed resistance group Hamas launched an attack that took Israel by surprise. Its fighters overran Israeli military installations and settlements, which led to the death of some 1,400 Israelis.

Israel responded by launching another war on Gaza, imposing a complete blockade and relentlessly bombing civilian buildings and infrastructure. More than 6,500 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli bombardment, including more than 2,000 children.

The Hamas attack has not only changed the path of the Palestine-Israel conflict, but also the dynamics of the whole Middle East. It has left the US strategy of de-escalation in the region in shambles, put Arab governments and Iran in a difficult position and opened the door for greater Chinese and Russian involvement.

US strategy undermined

Over the past three years, the Biden administration has been trying to limit its involvement in the Middle East and focus on China, as part of its “pivot to Asia”.

To do that, the US hoped to “cool off” tensions in the region by facilitating the normalisation of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel and de-escalating with Iran. It also hoped to challenge Chinese influence in the region and boost India’s by establishing an economic corridor that would link India, the Middle East and Europe.

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The proposed project had two parts: an eastern corridor, which would connect India to the Arab Gulf states, and a northern corridor, which would link the Gulf states to Europe via Jordan and Israel. It was supposed to be the US response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

The Hamas attack has put an abrupt end to these plans. First, it has effectively frozen the normalisation process between Israel and Saudi Arabia, thwarting the conclusion of a regional security arrangement.

Second, the attacks also compelled the US to reverse its policy of diminished military presence in the region by ordering the biggest military [buildup](https://time.com/6322472/hamas-american-hostages-gaza-rescue/) since the war on ISIL. The Pentagon deployed one aircraft carrier in the Eastern Mediterranean, while another one has been sent to the Gulf. Together, they provide more than 100 aircraft with attack capabilities, as well as cruisers, destroyers and submarines equipped with Tomahawk missiles. Washington [says](https://apnews.com/article/biden-israel-palestinian-blinken-hamas-war-escalate-1d630d162c413383d91fc535904c854a) that this buildup is to prevent a third party from opening another front against Israel.

Third, US efforts to de-escalate tensions with Iran have also come to an end. Just a month ago, the two countries reached an agreement on a prisoner swap and the release of $6bn worth of frozen Iranian assets. It was hoped the deal would encourage Iran to restrain its militias in Syria and Iraq from launching further attacks against US forces.

Developments of the past week demonstrate that this arrangement has not held. Pro-Iran armed groups in Syria and Iraq have launched attacks on US military bases, wounding a number of US personnel. The US officials have also claimed that US forces in the northern Red Sea have [intercepted](https://apnews.com/article/yemen-navy-warship-missiles-intercepted-2f5fc9c8a3737f762b29d5c53ec08a5b) drones and missiles launched by the Houthis in Yemen.

All of this means the US is at risk of being dragged into another regional war in the Middle East.

Arab and Iranian dilemmas

The Hamas attack and the Israeli war on Gaza have also put regional governments in difficult positions. On one hand, the US has been pressuring its Arab allies, a number of whom had normalised relations with Israel, to condemn Hamas. Only the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain issued such statements.

On the other hand, Israel’s indiscriminate killing of Palestinian civilians has angered the Arab public and also put pressure on Arab governments to take action in solidarity with the Palestinians. There are already signs that the weight of public opinion is pushing Arab leaders to go against US wishes.

The massacre in al-Ahli Baptist Hospital on October 17 prompted sharp condemnations from Arab states, including from the UAE and Bahrain. At the Cairo Peace Summit on October 21, King Abdullah II of Jordan, whose country signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, delivered his strongest speech so far in condemnation of Israeli policies.

During a UNSC session on October 24 to debate the situation in Gaza the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia – all close US allies – strongly [condemned](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/25/us-resists-ceasefire-call-in-un-security-council-debate-on-israel-gaza-war) Israel and called for an immediate ceasefire. A day later, the UAE, along with China and Russia vetoed a US resolution that did not call for a cessation of fighting.

For the time being, pro-US Arab governments are resorting to strong rhetoric to quell public anger. But if Israel continues its deadly assault on Gaza, words will not be enough – they will have to take action by reversing normalisation with Israel, which could anger the US.

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A lack of action by Arab leaders to protect Palestinians could lead to a new wave of regional instability. The Arab public is already angered by failed economic policies and the indiscriminate killing of Palestinians will just further infuriate it. Once again, US support for Israeli atrocities in Gaza is undermining the Arab regimes it supports.

Iran also finds itself in a difficult position, albeit for different reasons. The Iranian leadership praised Hamas’s October 7 attack while denying any involvement in it.

Tehran is threading carefully trying not to be dragged into a direct confrontation with Israel or its ally, the US, while at the same time supporting Hamas.

Israel has declared that the goal of its war on Gaza is to dismantle the Palestinian resistance group – ie, carry out regime change in the strip. This means Tehran could lose an important ally in the region.

It, thus, faces a difficult choice between standing idle and watching Hamas being weakened or eliminated by Israel or encouraging its Lebanon-based Hezbollah to enter the fray and put pressure on Israel in the north, which could have grave consequences for its ally.

Both Israel and the US [warned](https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/11/politics/us-allies-warn-hezbollah/index.html) that Hezbollah would face dire consequences if it attacked Israel. Having secured full US support, Israel might use this opportunity to attack the Lebanese group. This would certainly destabilise Lebanon, which is not in the interest of Iran.

Russian and Chinese calculus

The involvement of the US in another conflict in the Middle East and the weakening of its alliances with Arab states would be a welcome development for Moscow and Beijing.

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Both countries benefited from Washington’s bloody interventions in the Greater Middle East over the past two decades. The US-led “war on terror” hurt US standing in the region, encouraging positive perceptions of Russia and China among Muslim nations. It also kept the US busy in the Middle East, giving space for the two great powers to solidify their influence in their neighbourhoods.

Russia and China started to feel US pressure only after it pulled out of the Greater Middle East, allowing it to undertake a “pivot to Asia” and focus more on its NATO alliance. That might now change, as the US dragged again into the region it wanted so badly to disengage from.

A US military buildup in the Middle East, more aid for the Israeli army and a US diplomatic corps focused on supporting Israel mean there are fewer military, financial and diplomatic resources available to aid the war effort in Ukraine and support allies in Asia that are trying to stand up to Chinese pressure.

In addition, the unconditional US support for Israel’s massacres of Palestinian civilians in Gaza is further undermining its position in the Islamic world, allowing Russia and China to gain ground. The two countries have been calling for an immediate ceasefire in the war on Gaza, [blaming](https://www.reuters.com/world/kremlin-warns-there-is-risk-regional-escalation-after-israel-violence-2023-10-09/) the US for the “destructive’ conflict. It appears that the US is shooting itself in the foot: instead of containing China and Russia in the Middle East, it is helping them strengthen their positions and thwart its plans for the region, including the India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor.

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Indeed, Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel has triggered a shift of dynamics in the Middle East. The extent of this shift will be determined by the US’s ability and willingness to rein in Israel. Unless it puts pressure on the Israeli government to stop the war on Gaza, lift the siege, and start negotiating with the Palestinians, the whole region might end up in flames.

There is a real possibility that the conflict will widen to include Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq and trigger mass upheaval in the rest of the Arab world. This would not only hurt the US’s regional alliances but also leave the door wide open for much deeper involvement of Russia and China in the region.

I am a journalist, writer and justice activist from Bosnia and Herzegovina. I was deeply affected by the genocide in my country in the 1990s. Many of my family members were taken to concentration camps, and some of the most gruesome crimes of the era were committed in my hometown.

Also, for decades, I worked as a strategic communications expert in transitional justice contexts across the world, from Syria to Sri Lanka.

As someone who was affected by the Bosnian genocide and who participated in many transitional justice processes, I have two distinct feelings when I look at the events unfolding in Israel-Palestine.

The first is the sheer horror at the sight of the immense suffering that is being inflicted upon the population of Gaza. This does not in any way lessen the pain I feel for those who were killed or taken hostage by Hamas on October 7. I acknowledge everyone’s suffering. It is important to acknowledge everyone’s suffering.

However, what we are seeing in Gaza now is an astonishing demonstration of what happens when a superior power unleashes its revenge on defenceless civilians. And it fills me with horror.

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The second feeling I have about Gaza, perhaps, is less obvious. When I look at the events unfolding at the Strip, I recognise my privilege as a Bosnian.

Most of the crimes that have been committed in my country, against my people, have been addressed in a court of law. The people who committed those crimes, at least at the highest levels, have been tried and sentenced for them. The truth of what happened to us has been established beyond reasonable doubt. In a way, dignity has been returned to Bosnian victims of genocide and other crimes against humanity through these processes.

I cannot imagine a similar satisfaction being provided to the victims of the violence in Gaza, in the current circumstances. I feel privileged as a Bosnian, and knowing what was possible for us then will likely won’t be possible for Palestinians in Gaza today, weighs heavily on my mind.

This is not to say what happened to us is now happening in Gaza. I think that it is very important to acknowledge different contexts and not to draw false parallels. But there are undoubtedly very clear common points between the two.

For instance, the very same arguments that were used to justify inflicting violence on Bosnians then are now being used against Palestinians in Gaza. Arguments such as they are “not civilians” and they are all supporters of the forces fighting in their name. Arguments like “they are all terrorists, jihadists”. This same language was being used against Bosnians back then.

Another similarity I see between Bosnia then and Gaza now is the terror inflicted on civilians. The terror I am talking about is not only the indiscriminate killing of women and children, but also the efforts to terrorise an entire population into submission. These efforts include driving a population out of a certain area or getting them to accept demands through force.

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I am not a lawyer. We are not in a court of law. So I cannot speculate as to whether the situation in Gaza is leading towards a genocide. I know very well, however, on what basis it was legally established that the crime of genocide was committed in Srebrenica, Bosnia. So I can try to lay that out and make a comparison.

In Srebrenica, there was an enclave that was under siege. Serbs claimed that the forces from the enclave were coming out and attacking Serb civilians around the enclave, so this was the reason for genocide. They claimed what they did to Bosnians was simply revenge for what Bosnian forces did to them.

Yet, in the end, the courts went through the evidence, looked at what happened in Srebrenica, and decided it was genocide. They established that boys and men from a particular group were killed so that the group could not regenerate and continue living in the area it long occupied, so that Bosniaks would be destroyed as a group in that area.

To establish the crime of genocide there have to be elements of crimes, including killing members of the group, inflicting serious bodily and mental harm on the members of a certain group to bring about the physical destruction of that group, in whole or part, forcefully transferring children and measures imposed to prevent births within the group.

Those are the crimes that constitute the crime of genocide. But for genocide to be established as a crime, you also need to have intent – intent for a group to be destroyed in whole or in part in a particular area. This was also proven in Srebrenica.

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We can clearly see that some of the aforementioned crimes are already being committed in Gaza.

And if we look at statements from Israeli leaders, Israeli politicians, Israeli members of parliament, Israeli journalists and opinion makers we can see that the same “intent” is also very much present. This intent is being communicated on a daily basis. If a minister in a country says that the army is going to go into a territory and deal with “human animals” the intent here is undoubtedly clear.

Now, again, I repeat, I am not a lawyer. It is not up to me to make a judgement on this. But from my experience, from what I know about genocide, I can say all the elements are there, in Gaza.

Friday, October 20 was supposed to be a particularly humanitarian day for the “[world’s most moral army](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/16/the-myth-of-israels-most-moral)”, ie, the one that has slaughtered more than 4,000 humans in the Gaza Strip over the past two weeks, half of them children.

According to United States President Joe Biden – who continues to wholeheartedly back the Israeli slaughter-fest in Gaza both morally and financially while pretending to care a tiny bit about the victims of the whole arrangement – Israel had agreed to allow some 20 humanitarian aid trucks to enter the besieged Palestinian enclave on Friday via the shuttered Rafah crossing from Egypt. Depending on how that went, the US president said, more aid trucks could then follow.

A [statement](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/18/israel-says-it-wont-block-humanitarian-aid-entering-gaza-from-egypt) from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office on Wednesday affirmed that, “in light of President Biden’s demand, Israel will not thwart humanitarian supplies from Egypt as long as it is only food, water and medicine for the civilian population in the southern Gaza Strip”.

Biden, it seems, was a tad more excited about the PR stunt than everyone’s favourite “moral army”.

To be sure, the non-thwarting pledge would have been slightly more credible had Israel not [repeatedly bombed Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/17/bodies-all-around-as-israeli-air-raids-hit-homes-in-khan-younis-and-rafah) and the other areas of southern Gaza to which thousands of civilians from the north have evacuated under orders from Israel itself. As might have been predicted, the aid trucks were [held up all day](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/20/gaza-aid-egypt-rafah-crossing/) Friday on the Egyptian side of the border as the Israeli army continued its pulverisation efforts in the Palestinian territory.

They only managed to enter Gaza on Saturday morning after another nighttime [killing spree](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/20/israel-gaza-war-live-hamas-releases-two-american-captives-from-gaza) by Israeli warplanes which killed at least 46 Palestinians.

The fewer people left alive in Gaza, the fewer “humanitarian supplies” needed, right?

Of course, if Israel was actually concerned with allowing aid to reach Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, it could simply suspend the illegal land, air and sea blockade of Gaza which it has maintained for more than 16 years. Over this period, the fluctuating catalogue of banned and restricted items has proved consistently diabolically ludicrous, and has included everything from medical devices to flour, rice, salt, toilet paper, soap, notebooks and pens.

Israel also happens to share its very own land border with the Gaza Strip. This means that, were the Israeli government ever in a genuinely non-thwarty mood, it could with superlative ease permit the cross-border movement of cancer medication and other helpful stuff.

As this latest war underscores, however, Israel prefers the “shooting fish in a barrel” approach to Gaza, and the 20 aid trucks allowed to go through Rafah are merely a drop in the bucket (or barrel) in a humanitarian catastrophe of unspeakable proportions. Normally, [some 450 trucks](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/20/un-chief-visits-rafah-crossing-pushes-to-get-aid-into-gaza) enter Gaza daily carrying supplies to help residents survive the debilitating blockade.

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Back in 2012, a United Nations report warned that, in the absence of “Herculean efforts … in such sectors as energy, education, health, water and sanitation”, the Gaza Strip would not be “a liveable place” by 2020. Obviously, regular bouts of mass killing by the Israeli army have done nothing to increase chances of “liveability” over the years; ditto for Israeli attacks on infrastructure pertaining to each and every one of the aforementioned “sectors”.

Now, three years past the 2020 marker, Gaza appears to have entered into a state of distinct uninhabitability, particularly in the aftermath of Israel’s announcement on October 9 that it would commence a “[complete siege](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/israel-announces-total-blockade-on-gaza)” of the Gaza Strip, including a total ban on the passage of food, water, and fuel into the territory. This, mind you, was nine days prior to the promise to “not thwart humanitarian supplies from Egypt”.

What happens, then, to 2.3 million people without food, water, electricity or medicine who are trapped in a sliver of land that is rapidly being reduced to rubble? In Joe Biden’s view, apparently, we won’t have to find out – so long as we can get a couple of aid trucks in.

In reality, though, [hunger](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/under-israeli-bombs-gazas-palestinians-worry-they-may-die-of-hunger) is as good a weapon of war as any – just ask the Nazis, among others. As Alex de Waal, executive director of the World Peace Foundation, noted in a 2017 essay for the London Review of Books, “forced starvation was one of the instruments of the Holocaust” and an “effective instrument of mass murder”.

And regardless of whatever smattering of aid is allowed into Gaza without being “thwarted” by Israel, death by hunger remains a living threat.

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But there are still plenty of other ways to die, as was underscored on Tuesday, October 17, when an [attack](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/18/gazas-ahli-arab-hospital-after-the-attack-that-killed-at-least-500-people) on Gaza City’s al-Ahli Arab Hospital killed some 470 people. Notwithstanding Israel’s extensive track record of targeting Palestinian healthcare facilities, ambulances and [medical personnel](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/7/18/israeli-forces-deliberately-killed-palestinian-paramedic-razan), the Israeli government undertook to deny committing the atrocity – a denial that was quickly backed up by the ever-omniscient Biden, head of another country known for [bombing hospitals](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/9/everyone-was-in-blood-bombing-at-kunduz-mosque-in-afghanistan).

A rather more convincing picture was painted by British-Palestinian surgeon Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah, the co-founder of the Conflict Medicine Programme at the American University of Beirut Medical Center, who was present at al-Ahli Hospital at the time of the attack and who described it as an Israeli “massacre by appointment”.

Writing on his Facebook page, Abu-Sittah pointed out that the Israeli government had been “openly saying it was going to target hospitals for the last week and the world just stood by and did nothing”. He continued: “I saw a body of a toddler who was missing a head”.

And as those meagre 20 humanitarian aid trucks roll into Gaza, any fig leaf of aid can’t hide the fact that this is one big massacre by appointment.

These awful times require each of us to make a choice.

Will we choose measure over mayhem?

Will we choose humanity over horror?

Will we choose armistice over genocide?

Will we choose conscience over career?

Josh Paul, a veteran American diplomat, has made his choice

Last week, Paul [resigned](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/19/state-department-official-resigns-over-bidens-handling-of-israel-gaza-war) from the State Department in the wake of US President Joe Biden’s fulsome, categoric support – rhetorically, diplomatically and militarily – for Israel.

In a long, thoughtful [letter](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/josh-paul-655a25263_explaining-my-resignation-activity-7120512510645952512-APhR) explaining his decision, Paul wrote that he had devoted the past 11 years trying to make “differences” in the pursuit of outcomes he considered “good and just”.

Through it all, Paul understood that he was prepared and obliged to make “moral compromises … for as long as I felt [sic] the harm I might do could be outweighed by the good I could do”.

But, to borrow a phrase in vogue these days, Paul had reached an “inflection point” that meant “the end of that bargain”.

Paul opposed Biden sending even more “lethal arms” to Israel quickly.

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“Blind support for one side is destructive in the long term to the interests of the people on both sides,” Paul wrote. “I fear we are repeating the same mistakes we have made these past decades, and I decline to be a part of it for longer.”

Paul had rejected the pernicious policy that has long defined America’s cruel attitude towards the Middle East: Kill first, think later.

His blunt rebuke of the commander-in-chief was remarkable for a number of extraordinary reasons that, in the coverage of his abrupt departure, have gone largely and predictably unnoticed.

With cutting precision, Paul pointed to the galling, marquee-sized hypocrisy at the core of Biden’s feckless, historically illiterate response to the murderous madness engulfing Israel and occupied Palestine.

“We cannot be both against occupation, and for it. We cannot be both for freedom, and against it,” he insisted.

Let me paraphrase Paul’s admonition for the smack-the-forehead, oblivious dunces who are, of course, a staple on US networks and cable news outlets: It’s the occupation, stupid.

Then, Paul acknowledged what no Western diplomat, let alone an American envoy, has – to my knowledge – conceded publicly at the risk of incurring the retributive wrath of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his hysterical apologists at home and abroad: Israel is an apartheid state guilty of ethnic cleansing and collective punishment.

Paul framed his searing indictment this way: “There is beauty to be found everywhere in this world, and it deserves both protection, and the right to flourish, and this is what I most desire for Palestinians and for Israelis … collective punishment is an enemy to that desire, whether it involves demolishing one home, or one thousand; as too is ethnic cleansing; as too is occupation; as too is apartheid.”

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Paul has, it seems to me, heeded the warnings – issued by human rights groups based in New York, London and Jerusalem – that his boss, Congress and a prostrate Western media establishment have ignored or discredited in their evangelical fealty to a rogue regime brimming with crooks, racists, and authoritarians.

An apartheid state has, since its engineered inception, wielded carte blanche licence not only to steal Palestinian homes and land, but to traumatise, jail, torture, maim, and kill Palestinians with impunity.

That illegal, deliberate, systemic brutalisation and dehumanisation of generation after generation of imprisoned Palestinians in Gaza, the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem is unsustainable and was bound to combust, and, inevitably, fuel Hamas’s ruthless, retaliatory outrages.

It is instructive and a grievous shame that among the career and appointed diplomats who, together, craft the US’s ruinous blueprint for the region, only Josh Paul has had the good and prescient sense to act in the face of an unfolding humanitarian calamity.

It would be easy to dismiss his principled stand as the posturing of a minnow whose quitting will have no impact on the pitiless course that Biden and company have chartered.

It would be wrong, too.

Bureaucracies expect and demand conformity. To get along, you must go along.

So, when a solitary voice breaks from the official line dictated by the president of the US, it is, I suspect, a hard and lonely experience.

Still, one crack in the facade of unanimity can lead to a wider, more troublesome fissure.

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Indeed, Paul can now take considerable solace in knowing that many of his former colleagues have joined him in challenging their government’s “unlimited” backing of Israel as dangerous and short-sighted.

Reportedly, a “mutiny” is brewing among scores of US diplomats who are plotting to pen a “dissent cable” to express their grave objections to Biden’s obdurate pursuit of the US’s doomed “kill first, think later” so-called “strategy”.

To stem the building tide of discord, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has apparently held “listening sessions” with small groups of perturbed diplomats of Muslim, Arab and Jewish descent to mollify their concerns.

It is a sham exercise which reveals that “diversity” is a convenient fig leaf used to camouflage this stubborn fact about who calls the genocidal shots at Foggy Bottom and the White House: white, male warmongers.

Nevertheless, dissent is spreading on Capitol Hill.

Adam Ramer, the political director in the office of Democratic Congressman Ro Khanna, quit after only being on the job for two weeks in protest over the representative’s refusal to co-sponsor a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire.

“I resigned my job on Monday because of a refusal to call for a ceasefire. I will be doing everything in my power to stand against war & for Palestinian justice,” Ramer wrote on X.

Days later, in an impassioned open [letter](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/24041700-hill-staff-ceasefire-open-letter), more than 400 Muslim and Jewish congressional staffers demanded that their “bosses” stop “exploiting” their “pain and histories” to “justify violence” and support a ceasefire.

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The staffers wrote that, in this urgent moment, “we are calling on our elected officials to find a new way forward together, through unbreakable solidarity motivated by our humanity”.

It was a brave and necessary thing to do.

European Union President Ursula von der Leyen has also [faced](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/20/eu-staffers-criticise-von-der-leyens-uncontrolled-support-of-israel) the righteous rod of 800 public servants who, in a letter, have excoriated her blatant “double standards” and “uncontrolled” endorsement of Israel’s war crimes in Gaza.

“If Israel does not stop immediately, the whole Gaza Strip and its inhabitants will be erased from the planet,” the letter read.

They are right.

Which leads me, finally, to the choice the mostly unrepentant keyboard cavalry who are happily saddling up once more – in derivative columns and hyperbolic appearances on TV – made to side with their home team’s, by now, familiar mantra: Kill first, think later.

We remember when, not too long ago, you made the same disastrous judgements in Afghanistan and then in Iraq.

When the dreadful human and geopolitical consequences of your inexcusable folly became apparent, a few of you admitted your complicity and apologised – half-heartedly.

We did not accept your apologies then and we will not accept your apologies when Gaza is turned to dust and memory.

We will remember, since most of you will no doubt prefer, as always, to forget the catastrophic choice you have made yet again.

In our current era where digital platforms wield unparalleled influence, X – previously known as Twitter – is the closest thing we have to a global public square. Within this vast marketplace of ideas, a subset of Western feminists have unilaterally assumed leadership roles, fashioning themselves as the gatekeepers of who is a real “feminist” and what truly constitutes “feminism”.

Since October 7, these “leading feminists” have been bombarding this all-important digital landscape with posts vociferously condemning the Hamas attack on Israel, while excusing or simply ignoring the ongoing collective punishment of more than two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip that followed. Some even attempt to frame Israel’s indiscriminate bombardment and total siege of the tiny enclave, which already claimed the lives of over 5,000 men, women, and children, as acceptable retaliation for Hamas’s actions and lawful “self-defence”.

Let’s be clear: What is in question here is not their condemnation of the violence Hamas inflicted on Israeli women, but their apparent indifference to, and in some cases enthusiastic endorsement of, the violence currently being wielded against Palestinian women.

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These so-called feminists are not only failing to show any empathy or support for the long-standing suffering of Palestinian women, but are also joining in the increasing efforts to silence those expressing any hint of sympathy for them.

Whenever someone, especially someone with a certain public profile, posts a message on X supporting Palestine and acknowledging the decades-long suffering of Palestinian people under Israeli occupation and oppression, they are faced with the same loaded questions many times over: “Do you support Hamas?”, “Do you condemn the attacks on Israeli civilians?”

In response, some feel intimidated and reverse course, while others either refuse to engage or try to challenge the assumptions of these self-appointed public interrogators. But however they respond, they face the same barrage of abuse, intimidation and insults from those who “stand with Israel”, including many prominent Western feminists.

Phrases and labels such as “anti-Semite”, “rape apologist”, “support for rape and kidnapping of women”, “support for a terrorist group that governs with Sharia law”, and notably, “not a true feminist” are liberally bandied about.

So I want to ask all those feminists in the West who are not only making posts, signing statements and writing columns unconditionally supporting Israel’s “right to defend itself” but also working tirelessly to “cancel” anybody who dares to either put a spotlight on decades of Palestinian suffering, or call for an end to Israel’s indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza, which is killing and maiming hundreds of women and girls every single day: Is this what you call feminism?

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Your brand of feminism, which seemingly applies only to a certain subset of predominantly white, Western and Western-aligned women, is difficult to stomach. You rightly condemn the violence Hamas inflicted on Israeli women. Yet you are not only silent on the suffering of Palestinian women, but are trying to silence anyone else who is brave enough to speak up for them.

Today, Gaza’s women and children are not only under heavy bombardment, but also on a starvation diet thanks to Israel’s “total siege”. Is this not a crime against women that merits attention and condemnation? How can you call yourself a feminist while excusing, even supporting, punitive, genocidal actions of a powerful state against a helpless people trapped in an open-air prison? How can you so easily brush away the harrowing experiences of hundreds of thousands of women who lack the power to change their circumstances?

Western feminism’s apparent indifference to statements like that of Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, likening Palestinians to “human animals”, is deeply alarming.

If your feminism does not make you stand up for a people who experienced little other than ethnic cleansing, oppression and occupation since 1948, who have been trying to survive under a crippling blockade for 17 years, who are being defined as “human animals”, and who are now facing what can only be described as a genocide, then what it is for? If these realities do not encourage you to take a stance, it’s hard to imagine what will. Are Palestinian women somehow not women enough to be deserving of your feminist advocacy?

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I hope this weighs on your conscience: By endorsing Israel’s right to “defend itself” at any cost, you’re condoning violence against women and children – the very demographic you claim to champion. By ignoring the plight of the Palestinian people, by trying to brand as “anti-Semitic” and “anti-feminist” everyone who dares to support their struggle, you are making it evident that not all lives – not all women – hold the same value in your eyes.

Your message to the women trying to survive under Israeli bombs, women cradling the corpses of their murdered children, is loud and clear: you do not matter

At the end of last week, Thomas Maddens, a filmmaker and activist based in Belgium, noticed something strange. A video about Palestine that he posted to TikTok with the word “genocide” suddenly stopped getting engagement on the platform after an initial spike.

“I thought I would have got millions of views,” but the engagement had stopped.

Maddens is one of the hundreds of social media users who are accusing the world’s largest social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube and TikTok – of censoring accounts or actively reducing the reach of pro-Palestine content, a practice known as shadowbanning.

Authors, activists, journalists, filmmakers and regular users around the world have said posts containing hashtags like “FreePalestine” and “IStandWithPalestine” as well as messages expressing support for civilian Palestinians [killed by Israeli forces](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/no-one-is-left-to-mourn-in-gaza-as-israels-bombs-deliver-daily-death) are being hidden by the platforms.

Some users have also accused Instagram, owned by Meta, of arbitrarily taking down posts that simply mention Palestine for violating “community guidelines”. Others said their Instagram Stories were hidden for sharing information about protests in support of Palestine in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. Some also reportedly complained about the word “terrorist” appearing near their Instagram biographies.

In a post on X on October 15, Meta spokesperson Andy Stone blamed the reduced reach of posts on a bug.

“This bug affected accounts equally around the globe and had nothing to do with the subject matter of the content – and we fixed it as quickly as possible,” Stone wrote.

When asked about the accusations of shadowbanning, Stone pointed Al Jazeera to a blog post that Meta published highlighting its latest efforts in tackling misinformation related to the Israel-Hamas war. The post said users who don’t agree with the company’s moderation decisions may appeal.

The BBC reported that Meta apologised for adding the word terrorist to pro-Palestinian accounts, saying the problem that “briefly caused inappropriate Arabic translations” has been fixed.

A TikTok spokesperson told Al Jazeera that the company “does not moderate or remove content based on political sensitivities”, adding that the platform removes “content that violates community guidelines, which apply equally to all content on TikTok”.

A YouTube spokesperson told Al Jazeera that the company’s systems prioritise connecting viewers with high-quality news and information from authoritative sources. The spokesperson also pointed Al Jazeera to pages outlining the company’s recommendation system, hate speech, harassment, and misinformation policies.

X did not respond to Al Jazeera’s requests for comment.

Civil rights groups aren’t buying the platforms’ denials.

This month, 48 organisations, including 7amleh, the Arab Centre for Social Media Advancement, which advocates for digital rights of Palestinian and Arab civil society, issued a statement urging tech companies to respect Palestinian digital rights during the ongoing war.

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“We are [concerned] about significant and disproportionate censorship of Palestinian voices through content takedowns and hiding hashtags, amongst other violations,” the statement said. “These restrictions on activists, civil society and human rights defenders represent a grave threat to freedom of expression and access to information, freedom of assembly, and political participation.”

Jalal Abukhater, 7amleh’s advocacy manager, told Al Jazeera that the organisation had documented 238 cases of pro-Palestinian censorship, mostly on Facebook and Instagram. These included content takedowns and account restrictions.

“There is a disproportionate effort that targets Palestine-related content,” Abukhater told Al Jazeera in an interview. “In contrast, the official Israeli narrative, as excessively violent as it could get, has got more of a free reign because Meta considers it to be coming from “official” entities, including from the Israeli military and government officials.”

‘Getting censored’

A 26-year-old marketing manager from Brussels who asked to remain anonymous to protect her identity, noticed that engagement she received on Instagram Stories dipped sharply when she posted about Palestine from her personal account. “I have around 800 followers, and I usually get 200 views for a story,” she told Al Jazeera. “But when I started posting about Palestine, I noticed my views getting lower.”

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The woman said she was concerned because her story didn’t contain graphic images or include hate speech. “[They were] about understanding that Palestinian people are human and deserve to live freely in peace in the region,” she said. “Why is that getting censored?”

Another Instagram user, a 29-year-old mechanical engineer from India who also requested anonymity, noticed her Instagram Stories about protests in Los Angeles and California’s Bay Area had zero views even after an hour. “That was unusual,” she said. She then posted a selfie, which got the usual engagement she usually gets, she said.

Other users had similar experiences and took to the social media platforms themselves to complain. “After posting an Instagram story about the [war in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/no-one-is-left-to-mourn-in-gaza-as-israels-bombs-deliver-daily-death) yesterday, my account was shadowbanned,” Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Azmat Khan posted on X. “Many colleagues and journalists [sic] friends have reported the same. It’s an extraordinary threat to the flow of information and credible journalism about an unprecedented war.”

Pakistani author Fatima Bhutto also said Instagram was shadowbanning her and limiting comments and story views. “I am learning so much about how democracies and big tech work together to suppress information during illegal wars they are unable to manufacture consent for,” she posted on X. In a video she posted to Instagram, she said her posts weren’t showing up in her followers’ feeds on the platform.

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Khan and Bhutto did not respond to requests for comment from Al Jazeera.

Ameer Al-Khatahtbeg, the 25-year-old founder and editor-in-chief of Muslim, a news website that focuses on Muslim issues, noticed that posts from the publication reached significantly fewer people on Instagram over the past few days, plummeting from 1.2 million before the start of the war, to just over 160,000 a week into the war.

“The most major form of censorship that is being implemented is towards any account mentioning keywords such as ‘Palestine’, ‘Gaza’, ‘Hamas’, even ‘Al Quds’ & ‘Jerusalem’ in Instagram stories and posts alongside hashtags such as #FreePalestine, and #IStandWithPalestine,” Al-Khatahtbeg told Al Jazeera. “These posts aren’t reaching Instagram’s Explore page and are showing up on people’s main feed days later.”

Muslim wasn’t the only publication that accused social media platforms of censorship. Days after [Hamas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-tothe-palestinian-group) first attacked Israel, Mondoweiss, a pro-Palestine news outlet based in the United States, said TikTok banned its account and only restored it hours later after an online outcry. The Palestine-based Quds News Network posted on X that its Facebook page was suspended by Meta.

This isn’t the first time that social media platforms have been accused of censoring Palestinian voices.

An [independent report](https://about.fb.com/news/2022/09/human-rights-impact-meta-israel-palestine/) commissioned by Meta after Israel’s war on Gaza in 2021 and made public a year later found that the company had negatively affected the human rights of Palestinian users in areas such as “freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, political participation, and non-discrimination”.

According to findings by 7amleh shared with Al Jazeera, Facebook received 913 appeals from Israel’s government to restrict or remove content on its platform from January to June 2020. Facebook consented to 81 percent of these requests.

“This isn’t new. Palestinians have faced censorship from Meta before and are experiencing it again,” Al-Khatahtbeg told Al Jazeera. A Meta spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment.

‘Tricking the algorithm’

Some people who said they experienced censorship on social media have been resorting to workarounds.

When posting to Instagram for instance, a Palestinian activist who did not want to be named for his safety told Al Jazeera that they “started breaking up” words. “When I wrote ‘Palestine’ or ‘ethnic cleansing’ or ‘apartheid’, I’d break the word with dots or slashes. I’d replace the letter ‘A’ with ‘@’. This is how I started tricking the algorithm.”

Mohammad Darwish, 31, the founder of a Bydotpy, a blockchain company based in Cairo, Egypt, created a website called “Free Palestine.bydotpy” that automates the same process. Typing “Gaza” into his website, for instance, automatically changes it to “ğaza”, which users can then copy and paste into the social media app of their choice.

“I don’t like anyone controlling me, and during tensions in Sheikh Jarrah, a Palestinian neighbourhood in East Jerusalem, I experienced a lot of restrictions,” Darwish told Al Jazeera, adding that Facebook also warned him about spreading “hate speech” back then.

“As a community of developers, we have a principle that ‘there is nothing that cannot be done with code.’ So I developed this tool, which has two versions, one for the Arabic language and the other for the English language

“The function of the tool is to change the form of sentences to make it difficult for artificial intelligence and Facebook algorithms to understand the meaning of the text,” he added.

Shortly after noticing user complaints about social media censorship of pro-Palestine content, Florida-based law firm called Muslim Legal that focuses on helping American Muslims, set up a page on its website where anyone who had faced  such censorship could share their experience. At the time of publishing, Muslim Legal had received more than 450 submissions.

“We noticed pages that were simply speaking out for justice for Palestinians were being simply shut down and banned without warning,” Hassan Shibly, the firm’s founder, told Al Jazeera in an interview. “We were also seeing people restricted for innocent comments.”

Shibly is now trying to take these complaints to the platforms to try to resolve them.

“The use of social media by the community is so essential,” he said. “It’s one of the ways we can push back against Islamophobic narratives. It’s one of the ways we can expose the war crimes that are happening. And it’s one of the tools we have to dismantle the propaganda and misinformation that is being used to justify the ethnic cleansing happening in Palestine by the Israelis.”

Need for transparency

In July, the European Union [passed the Digital Services Act (DSA)](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/5/eu-parliament-adopts-historic-new-rules-for-internet-platforms), seeking to tame Big Tech. Under this regulation, social media platforms are required to comply with rules that ensure digital security and also safeguard users’ freedom of expression.

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“Platforms need to be very transparent and clear on what content is permitted under their terms and consistently and diligently enforce their own policies,” an EU spokesperson told Al Jazeera in a statement. “This is particularly relevant when it comes to violent and terrorist content.”

Crucially, the DSA also mandates transparency around shadowbanning and other kinds of content moderation.

“When an account gets restricted, the user must be informed,” the spokesperson said and added that users had the right to appeal the decision.

Some experts, however, expressed doubts on the effectiveness of the DSA in the current situation.

“In principle, the DSA covers shadowbanning,” Andrea Renda, senior research fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies, told Al Jazeera, “but in practice, it is going to be harder to prosecute this behaviour compared to the spread of misinformation on these platforms.”

Ultimately, censorship of Palestinian content hurts journalists, civil society and human rights defenders during a time of crisis, Abukhater said. “It especially prevents Palestinians from establishing context surrounding the events affecting their lives during this moment.

“It is crucial for companies to recognise their role at this vital moment and recognise that maintaining a steady flow of information to and from Palestine is absolutely essential to save lives and mitigate the human rights impact the censorship could have had.”

Already in its third week, Israel’s war on Gaza has so far killed more than 5,600 Palestinians, injured thousands more, and displaced more than one million. Despite calls from some quarters for a ceasefire, there seems to be no end in sight for the suffering of Gaza’s two million residents.

Having long embraced the dehumanisation of the Palestinians, Israeli society is filled with rage and the primordial drive for revenge over the killing of Israeli civilians by Hamas fighters on October 7.

This blind fury is now channelled into a genocidal drive by the narcissism and extremism of one man: Benjamin Netanyahu, a doubled-faced, pathological liar, who has done everything and anything to stay in power.

Netanyahu’s arrogance, corruption and callousness are to blame for the country’s political and military failures that led to the October 7 attacks. He thought he could just transform all of historic Palestine into a Greater Land of Israel, by making the occupation of the Palestinian territories permanent and keeping millions of Palestinians in an open-air prison in Gaza and segregated bantustans in the West Bank – all with no repercussions.

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On October 7, his arrogance finally caught up with him, because arrogance breeds stupidity. Hubris turned into humiliation, and the fiasco into farce, or as Israelis say, using Arabic words, the fashla (failure) turned fadiha (scandal).

And while Israel’s military and intelligence heads have accepted responsibility for their failures to prevent the attacks, Netanyahu has refrained from taking any responsibility, even though most Israelis blame him for their national tragedy.

Instead of resigning, the shamed and shameless prime minister cum wartime leader has gone on to wage a sadistic war with no clear strategy or endgame.

In his genocidal offensive, Netanyahu has been aided and abetted by his former Western detractors, who until recently were expressing “concern” about his plans to undermine Israel’s judiciary, through his coalition of fanatics and fascists, in order to stay out of jail.

First and foremost among them is US President Joe Biden, who went from snubbing Netanyahu for much of the year to embracing and shielding him from the wrath of Israelis and Arabs alike.

Biden has committed America to Netanyahu’s genocidal war on Gaza, offering American arms, tactical assistance in urban warfare, and diplomatic leverage. He has ordered the deployment of two aircraft carriers in the Eastern Mediterranean to protect Israel and deter the likes of Iran from intervening in the conflict.

Likewise, European leaders, who had also given Netanyahu the cold shoulder for much of the year, are now clamouring to show their support for his government and his war on Gaza. They have refused to call for a ceasefire and continued to justify the mounting Israeli war crimes as an exercise of “the right to self-defence”.

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Israel’s Western stooges love to evoke international law in all the wrong ways. Israel, indeed, has the right to self-defence, but not to defend its decades-long brutal military occupation, long enabled by Western powers. It is rather the occupied and victimised Palestinian people living under the Israeli racist system of apartheid that have the right to resist their tormentor under international law.

The ongoing genocidal war – spearheaded by a failed prime minister and supported by his morally suspect Western allies – is not one of self-defence; rather, it is a war of self-deceit. Israel falsely believes that it could attain security by the sword.

But when has killing more Palestinians ever resulted in better security for Israeli society? It never has; it never will.

Imposing a hermetic blockade on Gaza and unleashing a bombing rampage to pave the way for a land invasion, Israel will face dangerous regional blowbacks. In its genocidal drive, it may, as some fear, drag the US into World War III.

Sensationally and [falsely](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/12/israel-is-manufacturing-a-case-for-genocide) comparing Hamas’s attacks on Israel with those carried by al-Qaeda on the United States in 2001 will not help. The “war on terror” the US unleashed on the world killed even more Americans than the 9/11 attacks did, along with hundreds of thousands of mostly Muslim victims. It sowed chaos that more war and more troops could not stop for the past two decades.

If anything, the “war on terror” proves that war crimes, collective punishment and other violations of international law do not mitigate extremism; they perpetuate it as they fuel the cycles of violence – something UN Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism Fionnuala Ni Aolain [emphasised](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ5EZ2k9-4A) during a recent news conference focusing on the Israeli war on Gaza.

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As the Israeli army commits more war crimes against the Palestinians of Gaza, Israelis need to have a good look at where colonialism and occupation have gotten them. Perpetual Israeli oppression, racism and killings of the Palestinians have created the conditions for greater instability, extremism and violence in Palestine and the region.

A genocidal war on Gaza will not bring peace and quiet to the Israeli society, nor to those in the West abetting it.

 Since Israel began its blatant genocide of occupied Gaza almost three weeks ago, a frothing army of pedestrian Western politicians has confirmed their repellent character once more.

Chief among them are Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and British cabinet minister Suella Braverman. Both have pursued – like grovelling suitors – Israel’s welcoming embrace, eager to impress their child-mass-murdering darling with loving bonbons of adulation and devotion.

For his predictably slavish part, DeSantis has, in effect, unilaterally scrapped the first amendment of the US Bill of Rights which allegedly guarantees every American citizen the right to express ideas “through speech” and “to assemble or gather with a group to protest”.

The Ivy-league-trained “[ignorant bigot](https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/ron-desantis-gaza-bigotry/)” and flailing US presidential candidate earned a burst of fleeting attention earlier this week when he [banned](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/25/florida-governor-ron-desantis-bans-pro-palestine-student-organisation) a pro-Palestinian student group, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), from the state’s university campuses.

To my knowledge, the governor’s sweeping cancellation of the SJP has not prompted perpetually aggrieved, third-tier TV personalities and “free-expression” warriors like Bill Maher – who likely has spent more [time](https://www.reviewjournal.com/news/maher-muses-on-mansion/) inside the Playboy Mansion than a library – and company to howl like colicky babies about this egregious assault on unfettered speech.

Not to be outdone on the supposedly sacrosanct “free speech” and “right to assembly” cancellation score, Braverman – the stunt-addicted, bound-to-get-me-on-TV Home Secretary – tried to go one hysterical step further by attempting to have the Palestinian flag outlawed altogether.

Reportedly, Braverman approached several agreeable English police forces – who have been judged guilty, by the way, of institutional racism – asking her compliant chiefs to review if flying or waving the flag [constituted](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-war-uk-muslim-vows-legal-action-flag-banned) the criminal offences of “harassment” or “incitement to violence”.

I gather that the racist police officers are still pondering whether or not to enforce the crazed edict.

In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of unintimidated Londoners and [fans](https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2023/10/26/celtic-vs-atletico-madrid-fans-palestine-support-flags-champions-league) of the Scottish football club, Celtic, let Braverman know what they thought of her and the proposed ban by hoisting – at the risk of being jailed – the Palestinian flag in demonstrations over the weekend and during a Champions League match on Wednesday.

Good for them.

These acts of solidarity by ordinary people in defiance of erasing any overt exhibitions of support for trapped Palestinians and their just cause are fine examples of necessary responses to the West’s state-sanctioned resolve not only to stifle but to criminalise dissent.

It is an old, instructive story that proves that so-called “liberal” democracies will not tolerate having Palestinians and their millions of allies protest the cruel and lethal actions of their apartheid-practising pal in the Middle East – even peacefully.

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The explicit meaning of this systemic suppression of Palestinian “voices” is that Palestinians must have no “voice” at all.

They should, instead, shut up and accept as a geopolitical reality Israel’s right to steal and evict Palestinians from their land and homes, as well as to traumatise, imprison, maim and kill them, while invading and obliterating what remains of Palestine with carte blanche impunity.

For further and convincing evidence of this pervasive censorial attitude, please see much of the genocide-giddy Western media these days.

The bizarre corollary, of course, is any challenge to this absurd construct at any time, anywhere, by anyone, amounts, apparently, to a “blood libel” or worse, the vacuous rhetorical canard, “anti-Semitism”.

Hence, the determined push by Israel and its fanatical surrogates abroad to have the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement barred and tarred as an illegal, anti-Semitic affront to thwart Israel’s right to steal and evict Palestinians from their land and homes, as well as to traumatise, imprison, maim and kill them, while invading and obliterating what remains of Palestine with carte blanche impunity.

Palestinians are expected to allow rabid settlers to carry out what, by any measure, amounts to pogrom after pogrom and permit Israeli forces to carpet bomb, starve and dehydrate them to death because Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – and his avid champions in the fourth estate – says he can without restraint or remorse.

Palestinians have no right of reply. They have to take it – again and again and again.

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De facto: any form of “armed” resistance – including, but not limited to, the throwing of rocks, the burning of tires, or the flying of kites – is considered an outrageous capital offence that often warrants the summary execution of youthful offenders, such as Palestinian paramedic Razan al-Najjar.

The 20-year-old was killed on June 1, 2018, while she tended to Palestinians who had been shot near a perimeter fence in Gaza as they defied their brutal occupation by releasing flaming kites that, invariably, landed on unharmed pieces of parched Israeli soil.

At first, the Israeli military claimed al-Najjar’s murder was “an accident”. Months later, the Israeli human rights group, B’Tselem, [concluded](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/7/18/israeli-forces-deliberately-killed-palestinian-paramedic-razan) that this was – surprise, surprise – a lie.

“Contrary to the many versions offered by the [Israeli] military, the facts of the case lead to only one conclusion,” a spokesperson for B’Tselem said at the time. Israeli security forces deliberately shot and killed al-Najjar “despite the fact that she posed no danger [and] was wearing a medical uniform”.

In light of Israel’s killing of more than 7,000 Palestinians in the full-throttle pursuit of genocide, nearly half of whom are infants and children, I wonder whether [linguist](https://bdsmovement.net/news/chomsky-clarifies-position-cultural-boycott-israel) Noam Chomsky and [activist](https://bdsmovement.net/taxonomy/term/157/all) Norman Finkelstein – traditional and outspoken friends of Palestinians – are prepared finally to abandon their tactical or wholesale opposition to BDS.

The hellish times and circumstances demand it.

Indeed, in a little-noticed section of its 2021 report, A Threshold Crossed, which [found](https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution) that Israel has, for generations, committed “crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution”, Human Rights Watch (HRW) endorsed the main pillars of the BDS campaign.

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Remarkably, the group wrote that “all states” should: “Subject agreements, cooperation schemes, and all forms of trade and dealing with Israel to enhanced due diligence to screen for those directly contributing to the commission of crimes of apartheid and persecution of Palestinians,” and “impose targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, against officials and entities responsible for the continued commission of grave international crimes, including apartheid and persecution”.

I suspect HRW was motivated to ratify the ethical, legal and moral imperative and legitimacy of BDS by this simple, yet profound impulse: Each one of us is required, in the face of shocking and ingrained injustice and inhumanity visited upon generation after generation of besieged Palestinians, to do something about it.

We will no longer abide lectures by Israel, nor the wretched likes of Ron DeSantis and Sue Braverman, dictating the terms of resistance to the genocidal ferocity of an apartheid state.

Those obsequious days are over.

It has been more than two weeks now since another war in Gaza started. More than 6,500 Palestinians have been killed by relentless Israeli bombardment and 1,400 Israelis died in the attack by the armed Palestinian resistance group Hamas on southern Israel.

Watching the media coverage of these events, I have been struck by the stark difference between how the killing of civilians has been covered on both sides.

Many Western media outlets insist on highlighting the immorality of killing and brutalising Israeli civilians, as Hamas has undoubtedly done, while soft-pedalling the immorality of the Israeli military’s indiscriminate killing of Palestinian civilians by carpet bombing the Gaza Strip.

In one remarkable [interview on BBC Newsnight](https://twitter.com/BBCNewsnight/status/1711504505211097272), when Husam Zomlot, the Head of the Palestinian Mission to the UK, said that seven members of his family had been killed by Israeli bombs, the reaction of his interviewer was to offer perfunctory condolences and immediately proclaim that “you cannot condone the killing of civilians in Israel”

Zomlot had not offered his personal tragedy as justification for Hamas atrocities but as an answer to a direct question about what happened to them. Yet having done so, he now found himself being asked to condemn, not those who murdered them, but those who killed others.

It is worth noting that in all the interviews I watched of Israelis who had similarly lost loved ones, I have not come across a single one where the victims have been asked whether they condoned the actions of their government or disavowed the labelling of Palestinians by the Israeli defence minister, Yoav Gallant, as [“human animals”](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/9/israeli-defence-minister-orders-complete-siege-on-gaza). None have been asked to condemn what some are [controversially](https://forward.com/opinion/566209/calling-israels-actions-genocide-harms-the-cause-of-human-rights-everywhere/) describing as an unfolding genocide and the expulsion of civilians in Gaza.

“We are preconditioned not to see Palestinian humanity because colonialism, white supremacy, and Islamophobia are still the dominant lens through which states, institutions, people, and media in the West view the world (although geopolitical interests are, of course, also at play),” [editorialises The New Humanitarian](https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/editorial/2023/10/23/media-coverage-israel-and-gaza-double-standards), contrasting the glorification of Ukrainian resistance to the Russian invasion with the delegitimisation of Palestinian struggle against invasion, dispossession and ethnic cleansing.

Few outlets have bothered to ask how over two million people came to be packed into a tiny strip or discuss the 16-year blockade that has turned the territory into what is widely acknowledged as an open-air prison.

These inadequacies and distortions in the media coverage of the war in Gaza reflect a reality that is often obfuscated by claims of “journalistic objectivity”. The truth is, journalists’ discretion over what is fit to publish has never been absolute; it has always been circumscribed by the values and culture of the society in which they operate.

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The late American media ethicist, John Calhoun Merrill, asserted that “a nation’s journalism cannot exceed the limits permitted by the society; on the other hand, it cannot lag very far behind”.

Recognising how culture interacts with journalism is the key to understanding these biases, many of which are rooted in history. What we are seeing in the coverage of the war in Gaza is, in the first instance, a demonstration of the largely unacknowledged societal limits imposed on journalism.

There is obvious censorship. Opinions that humanise Palestinians or that deviate from the official line of unconditional support for Israel have been suppressed. There have been clampdowns on protests and expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians, threats to arrest people for flying the Palestinian flag, and attempts by Big Tech companies to remove or shadow-ban pro-Palestinian content.

A report by Al Jazeera’s Listening Post programme [suggested](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-listening-post/2023/10/22/israel-gaza-genocidal-rhetoric-and-the-fog-of-war) that editors in US newsrooms were discouraging any attempts to provide background context to the Hamas attacks as that would be unpalatable to audiences.

However, censorship is not a sufficient explanation. As Merrill said, the journalism “cannot lag very far behind” the society. Journalism ethics and the moral principles and values that inform them do not belong to journalists alone. Rather they are reflections of society-wide expectations from the media.

In essence, the reporting on Israel and Gaza tells us more about the journalists themselves and the cultures they spring from, than about the events in the region.

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Historically, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have been a well-documented feature of Western cultural thought. Jews were once racialised and othered in much the same way Muslims are today, routinely subjected to pogroms. In the aftermath of the horrors of the Holocaust, however, anti-Semitism was widely denounced in Western culture as unacceptable and abhorrent.

By contrast, anti-Arab and Islamophobic sentiments in the West were never censured in the same way. Over the past few decades, they have been further fuelled by the US-led “war on terror”, which Israel has used to frame its own conflict with the Palestinians.

In this context, it is not surprising that many Westerners seem to believe that acknowledging the humanity of Jews has to go hand-in-hand with the dehumanisation of those coded as Muslims or Arabs (the categories are almost always conflated in the Western imagination).

The insistence on Israel’s “right” to defend itself even in the face of undeniable atrocities that date back to its establishment reflects the Western perception that Arab civilian deaths are an acceptable price for Israeli security and peace of mind.

By contrast, even an attempt to mention the context in which Israeli civilian deaths occurred is considered an outrageous move – as the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres himself [has recently discovered](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/un-chief-says-clear-violations-of-international-humanitarian-law-in-gaza).

Western media reports reflect this awful cultural calculus – the one-sided demand for condemnation, the individualisation and humanisation of the Israeli tragedy are juxtaposed next to the representation of Palestinian tragedy in passive language and as suffered by undifferentiated masses.

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The calculus is also apparent in the imagery of death. Social media and TV reports are inundated with graphic images of Palestinian dead but relatively few images of dead Israelis. Words and descriptions such as “[beheaded babies](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/13/watching-the-watchdogs-babies-and-truth-die-together-in-israel-palestine)” are presumed sufficient to articulate the horror of Israeli death. The horror of Palestinian death, however, needs to be established with gory imagery.

Audiences are constantly reminded that Hamas has been designated a terrorist organisation by Western governments, but not that human rights groups and the UN have described Israel as an apartheid regime.

Criticism of Israeli actions, or even the attempt to humanise their victims, are coded as expressions of anti-Semitism, which carries a far heavier cultural penalty than anti-Arab sentiment.

That said, it is important to keep in mind that culture is itself a collectivising and muddy concept and it should not be assumed that cultural concepts are held or accepted by everyone who identifies as part of the culture.

The huge demonstrations in support of Palestinians that are happening in Europe and North America are an example of this. The point though is that culture does influence media attitudes, ethics and framing as well as [limits](https://nypost.com/2023/10/16/msnbc-denies-report-it-sidelined-muslim-anchors/) on what journalists can do.

Media practitioners need to take cognisance of the facts and rethink ethics and professional practices forged in days when journalists reported the news largely to audiences who looked like and thought like them.

Today, when news reports are instantly broadcast around the world, cultural blindspots can manifest as unethical practices, including as [justification for genocide and ethnic cleansing](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/upfront/2023/10/20/israel-gaza-when-will-the-world-say-enough). They should listen to and take seriously the repeated [complaints about their reporting and framing](https://www.arabnews.com/node/2395266/media). That requires a degree of self-awareness that sadly, many have so far failed to demonstrate.

At least five people have been killed by Israeli fire as the Israeli army carried out a number of overnight raids in the occupied West Bank, according to Palestinian officials.

The Palestinian health ministry said three people were killed early on Wednesday in an Israeli air attack on the Jenin refugee camp. Two more young people were killed during raids in Qalqilya and Qalandiya, respectively, it added.

The Israeli military said on Wednesday that a group of Palestinians at the camp “fired and hurled explosive devices” at its forces when they were carrying out “counterterrorism activities”. The army hit them with a drone, it said, without mentioning casualties.

Al Jazeera’s Charles Stratford, reporting from Ramallah, said Israeli forces went into Jenin “with military-grade bulldozers that they use so often to destroy homes” of Palestinians in the West Bank.

“The main focus of that raid was a refugee camp in Jenin, but there was another incident in the village of Burqin, just outside of Jenin. There were a number of arrests made there,” he said.

The West Bank has emerged as another front in Israel’s war in Gaza.

It began on October 7 when Hamas, the armed group that runs the Palestinian enclave, attacked southern Israel, prompting Israel to bombard Gaza with air attacks. The violence killed 1,400 people in Israel and more than 5,700 in Gaza.

At least 103 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank over the same period, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

The drone attack was at least the third use of Israeli air power in the West Bank.

Jenin refugee camp was the focus of a major Israeli military operation earlier this year.

On October 7, the Palestinian armed resistance group Hamas launched an attack that took Israel by surprise. Its fighters overran Israeli military installations and settlements, which led to the death of some 1,400 Israelis.

Israel responded by launching another war on Gaza, imposing a complete blockade and relentlessly bombing civilian buildings and infrastructure. More than 6,500 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli bombardment, including more than 2,000 children.

The Hamas attack has not only changed the path of the Palestine-Israel conflict, but also the dynamics of the whole Middle East. It has left the US strategy of de-escalation in the region in shambles, put Arab governments and Iran in a difficult position and opened the door for greater Chinese and Russian involvement.

US strategy undermined

Over the past three years, the Biden administration has been trying to limit its involvement in the Middle East and focus on China, as part of its “pivot to Asia”.

To do that, the US hoped to “cool off” tensions in the region by facilitating the normalisation of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel and de-escalating with Iran. It also hoped to challenge Chinese influence in the region and boost India’s by establishing an economic corridor that would link India, the Middle East and Europe.

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The proposed project had two parts: an eastern corridor, which would connect India to the Arab Gulf states, and a northern corridor, which would link the Gulf states to Europe via Jordan and Israel. It was supposed to be the US response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

The Hamas attack has put an abrupt end to these plans. First, it has effectively frozen the normalisation process between Israel and Saudi Arabia, thwarting the conclusion of a regional security arrangement.

Second, the attacks also compelled the US to reverse its policy of diminished military presence in the region by ordering the biggest military [buildup](https://time.com/6322472/hamas-american-hostages-gaza-rescue/) since the war on ISIL. The Pentagon deployed one aircraft carrier in the Eastern Mediterranean, while another one has been sent to the Gulf. Together, they provide more than 100 aircraft with attack capabilities, as well as cruisers, destroyers and submarines equipped with Tomahawk missiles. Washington [says](https://apnews.com/article/biden-israel-palestinian-blinken-hamas-war-escalate-1d630d162c413383d91fc535904c854a) that this buildup is to prevent a third party from opening another front against Israel.

Third, US efforts to de-escalate tensions with Iran have also come to an end. Just a month ago, the two countries reached an agreement on a prisoner swap and the release of $6bn worth of frozen Iranian assets. It was hoped the deal would encourage Iran to restrain its militias in Syria and Iraq from launching further attacks against US forces.

Developments of the past week demonstrate that this arrangement has not held. Pro-Iran armed groups in Syria and Iraq have launched attacks on US military bases, wounding a number of US personnel. The US officials have also claimed that US forces in the northern Red Sea have [intercepted](https://apnews.com/article/yemen-navy-warship-missiles-intercepted-2f5fc9c8a3737f762b29d5c53ec08a5b) drones and missiles launched by the Houthis in Yemen.

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All of this means the US is at risk of being dragged into another regional war in the Middle East.

Arab and Iranian dilemmas

The Hamas attack and the Israeli war on Gaza have also put regional governments in difficult positions. On one hand, the US has been pressuring its Arab allies, a number of whom had normalised relations with Israel, to condemn Hamas. Only the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain issued such statements.

On the other hand, Israel’s indiscriminate killing of Palestinian civilians has angered the Arab public and also put pressure on Arab governments to take action in solidarity with the Palestinians. There are already signs that the weight of public opinion is pushing Arab leaders to go against US wishes.

The massacre in al-Ahli Baptist Hospital on October 17 prompted sharp condemnations from Arab states, including from the UAE and Bahrain. At the Cairo Peace Summit on October 21, King Abdullah II of Jordan, whose country signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, delivered his strongest speech so far in condemnation of Israeli policies.

During a UNSC session on October 24 to debate the situation in Gaza the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia – all close US allies – strongly [condemned](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/25/us-resists-ceasefire-call-in-un-security-council-debate-on-israel-gaza-war) Israel and called for an immediate ceasefire. A day later, the UAE, along with China and Russia vetoed a US resolution that did not call for a cessation of fighting.

For the time being, pro-US Arab governments are resorting to strong rhetoric to quell public anger. But if Israel continues its deadly assault on Gaza, words will not be enough – they will have to take action by reversing normalisation with Israel, which could anger the US.

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A lack of action by Arab leaders to protect Palestinians could lead to a new wave of regional instability. The Arab public is already angered by failed economic policies and the indiscriminate killing of Palestinians will just further infuriate it. Once again, US support for Israeli atrocities in Gaza is undermining the Arab regimes it supports.

Iran also finds itself in a difficult position, albeit for different reasons. The Iranian leadership praised Hamas’s October 7 attack while denying any involvement in it.

Tehran is threading carefully trying not to be dragged into a direct confrontation with Israel or its ally, the US, while at the same time supporting Hamas.

Israel has declared that the goal of its war on Gaza is to dismantle the Palestinian resistance group – ie, carry out regime change in the strip. This means Tehran could lose an important ally in the region.

It, thus, faces a difficult choice between standing idle and watching Hamas being weakened or eliminated by Israel or encouraging its Lebanon-based Hezbollah to enter the fray and put pressure on Israel in the north, which could have grave consequences for its ally.

Both Israel and the US [warned](https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/11/politics/us-allies-warn-hezbollah/index.html) that Hezbollah would face dire consequences if it attacked Israel. Having secured full US support, Israel might use this opportunity to attack the Lebanese group. This would certainly destabilise Lebanon, which is not in the interest of Iran.

Russian and Chinese calculus

The involvement of the US in another conflict in the Middle East and the weakening of its alliances with Arab states would be a welcome development for Moscow and Beijing.

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Both countries benefited from Washington’s bloody interventions in the Greater Middle East over the past two decades. The US-led “war on terror” hurt US standing in the region, encouraging positive perceptions of Russia and China among Muslim nations. It also kept the US busy in the Middle East, giving space for the two great powers to solidify their influence in their neighbourhoods.

Russia and China started to feel US pressure only after it pulled out of the Greater Middle East, allowing it to undertake a “pivot to Asia” and focus more on its NATO alliance. That might now change, as the US dragged again into the region it wanted so badly to disengage from.

A US military buildup in the Middle East, more aid for the Israeli army and a US diplomatic corps focused on supporting Israel mean there are fewer military, financial and diplomatic resources available to aid the war effort in Ukraine and support allies in Asia that are trying to stand up to Chinese pressure.

In addition, the unconditional US support for Israel’s massacres of Palestinian civilians in Gaza is further undermining its position in the Islamic world, allowing Russia and China to gain ground. The two countries have been calling for an immediate ceasefire in the war on Gaza, [blaming](https://www.reuters.com/world/kremlin-warns-there-is-risk-regional-escalation-after-israel-violence-2023-10-09/) the US for the “destructive’ conflict. It appears that the US is shooting itself in the foot: instead of containing China and Russia in the Middle East, it is helping them strengthen their positions and thwart its plans for the region, including the India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor.

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Indeed, Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel has triggered a shift of dynamics in the Middle East. The extent of this shift will be determined by the US’s ability and willingness to rein in Israel. Unless it puts pressure on the Israeli government to stop the war on Gaza, lift the siege, and start negotiating with the Palestinians, the whole region might end up in flames.

There is a real possibility that the conflict will widen to include Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq and trigger mass upheaval in the rest of the Arab world. This would not only hurt the US’s regional alliances but also leave the door wide open for much deeper involvement of Russia and China in the region.

On top of its [genocidal escapades](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/12/israel-is-manufacturing-a-case-for-genocide) in the Gaza Strip, the state of Israel is now also having a hissy fit.

The tantrum is primarily directed at United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who in [recent remarks](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/un-chief-says-clear-violations-of-international-humanitarian-law-in-gaza) before the UN Security Council in New York had the audacity to point out the bleeding obvious. “It is important to … recognise the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum,” Guterres said, in reference to the October 7 Hamas operation that Israel sees as justifying the slaughter of more than 7,000 Palestinians in less than three weeks.

The Secretary-General continued: “The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation.” Had Guterres wanted to fill in the vacuum a little more, he could have mentioned the past 75 years of ethnic cleansing, dispossession and massacres suffered by Palestinians at the hands of Israel, which has now added [forced starvation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/25/starvation-used-as-a-weapon-of-war-on-civilians-in-gaza-oxfam) to its deadly anti-Palestinian arsenal.

Notwithstanding his vacuum observation, Guterres apparently found it necessary to abide by the unwritten rule that you must never criticise Israel – however indirectly – without criticising the other side, as well. And so he declared that the “grievances of the Palestinian people cannot justify the appalling attacks by Hamas” – never mind that the attacks in question would never have taken place in the absence of three-quarters of a century’s worth of Israeli-induced “grievances”.

At any rate, the glimmer of context was still more than Israel could handle, and Israeli officials went about registering their displeasure in typical grown-up fashion. Foreign Minister Eli Cohen cancelled his scheduled meeting with Guterres in New York, and Israel’s UN ambassador Gilad Erdan [announced](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/25/israel-to-refuse-visas-to-un-officials-after-guterres-speech-on-gaza-war) petulantly that Israel would henceforth refuse visas to UN representatives, starting with Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths. Warning that “the time has come to teach them [the UN] a lesson”, Erdan took to the platform X (formerly known as Twitter) to [accuse](https://twitter.com/giladerdan1/status/1717226560606892126) Guterres of “distort[ing] and twist[ing] reality” with his vacuum comment, and called for the UN leader’s resignation.

In reality, of course, it is Israel that presides over a calculated assault on reality, dependent as the Israeli narrative is on an absolute vacuum of truth when it comes to the Palestinians. Call it “Israelspeak”, if you will: a language in which mass murderers are victims, killing children is self-defence, left is right, up is down and black is white.

And as we’ve just seen with Guterres, not even the slightest diversion from this counter-reality is permissible, lest the whole edifice come tumbling down. In short: if your mouth is not permanently and unwaveringly puckered up next to Israel’s rear end, you’re on the side of the “terrorists”.

To be sure, Israel has never had the greatest relationship with the UN – despite the fact that the international body is largely to thank for signing off on Israel’s existence in the first place. In recent years, Israel’s relations with the organisation have mainly consisted of ignoring all resolutions pertaining to Israeli crimes against Palestinians and intermittently engaging in crimes against the UN itself, such as bombing UN institutions and personnel.

In July 2006 in the southern Lebanese town of Khiam, for example, the Israeli military disregarded consecutive warnings before bombing a UN post and [killing four unarmed UN observers](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jul/27/syria.israel4) from Austria, Canada, China and Finland. This episode took place in the context of a 34-day Israeli assault on Lebanon that killed some 1,200 people, the majority of them civilians; then as now – surprise, surprise – the United States agitated at the UN against a ceasefire.

As for attacks on the UN in Palestine, the Times of Israel [reported](https://www.timesofisrael.com/11-un-staff-30-pupils-at-un-schools-killed-in-gaza-says-spokesperson/) on October 12 – five days into the latest round of carnage – that 11 UN staff and 30 students at UN-run schools had thus far been killed in the Gaza Strip. Among the staff were five teachers, a counsellor, an engineer and a gynaecologist.

This, mind you, was almost two weeks before the UN was elevated to the status of semiofficial enemy of Israel on account of Guterres’ willingness to deploy a bit of truth against Israelspeak.

Granted, this was not the secretary-general’s first transgression. In May 2021, during an 11-day Israeli [onslaught](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/31/palestine-gaza-young-victims-israel-bombardment-may) on Gaza that killed some 260 people, including 67 children, the UN chief [stated](https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092332): “If there is a hell on Earth, it is the lives of children in Gaza.” But not even hell, it seems, is exempt from the “both sides” requirement, and Guterres went on to denounce as “unacceptable” the mostly ineffective rocket fire directed at Israel by Hamas. Now, life in Gaza has become significantly more hellish for all involved, while Israel continues to push its forcible inversion of reality and usurped victimhood down everyone’s throats.

In his anti-Guterres [rant on (the ex-Twitter) X](https://twitter.com/giladerdan1/status/1717226560606892126), Israeli UN envoy Erdan contended that “a Secretary-General who does not understand that the murder of innocents can never be understood by any ‘background’ cannot be Secretary-General”.  What, then, should be said of a state that does not understand exactly that?

One day, the war between Israel and Hamas will come to an end. And when that happens, Israelis and Palestinians will need to re-engage in the essential question of what could constitute a peaceful settlement between them. But with each passing day of bombing, blockade, rocket attacks and hostages not released, it becomes more and more difficult to resume the process towards a two-state solution.

The war has reminded us that there is no viable alternative to a peace process and a two-state solution. The international community cannot continue to look the other way. We cannot allow another 30 years of occupation, war and unresolved conflict.

At the time of writing, one month has passed since the barbaric terrorist attack by Hamas on October 7. A total of 1,400 Israelis were murdered. Over 230 people were taken hostage.

The air raid sirens continue to blare due to continued rocket attacks, and Israelis across the country are deeply worried about their loved ones. But the same is true of Palestinians. The people of Gaza are living with the sound and devastation of Israeli bombing raids night and day. Over 9,000 Palestinians have been killed, nearly half of them children. The death toll is rising every day.

For one month, the people of Gaza have faced severe shortages of essential supplies such as food, water, fuel and medicines. Even if hundreds have been allowed to exit through the Rafah crossing to Egypt, several thousand foreign nationals, including 250 Norwegians, are still waiting to leave Gaza. Roughly half the buildings in Gaza have been damaged or reduced to rubble. People who had very little to start with have lost everything. People who were already refugees have once again been forced to flee.

There are rules in war

Hamas’s attack on October 7 was a flagrant violation of international law. We have been clear in stating that Hamas should be considered a terrorist organisation. Israel has the right to self-defence against the horrible attacks committed by Hamas.

At the same time, international law establishes clear limits for what is permitted in warfare. All parties to conflict must comply with international humanitarian law. The parties must take active steps to distinguish between military targets and the civilian population to the extent possible. In addition, the harm caused to civilians or civilian infrastructure must not be excessive in relation to the military advantage anticipated. The warfare in Gaza has by far exceeded these limitations. It is explicitly prohibited to carry out attacks on hospitals, healthcare personnel and civilian infrastructure, and to set up blockades preventing access to life-saving humanitarian relief for civilians in need.International humanitarian law applies just as fully to Hamas: It is prohibited to kill civilians or take them hostage. Nor is it permitted to fire rockets indiscriminately into Israeli territory, or to use civilians as a human shield.

Furthermore, using schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure as a base for launching military attacks on Israel is unacceptable. All such actions would further exacerbate the risk to an already vulnerable civilian population.

Three Norwegian priorities

The most urgent priority is to secure a break in the war in order to alleviate human suffering and help those who are affected.

The situation in Gaza is desperate. The scale of destruction is enormous. A child is dying every 15 minutes.

Norway has a broad network in and outside the Middle East and we are making full use of these contacts now.

On October 27, Norway was one of 120 UN member states that voted in favour of a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a humanitarian truce and demanding the unhindered provision of essential aid to civilians in Gaza. The international community is expressing its concern about the people in Gaza and their right to life and health. This sends a clear message to all parties of the need to respect international law, protect the civilian population and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza.

We must ensure that humanitarian aid actually reaches people inside Gaza.

This is a matter of urgency. UN resolutions alone will not feed the hungry. Some aid has been allowed in over the past week, but it is only a drop in the ocean of what is needed.

In Gaza, there is a huge, acute need for fuel, medicines, water and food. Norway has increased its humanitarian support to the UN and humanitarian organisations by 200 million Norwegian kroner ($18m). We have also urged other countries to increase their humanitarian support to the people of Gaza and to maintain their support for the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

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If the authorities in the West Bank collapse, there will be no one for Israel to negotiate with when the day comes when it is possible to resume peace negotiations.

We are doing all we can to get Norwegian and other foreign citizens out of Gaza.

The situation for everyone who is in Gaza is becoming increasingly difficult to cope with. We welcome the progress that has been made over the last days enabling some foreign nationals to leave Gaza. We are working hard to ensure that Norwegian citizens and other foreigners can leave Gaza in the coming days. A Norwegian emergency response team deployed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in place in Cairo and stands ready to help those who come out of Gaza.

Duty to speak up

Norway has a duty to speak up about the fact that the military actions against Gaza have gone too far. We do so as a friend to Israel, fully cognisant of the shock imposed on Israeli society by the terror of October 7.

The international community cannot simply look the other way. We cannot and will not accept the enormous suffering and devastation we are now seeing in Gaza.

We are in the midst of a deep crisis: for Gaza, for Israel, for Palestine, for the Middle East and the international community as a whole. Our message to Hamas is that they must halt their rocket attacks on Israel. They must release the hostages immediately and unconditionally, and they must never use civilians as a human shield.

When the war is over, Israel will need to live side by side with the Palestinians and the Arab countries. The risk of the conflict spreading and of further escalation is growing with every day that passes. Violence by the Israeli security forces and settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank has increased dramatically. There are daily clashes between Israel and Lebanon. In many countries across the world, we are seeing that what started as peaceful protests in support of the people of Gaza are leading to further animosity. We can never tolerate a situation where members of the Jewish community in Norway fear for their safety because of the situation in the Middle East.

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The hostilities must cease

The 2.3 million inhabitants of Gaza are holding their breath, hoping that their families will survive and that they will still have a roof over their heads after the next night’s bombing raids. In Israel, hundreds of families are fearful for their kidnapped family members and are praying for their safe return.

This situation cannot continue. That is why we are appealing to the Israeli government and the Palestinians to find another way. To stop the violence. To ensure humanitarian access. To release the hostages. And to resume the negotiations on a two-state solution.

Israeli forces have bombed the densely packed [Jabalia refugee camp](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/1/israels-deadly-attack-on-the-jabalia-refugee-camp-what-we-know-so-far) in north Gaza for the second day in a row, following a previous assault that killed dozens of people and wounded many others.

Palestinian authorities said “dozens of people were killed and wounded” in the attack on Wednesday.

Footage from the scene of the attack showed people standing around large craters as rescue workers and volunteers dug through piles of rubble with their hands searching for people and bodies trapped under collapsed buildings.

The news outlet AFP reported that rescuers said that “whole families” had been wiped out in the attack.

The Israeli military later issued a statement saying its fighter jets had struck a Hamas command and control complex in Jabalia “based on precise intelligence”, killing the head of the group’s anti-tank missile unit, Muhammad A’sar

More than 50 people were killed and dozens of others wounded in the [bombing of Jabalia](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/31/al-jazeera-engineer-loses-19-family-members-in-israeli-bombing-of-jabalia) on Tuesday, according to Palestinian authorities and the director of the Indonesian Hospital, which received some of the casualties.

Mohamed Abu Al-Qumsan, a broadcast engineer with Al Jazeera’s bureau in Gaza, lost 19 [family members](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/31/al-jazeera-engineer-loses-19-family-members-in-israeli-bombing-of-jabalia) in the attack.

The Palestinian armed group Hamas said that seven captives, taken during the group’s deadly incursion into Israel on October 7 that Israeli authorities say killed more than 1,400 people and took more than 200 [captives](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/what-do-we-know-about-israeli-captives-taken-by-hamas-and-their-release), were killed in the bombing on Tuesday.

“Seven detainees were killed in the Jabalia massacre yesterday, including three holders of foreign passports,” the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, said in a statement on Wednesday.

Israel has defended the Tuesday attack on Jabalia, which [drew condemnation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/1/a-wake-up-call-world-reacts-to-jabalia-camp-attack) from human rights organisations and Middle Eastern nations such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, stating that it was targeting a Hamas commander in the area.

Israel said its warplanes had hit a “vast” tunnel complex at the site, killing “many Hamas terrorists,” including local battalion commander Ibrahim Biari.

The UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths described the attack as an “atrocity”.

“This is just the latest atrocity to befall the people of Gaza where the fighting has entered an even more terrifying phase, with increasingly dreadful humanitarian consequences,” In a social media post on Wednesday, the European Union’s top diplomat, [Joseph Borrell](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/23/eus-foreign-policy-chief-borrell-backs-pause-in-israel-hamas-war), said that he was “appalled by the high number of casualties following the bombing by Israel of the Jabalia refugee camp”.

While Borrell reiterated the EU’s support for Israel, he said that “laws of war and humanity must always apply”.

It is now clear that Israel is engaging in a genocide of the Palestinian people. As reported by Al Jazeera, the Israeli state has “loosened” its military rules of engagement, essentially giving its soldiers the green light to kill anyone they encounter inside the Gaza Strip as part of their ground operations. Israeli politicians and soldiers are talking openly about turning Gaza into dust, eliminating Palestinians, and imagining Israeli settlers living on land that used to be called Gaza. Palestinians are being deliberately deprived of all the basic necessities for life, including food, water, shelter and medical care. Bombs from the air are indiscriminately killing and maiming Palestinians. Palestinians are being encouraged to leave their lands and homes in northern Gaza and head towards the south – Israel clearly wants to colonise northern Gaza and turn it into a security or military zone, permanently expelling the Palestinians who currently live there.

Scholars of genocide have always argued that such mass atrocities are rarely the product of an “evil leader” or “a small extremist political class”. The terrifying reality of genocide is that it happens with mass support, which either comes in the form of active participation (direct and indirect), or complicity through silence.

I am not sure that we have ever seen a case of genocide being supported by this many actors, openly and actively. The majority of institutions in North America, Western Europe and elsewhere are either actively participating in this genocide, or completely silent and are thus complicit.

For genocide to happen, two critical elements are needed: the infrastructural and material capabilities to commit the genocide and the ability to conceal the genocide by calling it something other than what it is. The West is participating in both of these critical elements.

In terms of material capabilities, the United States empire has sent, not one, but two aircraft carriers to the region, and has made it abundantly clear in word and deed that if any state or group attempts to enter the picture and aid Palestinians in their desperate attempt to survive Israel’s genocidal operation, that the US will intervene with its full force. The United Kingdom has also sent naval ships to support this Western imperial threat to the people of the region. The US is sending military equipment and weaponry to Israel, refusing to call for a ceasefire or de-escalation. Corporations and economic institutions are providing financial support to Israel all in the name of supporting Israeli victims, as well as reportedly offering financial incentives to Egypt, attempting to entice it to host the Palestinian refugees who will not be allowed to re-enter the Gaza Strip. Years of US and Western aid and support to Israel have allowed Israel to develop the infrastructural capabilities to carry out a genocide.

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In terms of concealment, political, media, social and cultural institutions are fully mobilised in the West to hide and conceal this act of genocide, presenting it as a righteous violence of a victimised Jewish people everywhere in the world. Those expressing support for Palestine in the West are being threatened with job loss (and are actually losing their jobs), possible criminal charges and bans, and other punitive measures and harassment campaigns. The media is continuously and consistently sending the outrageous message that Hamas is the one responsible for the loss of Palestinian civil life in the Gaza Strip, attempting to wash their hands clean of the genocide. The Israeli operation is being framed as a mission to “eliminate Hamas” as opposed to what it really is: a genocide of the Palestinian people and their erasure from the map. The few voices that are questioning these narratives are being marginalised, silenced and de-platformed. In short, all of the establishment institutions in the West are mobilised, fully and coherently, at this moment in enabling the genocide of Palestinians, all under the guise of protecting “civilisation” from “barbarism”.

As I write this, I am dreading what’s to come. The suffering that Palestinians have endured so far is already unfathomable and very difficult to register in words. And what is coming is going to be even worse.

In moments like this, everything becomes clear. It was clear to many of us for a long time, but now there can be no doubt. The imperial West is still firmly committed to the imperial project it launched against the world late in the 15th century. Yes, it has changed and transformed its methods, tactics, strategies, and its apparatus of power and force. The players have changed, some things became more complex, some things less so. And on and on. All of these academic debates are important, but not right now. What is important right now is to say it clearly and loudly – the imperial West is hell-bent on maintaining its supremacy and will kill indiscriminately in order to achieve the only goal it has ever had, the only value it has ever stood for, power and wealth.

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The same imperial project that brutalised millions of Black Africans, committed genocide against millions of Indigenous peoples across the Americas, in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere, colonised Asia and Africa through unfathomable brutality and force, destroyed countless societies full of complexity and beauty, massacred civilians in its imperial wars in places like Vietnam and Iraq, dropped atomic bombs on Japanese civilians, created a neocolonial economic infrastructure that is continuously robbing the majority of the world’s population blind, and I can go on and on, but this project is ongoing and nowhere at this moment is this more visible than in Palestine.

The world will never forget any of these brutalities and injustices. We will always remember our dead and injured; our suffering will always guide us in our actions and provide the impetus for us to create a better world.

The world is seeing that we do not live in an international system of nation-states, but an imperial world order where the West reigns supreme; it is seeing that white supremacy is not just alive and well, but is an expression of the material conditions of our world; succinctly put, the world is seeing how the Euro-American empire posits itself, forcefully and violently and through all and any means necessary, as lords of the world.

The world should be seeing that the only way to begin a serious movement out of this age of colonial modernity is to oust Western European and North American states, not people but states, from our political and economic lives everywhere around the globe.

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People across the world must begin to withdraw their participation from this system that primarily works for Euro-American powers and political and economic elites across the world. Don’t do it just for Palestine, do it for your own sake as well. Do it for your dignity, freedom and humanity.

European and North American people can and should join us in creating this better world. But not unless they actively participate in dismantling the imperial world order that primarily benefits their political and economic elites. You as well, can and should join this brave decolonisation project as equals with the rest of the world, but never again, as lords of it. For you and indeed for Israeli people, joining the decolonisation project is the only way to evade what history teaches as the inevitable fate of all lords, which is their eventual violent replacement with new lords.

Gal Hirsch has no known experience in hostage negotiations, and in 2006, he left the Israeli forces, disgraced over his role in military failures during the war with Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Yet when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu picked the former military commander to lead efforts for the release of captives taken by Hamas to Gaza after its October 7 attack, that decision made sense to political psychologist Saul Kimhi.

“He’s choosing people [to join his wartime administration] based on their opinions of him and not on how fit they are for the job,” Kimhi said. Hirsch is a member of Netanyahu’s Likud party, and — like Israel’s prime minister himself — has faced charges of corruption.

Kimhi, who teaches at Tel Aviv University, has studied Netanyahu’s mind for almost a quarter of a century. In 1999, the same year that Netanyahu’s first term as premier would end, Kimhi’s behavioural analysis of the leader found a concerning pattern of behaviour. Some of his conclusions: Netanyahu was narcissistic, entitled and paranoid, and he reacted poorly under stress.

Kimhi revisited Netanyahu as a subject in 2017 but found not much had changed. As people age, Kimhi said, their behaviours tend to become more extreme. For Netanyahu, his paranoia and narcissism have grown. He trusts no one, except maybe his immediate family, and prioritises his “personal future” over all else, Kimhi’s research found.

Now, as he leads his nation into the war on Gaza, the personality traits that shape Netanyahu’s biggest decisions could directly affect the lives of millions of Israelis and Palestinians and the direction of the conflict. And the signs so far, according to Kimhi and other analysts, are worrying.

Indecisive and distrustful

Netanyahu’s behavioural analysis, according to Kimhi, suggests that he is indecisive and struggles with difficult decisions. “He is not a resilient person at all,” Kimhi told Al Jazeera.

Before Netanyahu appointed Hirsch on October 8, the position of hostage negotiator had been left vacant for more than a year. Hamas took more than 200 Israelis captive during its raid on southern Israel, and only a handful have been released so far. This, Kimhi said, was an example of Netanyahu taking “tough decisions at the very last minute”.

To be sure, Netanyahu also has qualities that appear to have helped him emerge as one of the world’s great political survivors. A 2021 personality [study](https://eng.alzaytouna.net/2021/03/06/academic-paper-the-psychological-studies-of-the-personality-of-benjamin-netanyahu/) by the Jordanian professor of political science Walid ‘Abd al-Hay, found Netanyahu to be highly charismatic, “with a strong memory and high analytical ability”.

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In a career at the top of Israeli politics spanning almost three decades, those attributes have frequently worked for him.

Netanyahu is Israel’s longest-serving prime minister. He first came to power in 1996 and served a three-year term before he was replaced by Ehud Barak. He would return to power in 2009 and then serve for 13 of the last 14 years.

On a handful of occasions, Netanyahu’s time appeared to be running out. In 2015, with his back to the wall, he used a scaremongering tactic, saying “Arab voters are heading to the polling stations in droves.” He was re-elected.

After losing the premiership for a year, he came back to power in 2022, this time, by assembling the most far-right government in Israel’s history.

National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has been convicted of incitement to racism, destroying property, and joining a “terror” organisation when he was 16 years old. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich leads the hardline Religious Zionist Party that not only rejects Palestinian statehood but denies the existence of the Palestinian people and has condemned LGBTQ activists. Interior and Health Minister Aryeh Deri is an ultraorthodox rabbi who was sentenced to three years in jail for taking bribes.

By composing such a cabinet, critics have accused Netanyahu of choosing his own political survival over Israel’s interests. An op-ed in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz has described some of Netanyahu’s ministers as “neo-Nazi” and “neo-fascist”.

However, none of that will matter much to Netanyahu. The important thing for him, according to Kimhi and other analysts who have studied the Israeli prime minister, is that he is in power, no matter the cost.

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The extremist views in his cabinet may not bother him because “everything goes through him without the ministers knowing”, Thomas Vesconi, an independent researcher and author of two books on Palestine and Israel, told Al Jazeera.

Killing the ‘two-state solution’

Netanyahu’s paranoia and entitlement have arguably shaped his view on a Palestinian state as well. Despite publicly saying he is open to a two-state solution, he has undermined the process at every turn — including by insisting that a Palestinian state should have no military or security oversight over its territory.

Under his reign, settlement expansion has flourished and political repression of Palestinians is rampant. Even before October 7, this year was the deadliest on record for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank with more than 150 people killed by Israeli forces, 38 of those children. More than 100 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since October 7. Netanyahu has tried to circumvent a Palestinian state by building regional agreements with Arab states through the Abraham Accords.

The issue of settlements and Netanyahu’s perceived unwillingness to engage in good-faith peace talks has grated many of Netanyahu’s foreign contemporaries over the years. “I cannot bear Netanyahu,” former French President Nicolas Sarkozy was caught telling then-American President Barack Obama on a hot mic in 2011. “He’s a liar.”

“You’re fed up with him, but I have to deal with him even more often than you,” Obama had replied.

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According to Vesconi, Netanyahu believes that all of historical Palestine should belong to Israel. It is a belief with roots in Netanyahu’s upbringing.

Father’s son

Benzion Netanyahu, the prime minister’s father, was a proponent of Ze’ev Jabotinsky – a proponent of what is known as Revisionist Zionism – who believed a Jewish state should extend to both sides of the Jordan River. In effect, that means an Israel that includes the country’s current territory, the West Bank, Gaza and part or all of Jordan.

After failing to be awarded a position at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Benzion moved his family to the United States and took a position at Cornell University where he taught Judaic Studies. He carried that rejection for the rest of his life, and along with it, a distrust of intellectuals and the Israeli Labor Party.

Netanyahu held his father, who died in 2012 at the age of 102, in high regard. He said his father knew “how to identify danger in time” and “draw the necessary conclusions”.

Netanyahu learned that relationships were transactional – not altruistic – and “that humans live in constant Darwinian struggle for survival”, according to ‘Abd al-Hay’s study.

The Israeli prime minister is currently waging his own struggle to survive in office. He once enjoyed support from deeply religious conservatives and young, liberal capitalists working in sectors like tech — what Vesconi calls the two bourgeois.

But in recent times, he has lost the liberals while the religious right has intensified their support to that of what Kimhi calls “almost like a cult”. Starting in January 2023, Israelis flooded the streets to protest against wide-ranging judicial reform. Netanyahu said the changes are to balance an interventionist court.

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Meanwhile, he is currently under trial for corruption, fraud and breach of trust and public opinion largely blames him for allowing the October 7 attack which saw Hamas break through a border fence, killing about 1,400 people and taking some 200 people captive.

What’s next

Under fire once again, Netanyahu’s character flaws are once again showing themselves, Kimhi said.

Analysts believe Netanyahu is likely to want to prolong the war, as few in Israel will call for a change of leader amid a war. More than 8,500 Palestinians have been killed in recent weeks in an assault of unprecedented intensity on Gaza. More than 3,000 of those are children. But those figures, much like the hostages, do not seem to be of concern to Netanyahu.

Putting his survival first aligns with the conclusions of Kimhi and ‘Abd al-Hay’s studies. Whatever move he takes next will be with that in mind.

“The Israeli public,” Kimhi said, “needs a real leader that can unite people.”

Israel has [stormed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/16/israel-raids-gazas-al-shifa-hospital-for-second-day) Gaza’s largest hospital and [bombed](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/13/photos-more-death-and-destruction-in-gaza-as-israeli-attacks-continue) residential areas and refugee camps in attacks the United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk says have unleashed a “nightmarish” situation in the besieged Palestinian enclave.

There are growing calls for a ceasefire as the humanitarian situation worsens with risks of starvation facing thousands due to the Israeli blockade of the territory – home to 2.3 million people.

Israel and its allies, meanwhile, have insisted the bombings are justified because it has the [right to self-defence](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/16/the-fallacy-of-the-colonial-right-to-defence) in response to the October 7 Hamas attacks that killed 1,200 people and injured more than 5,600 in southern Israel.

But what is this right to self-defence, and does it justify Israel’s killing of more than 11,500 Palestinians and wounding of 29,800 since then?

What is the right to self-defence?

According to Article 51 of the UN Charter, until the UN Security Council takes measures to maintain international peace and security, “nothing in the charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a member of the United Nations.”

Ever since Israel embarked on the bombardment of the Gaza Strip, its officials and its Western allies – from the [United States](https://streaklinks.com/BvQJkiWlZZ5dwNOQigQQq9u7/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.reuters.com%2Fworld%2Fus-pushes-un-back-israel-self-defense-demand-iran-stop-arms-hamas-2023-10-22%2F) and [United Kingdom](https://streaklinks.com/BvQJkiWGxhaOFNh8aABgkb9H/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fspeeches%2Fthe-uk-supports-israels-right-to-self-defence-in-line-with-the-un-charter-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council) to the [European Union](https://streaklinks.com/BvQJkiSERIGwosihhQL2JAwK/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.newindianexpress.com%2Fworld%2F2023%2Foct%2F15%2Feu-leaders-stress-israels-right-to-self-defence-within-international-law-2624211.html) – have defended Israeli actions by pointing to Article 51.

Does it apply to Israel against Gaza?

Many experts aren’t convinced that it does apply.

“The right to self-defence can be invoked when the state is threatened by another state, which is not the case,” [Francesca Albanese](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/15/un-special-rapporteur-israel-cant-claim-right-of-self-defence), UN special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, said in an address to the Australian Press Club on Tuesday

The attack Israel faced on October 7 came from an armed group in a territory, Gaza, that Israel has effectively controlled.

Israel withdrew its forces from Gaza in 2005, but it has imposed a land, sea and air blockade on the enclave since Hamas came to power in 2007.

That, according to Albanese, amounts to occupation – although Israel and its allies disagree with that assessment.

“Israel does not claim it has been threatened by another state. It has been threatened by an armed group within an occupied territory. It cannot claim the right of self-defence against a threat that emanates from a territory it occupies, from a territory kept under belligerent occupation,” Albanese said.

Albanese was referring to a [2004](https://news.un.org/en/story/2004/07/108912) advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which said the construction of Israel’s separation wall in the occupied West Bank was illegal. The ICJ rejected the Israeli argument to build the wall, saying it could not invoke the right to self-defence in an occupied territory.

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Are there other challenges to Israel’s argument?

Other experts point to the devastating scale of Israeli attacks on Gaza.

“The death of a reported [4,710 children](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker), attacks on healthcare, the withholding of water and electricity – these cannot be merely justified as a ‘right to self-defence’,” said Iain Overton, executive director of the London-based Action on Armed Violence, which conducts research and advocacy on armed violence against civilians.

He added that for Israel to claim this right without being challenged “would be a mockery of the international humanitarian law”.

What rules govern Israel’s war on the Gaza Strip?

Armed conflicts are governed by international humanitarian law (IHL), a set of rules contained in international agreements like the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 as well as other agreements and conventions meant to ensure that all member nations subscribe to a list of fundamental rules during conflicts.

But member states do not always act by the rules, most recently during the Ukraine-Russia war. Israel has been accused of war crimes in its previous military assaults on Gaza, but it has not been held accountable.

In the current conflict, though, experts said Israel’s actions seem to violate all of the four main principles of IHL: distinction between civilians and combatants, proportionality between anticipated loss of civilian life and damage and the strategic military advantage of an attack, legitimate military purposes and the humane treatment of all individuals from civilians to detainees and hostages.

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Among the dead Palestinians in the current conflict as of Thursday are 4,710 children and 3,160 women.

“The scale of the bombardment and its impact on civilians raises questions about Israel’s adherence to proportionality,” Overton told Al Jazeera.

Israel’s bombing of Gaza has also killed 102 aid workers with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), making this the deadliest conflict ever for UN staff in the organisation’s history.

Is it justifiable to attack civilians during a conflict?

IHL [underlines](https://streaklinks.com/BvQJkiaICBY7UWwRNgh8gzEn/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.icrc.org%2Fen%2Fdoc%2Fresources%2Fdocuments%2Fmisc%2Fbasic-rules-ihl-311288.htm) the fundamental rule of all wars – that parties in a conflict must always make a distinction between civilians and combatants and that civilians and civilian objects must never be attacked.

Hence, there is no justification for civilians being attacked by either side in the current conflict, and it is unlawful.

Neve Gordon, a professor of international law and human rights at Queen Mary University of London, said both Hamas’s and Israel’s actions were “clearly war crimes”, adding that it was “obvious to anyone” that Hamas’s actions on October 7 violated IHL.

“It is also obvious that Israel has committed war crimes in Gaza since October 7,” he said.

“There is the collective punishment through the stopping of water and electricity, the compelled movement of populations and then the unleashing of eruptive violence that is killing thousands of civilians while destroying the very infrastructure of existence in the Gaza Strip,” Gordon added.

Israel controls what goes in and out of Gaza. Even the fuel for its sole power plant, which has since shut down, has been supplied with Israel’s permission.

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Israel’s claims that Hamas is operating out of civilian facilities, however, are aimed at justifying civilian casualties, Gordon said.

“When Israel claims Hamas targets in refugee camps and hospitals, the idea in both cases is to underscore that the value of the target is extremely high and, therefore, that Israel is abiding by the principle of proportionality even if many civilians die,” Gordon said.

What about Israeli attacks on hospitals, schools and refugee camps? Are such tactics lawful?

International humanitarian law insists that [medical units must be protected](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/are-israels-attacks-on-gazas-hospitals-legal). Similarly, international law also disallows attacks against places that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as drinking water installations and farmland.

Attacking schools and hospitals during the conflict, as Israel has done, is [“one of the six grave violations”](https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/attacks-against-schools/), according to the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Yet Israel has been unrelenting in these attacks despite facing heavy criticism. Experts have pointed to how it has relied on the claim, backed by the US and EU, that Hamas is using civilians in these places as “human shields”.

US President Joe Biden on Wednesday reiterated the Israeli claim of a Hamas base at al-Shifa Hospital, Gaza’s largest medical facility. He offered no proof, and Israel has so far not shown any evidence for that claim either.

But what if Hamas is using civilians as ‘human shields’?

One way Hamas uses civilians as [“human shields”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/13/what-is-a-human-shield-and-why-is-israel-using-the-term-in-gaza), Israel insists, is by allegedly operating out of schools, hospitals, refugee camps and shelters.

But many experts believe that painting civilians as human shields is a convenient argument that Israel has used to create legitimacy for its attacks.

“When a person in a battlefield is defined as a human shield, …he or she loses some of the protections assigned to civilians by the laws of war,” Gordon said.

“What many legal commentators say is that once a warring party uses human shields, lethal forms of violence that might otherwise be prohibited in a civilian setting can be used,” he added.

Others, like Overton, said that even if Israel’s claims about Palestinian civilians being used as human shields are accurate, Israeli actions are still not justified.

“The claim that civilians are being used as human shields does not absolve a party from its obligations under IHL. Even if combatants are present, attacks must still adhere to the principles of distinction and proportionality,” Overton said, pointing to how UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [called](https://streaklinks.com/BvQJkiWMDGujsh17yAx12kny/https%3A%2F%2Fturkiye.un.org%2Fen%2F251952-guterres-%25E2%2580%259Cgaza-becoming-graveyard-children%25E2%2580%259D) Gaza a “graveyard for children” on November 7.

“This underscores the severe impact on civilians, suggesting that the claim of human shields may not justify the scale and nature of the attacks on civilian areas,” he added.

What are some other laws that Israel has potentially violated?

Israel has also been accused of using [white phosphorus](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/what-is-the-white-phosphorus-that-israel-is-accused-of-using-on-gaza), which could [trigger](https://streaklinks.com/BvQJkiSEhAfRggcxZg7a6ro1/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.amnesty.org%2Fen%2Flatest%2Fnews%2F2023%2F10%2Flebanon-evidence-of-israels-unlawful-use-of-white-phosphorus-in-southern-lebanon-as-cross-border-hostilities-escalate%2F%23%3A%7E%3Atext%3DThe%2520usage%2520of%2520white%2520phosphorus%2Cand%2520smoke%2520it%2520causes%2520spread.) fires as well as lead to severe, potentially fatal burns. Firing white phosphorus is akin to an indiscriminate attack, according to Amnesty International, which affects civilians and military targets alike and hence is prohibited under international law.

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IHL makes it clear that parties to a conflict “may not order the displacement of the civilian population, in whole or part” except if military reasons demand or if their security is involved.

On October 13, Israel [ordered](https://streaklinks.com/BvQJkiSvr2qnY2gUIQRDjmDx/https%3A%2F%2Fapnews.com%2Farticle%2Fisrael-palestinians-gaza-hamas-war-c8b4fc20e4fd2ef381d5edb7e9e8308c) more than 1 million Palestinians in northern Gaza to evacuate and move to the besieged enclave’s south despite the UN warning that Gaza faced a “real catastrophe” due to such an order. Israel has justified this order by saying it was aimed at limiting civilian casualties during its military operation in northern Gaza.

IHL also lays out that all parties in a conflict must ensure that humanitarian relief operations are allowed and facilitated “unimpeded”. However, Israel had refused to allow essential aid into Gaza despite widespread warnings of a humanitarian crisis.

Israel’s decision to impose a “[complete siege](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/israel-announces-total-blockade-on-gaza)” of Gaza’s power, food and water supplies has also been widely criticised for triggering a humanitarian crisis as thousands of Palestinians face “death by starvation”, [according to](https://streaklinks.com/BvQJkiWyMtSQp71TaQKxQBLK/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cbsnews.com%2Fnews%2Fisrael-hamas-war-gaza-palestinians-face-death-by-starvation-aid-group-says%2F) the ActionAid charity. Humanitarian law prohibits the use of starvation of the civilian population “as a method of warfare”.

“The complete siege now lasting over one month has made it an agony for residents in Gaza to find basic necessities and frankly to survive,” Turk said last week, adding that “all forms of collective punishment must come to an end”.

Are Israel and Hamas likely to be held to account for any legal violations?

While lawyers and experts have pointed to likely violations by Israel and Hamas of international law and international humanitarian law in particular, that might not ensure legal action against them.

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Experts point to the lack of action against Israel for its 2008 assault on Gaza, named Operation Cast Lead, during which Israel was accused of war crimes. The 22-day Israeli offensive killed 1,400 Palestinians. At least 13 Israelis were killed in retaliatory rocket attacks by Palestinian armed groups.

“Historical precedents, such as the inquiries following Operation Cast Lead and others, show that while investigations into Israeli actions in Gaza have occurred, they often have not led to significant preventative measures or accountability,” Overton said.

In the current conflict, the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory had announced on October 10 that there was “clear evidence of war crimes” from both sides and added that it had been “collecting and preserving evidence of war crimes” because it is “intent on ensuring legal accountability, including individual criminal and command responsibility”.

“The killing of so many civilians cannot be dismissed as collateral damage. Not in a kibbutz. Not in a refugee camp. And not in a hospital,” the UN human rights chief said.

At least three Palestinian rights groups have filed a [lawsuit with the International Criminal Court (ICC)](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/9/three-rights-groups-file-icc-lawsuit-against-israel-over-gaza-genocide) against Israel during the ongoing war. And this week, [French lawyer Gilles Devers](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/15/lawyers-for-gaza-victims-file-case-at-international-criminal-court) submitted a complaint to the prosecutor at the ICC on behalf of Gaza victims.

A US-based civil rights group, the Center for Constitutional Rights, has also [sued Biden](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/14/us-president-biden-sued-for-complicity-in-israels-genocide-in-gaza) and senior members of his cabinet for “complicity” in the “unfolding genocide”.

British media organisations and journalists working for them have struggled for decades to cover the Israeli-Palestinian conflict accurately and impartially. Supporting what we all observed with our very own eyes and ears, research has demonstrated categorically over the years how Israeli narratives and viewpoints dominate the Middle East output of most mainstream media organisations in Britain, leading to the silencing, erasure and dehumanisation of the Palestinians.

So the unmistakable pro-Israel narrative in most of the British coverage of Israel’s ongoing war on Gaza – which prioritises Israeli suffering, threat perceptions and geopolitical aspirations over all else – did not come as a surprise to anyone who was paying attention to the country’s news landscape before this most recent episode of violence.

Nevertheless, on this day, as bombs continue to rain down on besieged Palestinians in Gaza with unprecedented force and a wider regional war looms on the horizon, it is crucial to point out this problematic journalistic conduct once again in the hopes that it may encourage some members of Britain’s media establishment into acknowledging their responsibilities as journalists and adopting a truly impartial attitude towards the conflict – a change in direction that could not only help all those affected by this war in their search for safety and justice but also improve the British public’s deteriorating relationship with and trust in its national press.

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One of the main issues with the British coverage of the ongoing war is the seemingly universal insistence on framing it as a confrontation that began only on the morning of October 7.

In most of the British media output on this war, there is little mention of decades of Israeli oppression and military occupation directed at the Palestinians, or the Israeli history of land grabs that is shaping the Palestinian – and the wider Arab – perceptions of, reactions to and interactions with Israel in the Gaza Strip and beyond. This blind spot in the coverage contributes to the dehumanisation of Palestinians, providing Israel with a pass to reframe them as “barbarians” who cannot be reasoned with and thus are deserving of the bombs raining down on them.

There are many other layers to these efforts to dehumanise Palestinians.

In the past three weeks, more than two million Palestinians in Gaza, half of them children, have been indiscriminately bombed, starved and killed in their thousands. This is a fact. Videos and photographs proving their suffering, their violent deaths, their fear and desperation are readily available and reported upon by Palestinian journalists in Gaza.

Despite this, “guests” and “experts” with clear links to the Israeli government have claimed on British television with no challenge whatsoever from experienced journalists who should know better that Palestinian numbers “cannot be trusted”.

The United Nations says the casualty numbers coming from the Ministry of Health in Gaza – currently standing above 9000 – are accurate. Leading international NGOs also say they are accurate. Palestinian authorities, who published the names and ID numbers of the victims, insist they are accurate. We have the photos. We have the videos. We have the mass graves. Most importantly, we have the Palestinians mourning their dead and telling us in every way they can, on every platform they can find that they are being slaughtered.

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Yet the Israeli government says the numbers are “inflamed”, the United States president agrees and many UK journalists are suddenly not so sure whether the carnage unfolding before their eyes is real. This gives a pass to Israel to continue its indiscriminate bombing and killing of civilians in Gaza without any worries about media scrutiny.

There is also the other side of the coin. Since the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, much of the British media have been accepting as fact all information coming from Israeli authorities. From 40 beheaded babies to Hamas command centres hidden under hospitals packed with displaced and wounded civilians, British media organisations have repeated as fact even the most inflammatory and consequential claims from the Israeli authorities without taking the time to verify the information presented to them.

As a journalist and a scholar on media who has reported on and analysed the coverage of conflicts, I undoubtedly know how difficult it is to verify certain information in times of war. But I also know the importance of clearly attributing newsworthy yet unverifiable claims to sources and the grave harm such unverified claims being presented as fact can cause.

Remember the days leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq?

The US and the United Kingdom claimed Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq was in possession of weapons of mass destruction. The Anglo-American media, including the BBC, took that claim at face value and presented it as fact. The result was an unlawful war, years of instability, limitless human misery and hundreds of thousands of dead Iraqis.

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Today, history is repeating itself, it seems, and no lessons have been learned from the grave mistakes made in the aftermath of 9/11.

For example, on October 22, the BBC presented its report on an Israeli strike on a mosque within the West Bank’s Jenin refugee camp with the caption “Israel strikes Jenin Mosque targeting Hamas cell.” The claim that the targeted mosque was in fact a “Hamas cell” was not attributed to anyone or placed in quote marks, creating the impression that the BBC itself has somehow verified the existence of this cell in a place of worship. This careless attitude in handling claims by a military at war is not only obvious journalistic misconduct but also a moral failing that could serve as a green light for more atrocities.

Another issue with the coverage of the ongoing conflict is apparent acceptance of hate speech – when it is directed at the Palestinians.

Media organisations have a responsibility to not broadcast or publish views and statements that amount to hateful incitement against a group of people on the basis of their national identity, religion or any other intrinsic characteristic. Yet the British media appear uninterested in offering this crucial protection to the Palestinians.

Indeed, since the beginning of this latest round of conflict in Israel-Palestine, pro-Israel pundits, experts and officials have repeatedly been allowed to engage in anti-Palestinian hate speech on British television with little pushback from the journalists hosting or interviewing them.

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Israel’s former ambassador to the UN, Dan Gillerman, for example, was allowed to refer to Palestinians, as “horrible, inhuman animals” during an interview with Sky News.

In response to a question about the UN’s concerns over Israel’s “collective punishment” of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip through a blockade and the cutting off of fuel, Gillerman said:

“I am very puzzled by the constant concern which the world is showing for the Palestinian people and is actually showing for these horrible, inhuman animals who have done the worst atrocities that this century has seen.”

“I don’t remember people shedding tears for the Taliban,” he added.

A few hours after this outrageous performance, which received no serious rebuke from the journalist interviewing him, Gillerman was allowed to repeat the same hateful rhetoric on the BBC’s Newsnight.

When asked about the calls for fuel to be sent into Gaza for humanitarian reasons, Gillerman said: “It’s very hard because we’re dealing with murderers and liars.” Once again, his hateful words about the Palestinian people were not challenged by the presenter.

Of course, we all know British TV channels would never allow – and rightfully so – any of their guests or experts to make such generalisations about Israelis. For some reason, it seems, the British media’s rules and norms about hate speech do not apply to the Palestinians.

It will be not only the Palestinians and other peoples of the Middle East who will suffer the consequences of these journalistic failures. When the dust of the war is settled, and the truths about what really happened are inevitably revealed, all British media organisations, and especially the public broadcaster BBC, will also experience significant reputational damage.

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In fact, this is already happening.

Arab and Muslim audiences in Britain and across the world are already disillusioned with the BBC’s claims of truthful and impartial coverage and are turning to other sources, especially Al Jazeera, to follow the developments in the Middle East. On Arab social media, it is now widely accepted as fact that the BBC “lies” and its reports on Israel-Palestine cannot be trusted.

The same happened in 2003 when the BBC failed to cover the US-led invasion of Iraq and its grave consequences accurately and impartially. Two decades later, there is now no doubt that the BBC was wrong and the dissenting Arabs were right about the Iraq war. Yet the broadcaster seems to be repeating those mistakes all over again.

It is not only the audience members who are disappointed and angry. It has been reported that BBC journalists are “crying in the toilets” over the network’s Israel-Gaza output, and some of them sent an email to Director General Tim Davie decrying what they perceive as the BBC ” treating Israeli lives as more worthy than Palestinian lives” in its coverage of the ongoing war.

In a recent statement, BBC News CEO Deborah Turness said the BBC’s coverage of Israel-Palestine has received criticism from “both sides” but added that the BBC “cannot afford to simply say that if both sides are criticising us, we’re getting things right”. She made a commitment to attribute all information to appropriate sources and accepted the need for the BBC to be careful about semantics. She acknowledged that the BBC created the impression that it considers some deaths more important than others by writing people “died” in Gaza and “were killed” in Israel in one of its tweets and said its journalists will think “more carefully” when talking about civilian deaths in the future.

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This is an important step in the right direction, but it is not enough.

Journalists have a responsibility not only to be impartial, factual and fair when covering a war but also to stand up against hate and call out blatant war crimes that they witness. They have a responsibility not to contribute to the dehumanisation of an entire people. By allowing a state to impose its PR narratives on their output, many in the British media are failing the British public and paving the way for further atrocities against the Palestinians.

I am not alone in my disappointment with much of the British media’s coverage of this war. Dozens of scholars researching media and communication have also spoken out against the inequitable coverage. [In an open letter](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EGZ2ubh_rKyRq3TXPPELXBGKOrjpIAKgMaWpnXAOptM/edit), they decried the double standards and the inflammatory use of language that treats the Palestinians en masse as guilty.

We have seen many times before, most obviously in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, what happens when leading media organisations of the West decide the truth should not get in the way of state narratives. Let’s not repeat the disastrous mistakes of the past.

Across Israel, huge billboards tower over central highways, while large placards have been placed in front of schools, supermarkets, and government buildings. They all feature a new slogan: “Together we will win.”

The slogan is short and sharp (in Hebrew, it is made up of two words, “beyahad nenatzeach”) and has been embraced by large segments of Israel’s Jewish population. Part of its attraction is likely due to its ambiguity, allowing each viewer to interpret the word “win” differently.

Despite different interpretations of what victory would look like, however, there appears to be wide consensus among Israelis that a victory of any type can only be achieved through [unleashing lethal violence](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/11/9/israel-attacks-on-gaza-weapons-and-scale-of-destruction) on Gaza.

Otherwise, how do we explain that when fleeing residents, travelling on a road Israel identified as a “safe route” to the south, are hit by a deadly air strike not a single voice on mainstream media is heard criticising the assault? Nor do we hear any outrage when bombs are dropped in the middle of one of the most crowded neighbourhoods in [Jabalia refugee camp](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/1/photos-dozens-killed-in-another-strike-on-jabalia-refugee-camp-in-gaza) or when missiles strike [a convoy of ambulances](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/3/several-killled-in-israeli-attack-on-ambulance-convoy-gaza-health-ministry). For most Israelis, “winning” currently seems to justify almost any violence.

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As the past month demonstrates, most Israelis appear to have had no qualms about the military dropping 30,000 tonnes of explosives on Gaza, damaging around 50 percent of all housing units throughout the Gaza Strip, and rendering at least 10 percent of these uninhabitable. Almost 70 percent of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million has been forcibly displaced from their homes due to bombing and raids. Half of the [hospitals](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/7/israel-continues-to-attack-hospitals-in-gaza-city-killing-at-least-eight) and 62 percent of primary care health centres are effectively out of service and one-third of all schools have been damaged and about nine percent are now out of service.

This, many Israeli Jews believe, is part of what is needed to “win” and, thus, the Palestinians will just have to suffer thousands of civilian casualties, including the deaths of the more than 4,000 children killed to date. They seem to accept that “winning” entails killing on average six children every hour since October 7, and transforming Gaza into a “graveyard for children,” as UN chief Antonio Guterres put it.

The kind of indiscriminate bombing we have seen in the past month is undoubtedly part of Israel’s effort to assert deterrence in relation to Hamas, as well as Hezbollah. The message is clear: look at the destruction in Gaza and beware.

Yet even the wholesale bombing of Gaza needed for this kind of deterrence is not really the end goal.  What “winning” ultimately means for most Jewish Israelis is the complete annihilation of Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Considering that Hamas is an ideology, a social movement and a governing apparatus that includes a military arm, the scope and feasibility of this goal are unclear, but it will definitely entail killing thousands of combatants, including their political and military leaders, demolishing the tunnel system Hamas has created, and destroying the weapons the group has amassed. And the killing of thousands of civilians, the massive displacement of the population, and extensive destruction of civilian sites is considered legitimate “collateral damage”.

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But if the destruction of Hamas is the end goal, then “winning” also entails a regime change in Gaza as well as creating a new reality on the ground where Israel controls not only the borders surrounding the Gaza Strip, but also what happens within these borders.

It is only at this point, however, that the current widespread consensus in Israel about the need to annihilate Hamas becomes fractured and “winning” is interpreted differently according to the political group to which one belongs.

For the religious right, the heinous Hamas massacre is considered an opportunity to resettle the Gaza Strip with Jewish settlers. The blanket bombing and the displacement of more than a million Palestinians makes it possible to slice the Strip into different parts and to create Palestinian-free zones where Jewish settlers can take over land and rebuild settlements. Resettlement of the Gaza Strip is, however, part of a larger plan to Judaise the entire region – from the river to the sea. At this very moment – and under the cover of Israel’s violence in the Gaza Strip – settlers belonging to this political group are expelling Palestinian communities from the hills east of Ramallah, the Jordan Valley and the South Hebron Hills in the West Bank. “Winning” for them is completing the Nakba once and for all by replacing the indigenous population with Jews throughout the Biblical land of Israel.

For the Israeli political right and many on the political centre, “winning” means transforming parts of northern Gaza and a large perimeter around the Strip’s northern, eastern and southern borders into a no-man’s land. It means the permanent removal of populations from the north to the south and from Gaza’s borders inward while confining the Palestinians into an even smaller prison than the one they have lived in for the past 16 years. It entails creating a puppet government responsible for running municipal tasks, not unlike the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and it means Israeli soldiers will periodically enter the Gaza Strip to “mow the lawn,” similar to what the military does in Jenin.

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The remaining political centre and many Jewish Israeli liberals do not really know what “winning” means beyond the exertion of horrific violence to “destroy Hamas.” Trapped in a militaristic and now retributive paradigm, they seem to think that Israelis and Palestinians are locked in a fatalistic zero-sum game where only the application of violence against Palestinians will somehow ensure Jews are safe. Not entirely sure about what victory means, but desiring this end result, nonetheless, they, too, support the violence.

Thus, whether the vast majority of Jewish Israelis admit to it or not, “winning” involves a widescale eliminationist drive that is directed against the Palestinian people and not merely Hamas.

Only a tiny segment of Israel’s Jewish society is refusing these forms of “winning” and are calling for an immediate ceasefire. For them, then, winning entails a complete and total paradigm shift, transforming Israel into a single democratic state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea where Jews and Palestinians can live together as equals.

For this group, the “together” in the slogan “together we will win” is not the Jewish exceptionalism that reigns in Israel (and in many quarters around the world) but a Jewish Palestinian alliance, something that today seems like a far-fetched dream. This prophetic vision, however, is the only notion of winning worth fighting for. And our only hope for a peaceful future in this historic land.

Watching the United States deploy two aircraft carriers and a major naval strike force to the Middle East to threaten nemeses and help Israel sow death and destruction in Palestine, I am reminded of a [story](https://library.uniteddiversity.coop/More_Books_and_Reports/Noam_Chomsky-Pirates_and_Emperors_Old_and_New.pdf) told by St Augustine about a pirate captured by Alexander the Great, who asked him how he dared to molest the sea. “How dare you molest the whole world,” the pirate replied. “Because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief. You, doing it with a great navy, are called an emperor.”

Indeed, after two decades of imperial US wars that molested the Middle East, President Joe Biden’s administration is at it again, issuing threats and ultimatums to Palestinian and other resistance groups while shielding its client state, Israel, as it bombs Gaza and reoccupies the rest of Palestine; history be damned. As if millions of US/Israel war casualties were not enough, the American administration is now an enthusiastic accomplice in Israel’s unravelling genocide against besieged Palestinian Arabs in Gaza.

Like other empires, old and new, America is careful to speak of human rights as it helps decimate human life. It claims to respect the laws of war but continues to provide justifications for the Israeli murder of thousands of Palestinians. The benevolent empire expresses sorrow at the sight of a single dead infant but provides the deadly weapons and the political rationale to slaughter thousands of women and children. Its diplomats preach peace while propagating war.

For decades, America and Israel have been waging asymmetrical wars in the Middle East, where they devastate countless communities and displace millions of people under the pretext of self-defence. They demonise their enemies and dehumanise their victims to justify massive and disproportionate use of firepower, causing as much harm and suffering as possible.

After decades of war, the US and Israel have developed a comprehensive lexicon of newspeak and media [guides](https://www.transcend.org/tms/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/sf-israel-projects-2009-global-language-dictionary.pdf) that highlight the “righteousness” of their cause and the “evilness” of their enemies. They claim, for example, that the Israeli armed forces are “trained, tasked and operate to ensure that Palestinian civilians remain safe”, never mind the countless Palestinian civilian casualties so far in Gaza.

Despite the huge difference between Hamas and al-Qaeda, the fearmongering that followed the 9/11 attacks on the US, which shut down debate and led to catastrophic failures in the following two decades, has been replicated as if nothing has changed. Soon Hamas, a native Islamist resistance movement born out of, and marked by, oppressive occupation, came to be seen as ISIL (ISIS) incarnate – evil, fanatic and brutal – that must be annihilated at any cost.

The American and Israeli narrative is the same; it is as consistent as it is deceptive. Their fight is “on behalf of civilisation against barbarity”, of “good against evil” and “with moral clarity against moral bankruptcy”. Their fight is always in self-defence, their wars always just, their intentions always noble, even altruistic. They fight for democracy and freedom against totalitarianism and terrorism. If their allies are terrorists and dictators, as is often the case, they are swiftly rebranded as freedom fighters and moderates.

Such righteousness would be worthy of respect if only it was honest or true.

The American-Israeli strategic liaison, born during the latter’s 1967 war and occupation, has been the main engine of instability and violence in the region ever since. As the US replaced Europeans as the leading imperial power in the region at the height of the Cold War and became Israel’s patron, it paved the way for an imperial colonial alliance that occupies and subjugates the peoples of the Middle East as well.

The United States designated Israel as a regional policeman in the 1960s, a regional influencer in the 1970s, a strategic asset in the 1980s, and it has since been viewed as being at the forefront of the US war on terrorism. Paradoxically, almost every time Israel rejected an American peace initiative, it was somehow rewarded by a new Pentagon deal and greater military assistance, latest of which topped $38 billion.

For decades now, the US and Israel have [demanded](https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/letter-america-1/) that the Arabs choose between Good and Evil and told them they are “either with US or against us” as they wreaked havoc in the region. In 1958, the devil was Egypt’s pan-Arab leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser; in 1968, it became Palestinian guerrilla leader Yasser Arafat; in 1978, Iran’s ayatollah; and when all three were no longer threats, Saddam Hussein emerged as the new devil. Predictably, after Saddam was “contained”, Osama bin Laden became the devil of all devils, until Saddam emerged once again as the chief devil. And since 2008, Iran-supported Hamas and Hezbollah have become the new regional devils that must be defeated once and for all.

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This came into full view in the latest Gaza war when the United States redeployed its armadas to the region last month to shield Israel from any potential regional retaliation from the likes of Lebanon’s Hezbollah to allow it to carry out its genocide against the Palestinians in response to Hamas’s October 7 attacks.

Before looking for their next “evil” enemy in the Middle East, and plunge the region into more chaos and violence, the United States and Israel may want to look inwards, for a change, and save us all another horrific war.

Ten thousand dead and tens of thousands of wounded Palestinians later, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is back in the Middle East in an attempt to turn Israel’s war crimes into a diplomatic and strategic successes. Expect the modern-day imperial emissary to coerce the Arab regimes into joining a new Pax Americana revolving around colonial Israel

Not too long ago, the world was witness to starkly contrasting images.

On the one hand, we saw Palestine TV journalist [Salman al-Bashir](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I83zfzVLkIk) on our screens, visibly grief-stricken following news of the death of his colleague Mohammad Abu Hatab. Hatab had been on air 30 minutes ago. When he returned home, Hatab and eleven of his family members were killed in an Israeli air strike.

Al-Bashir was reduced to tears: “We can’t anymore. We are exhausted, we are here victims and martyrs awaiting our deaths, we are one after the other and no one cares about us or the large-scale catastrophe and the crime in Gaza”. He then proceeded to take off his protective gear, adding, “No protection, no international protection at all, no immunity to anything, this protection gear does not protect us and not those helmets”.

We have also seen images from CNN, carefully choreographed and curated, following the Israeli military’s ground operation in Gaza. We were told that CNN was “embedded” with them. As a condition for entering Gaza with Israeli air support, media outlets are required to “submit all materials and footage to the Israeli military for review prior to publication”. CNN had agreed to these terms.

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If it wasn’t apparent already, media and journalism has become a central battlefield in this Israel-Gaza war. And in the battle over how the war is reported from Gaza, journalists have been the primary victims.

On December 3, Shima El-Gazzar, a Palestinian journalist for Almajedat network, was killed along with her family members in an Israeli air strike on Rafah city in the southern Gaza Strip.

On November 23, an air strike on his home in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza claimed the life of journalist Muhammad Moin Ayyash and some 20 members of his family.

On November 19, Bilal Jadallah, director of Press House-Palestine, a non-profit which supports the development of independent Palestinian media, was killed by an Israeli airstrike on his car.

On November 7, it was reported that Palestinian journalist Mohammad Abu Hasira was [killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/7/palestinian-journalist-mohammad-abu-hasira-killed-in-israeli-strike-on-gaza#:~:text=An%20Israeli%20air%20raid%20has,news%20agency%20reported%20on%20Tuesday.) along with 42 family members in an Israeli air strike on his home near Gaza City.

Only two days earlier, media outlets [reported](https://cpj.org/2023/11/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/) that Mohamed al-Jaja, another media worker for Press House-Palestine was killed along with his wife and two children in an airstrike in northern Gaza.

On October 30 Nazmi al-Nadim, deputy director of finance and administration for Palestine TV was also killed in an air strike alongside his family members.

On October 26, the world watched as Al Jazeera Arabic Bureau Chief Wael Dahdouh buried his “wife, son, daughter and grandson” who were killed in an air strike on the Nuseirat camp. In a statement, the Israeli military [claimed](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3Ym9bPfVAo) that it was targeting “terrorist infrastructure in the area”.

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On October 13, prominent Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah – who was wearing protective gear with the word “press” on it – was killed by an Israeli rocket fired across the Israel-Lebanon border.

In all, according to the [Committee to Project Journalists](https://cpj.org/2023/11/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/) (CPJ), 63 journalists and media workers, mostly Palestinians, have been killed in and around the Gaza Strip in the two-month period between October 7 and December 6. Head of [Reporters Without Border](https://rsf.org/en/israelpalestine-war-41-journalists-more-one-day-killed-first-month-israel-palestine-war)’s Middle East desk, Jonathan Dagher said, “What is happening in the Gaza Strip is a tragedy for journalism…The situation is urgent. We call for the protection of journalists in the Gaza Strip, and for foreign journalists to be allowed to enter the territory, so they can work freely”.

Though, the battle is not just over who gets to report this war. It is equally a battle over how the war is reported. The words, phrases and images that are used on air to describe the events on the ground matter.

During a conversation, John Collins, professor of global studies at St Lawrence University and director of the independent news outlet Weave News, reminded me, “Words construct reality for us. In wartime, the words used by journalists are supposed to help us clarify what is happening and why. But too often, those words serve to distract us, mislead us, or shield the powerful from accountability”.

This misleading happens at a very elemental level in the way Palestinian deaths are described in news stories. While Palestinians are said to have “died”, Israelis are “killed”. The latter formulation acknowledges an active act of killing by someone, but the former is passive. As if to say that no one is to blame for Palestinian deaths or suggest – as did Israeli military spokesperson Lt Col Richard Hecht following the attack on Jabalia refugee camp – that Palestinian deaths are simply an unavoidable “tragedy of war”.

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Of course, the minimisation of the Palestinian death toll also happened when President Biden questioned the accuracy of numbers seeing as the Ministry of Health in Gaza is run by Hamas. He said, “I’m sure innocents have been killed, and it’s a price of waging a war…But I have no confidence in the number that the Palestinians are using.” Such an allegation effectively planted a seed of doubt about the actual severity of Palestinian suffering, with several news outlets assessing and reporting on the way the Ministry of Health calculated casualties – this while international humanitarian agencies insisting the ministry’s numbers are indeed reliable.

How media outlets frame the “why”, “how” and “what’s next” of this ongoing war also shapes public opinion. As a scholar of disinformation and propaganda, Nicholas Rabb found that “misleading rhetoric and incessantly one-sided coverage” by the US and Israeli media has allowed for the “uncritical demonisation of Palestinians”.

This includes right-wing media outlets in the US fearmongering about a forthcoming “Global Day of Jihad” called by Hamas. A Homeland Security official said that there was no credible evidence of an imminent threat on US soil. Nonetheless, after listening to conservative talk radio and worried about the impending “Day of Jihad”, a 71-year-old man attacked his tenant, a Palestinian American woman, before stabbing her six-year-old son to death.

The Honest Reporting group that monitors and reports on anti-Israel bias in the media has also raised ethical questions around Gaza-based photojournalists working with the likes of Reuters, The Associated Press, CNN and The New York Times and how they were able to capture images from the breached border areas on October 7. It asked: “What were they doing there so early on what would ordinarily have been a quiet Saturday morning? Was it coordinated with Hamas? Did the respectable wire services, which published their photos, approve of their presence inside enemy territory, together with the terrorist infiltrators?”

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While all the accused agencies vehemently denied the allegations that they had any prior knowledge of the attack, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ran with the story and said, “These journalists were accomplices in crimes against humanity; their actions were contrary to professional ethics”.

Outraged by the attacks on journalists, independent journalism as well as the media portrayal of the war, 750 journalists signed an [open letter](https://www.protect-journalists.com/) calling for the protection of journalists. The letter also encourages journalists to “tell the full truth without fear or favor” and use “precise terms that are well-defined by international human rights organizations” such as “apartheid,” “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide” in the reporting. The letter concludes by saying, “To recognize that contorting our words to hide evidence of war crimes or Israel’s oppression of Palestinians is journalistic malpractice and an abdication of moral clarity. The urgency of this moment cannot be overstated. It is imperative that we change course”.

Seeing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, few can deny the urgency of this moment. Though, only time will tell if this results in a recognition of the importance of protecting journalists and journalism in a time of extreme crisis.

Israel’s military has announced that its forces have surrounded Gaza’s main city while rejecting growing international calls for a ceasefire to halt bloodshed in the besieged Palestinian territory.

Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari said on Thursday that Gaza City has been encircled nearly a week after its forces expanded ground operations in the Hamas-governed enclave.

“Israeli soldiers have completed the encirclement of the city of Gaza, the centre of the Hamas terror organisation,” Hagari told journalists.

Hagari said a “ceasefire is not currently on the table at all”.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who last week said the war against Hamas had entered the “second stage” amid an escalating ground war, said on Thursday night that Israeli forces were at the “height of the battle”.

“We’ve had impressive successes and have passed the outskirts of Gaza City,” he said. “We are advancing.”

Israel’s military said in a separate statement on social media that its priorities “are to bring home the children, women and men who are being held hostage by Hamas and to make sure Hamas will no longer have the ability to attack Israelis”.

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Hamas’s military wing, the Qassam Brigades, warned in response that Gaza would be the “curse of history for Israel” and that Israeli soldiers entering the enclave would go home “in black bags”.

Israel’s announcement came after United States President Joe Biden voiced support for a humanitarian “pause” in fighting to allow the release of captives held by Hamas.

White House officials later clarified that the Biden administration did not support a full ceasefire, but would press for temporary, localised pauses in fighting to allow the aid and release of hostages.

On Thursday, seven UN special rapporteurs issued a statement calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, expressing their concern that Palestinians face a “grave risk of genocide”.

Israel’s assault on Gaza has come under growing condemnation since its forces earlier this week carried out successive air raids on the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza.

At least 195 people were killed and hundreds of others wounded in the strikes on Tuesday and Wednesday, according to officials in the Hamas-governed enclave.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [said on Wednesday the attacks could amount to war crimes](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/un-rights-office-says-israeli-attacks-on-jabalia-could-be-war-crime) given the “high number of civilian casualties” and “the scale of destruction” at the refugee camp.

Israel said the air raids had targeted a Hamas commander and a “vast” network of tunnels under the site of the camp.At least 9,061 Palestinians have been killed in the bombardment of Gaza, which Israeli forces launched in response to Hamas’s October 7 attacks on communities in southern Israel.At least 1,405 people, mostly civilians, were killed in Hamas’s surprise attack involving incursions from land, sea and air, according to Israeli officials.

The gruesome scenes of death and destruction in Gaza are a reminder that for Israel, violence is not incidental, accidental or coincidental. It is part and parcel of its colonial DNA.

Like the French in Algeria, the Dutch in Indonesia and South Africa, the Belgians in the Congo, the Spaniards in South America and the Europeans in North America, the Zionists have also dehumanised the natives of the land as a precursor to or justification for guilt-free repression and violence. But colonialism must not be conflated with Judaism. If anything, the Jews have historically been the victims of racism for centuries, rendering many of them anti-colonialists.

In 1948, Israel was established on the ruins of another people, the Palestinians. It was made into a Jewish majority state through the deliberate ethnic cleansing of the land’s 750,000 Palestinian inhabitants. Since then, Israel has maintained security through state repression, military occupation, bloody wars and countless massacres against civilians.

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Nazareth, the city of my birth, was one of the few to be spared from ethnic cleansing but only because a military commander named Benjamin Dunkelman, a Canadian Jew who led the 7th Brigade of the Israeli army, refused to carry out his superiors’ evacuation order for this Christian majority city, as he later [wrote](https://www.amazon.com/Dual-Allegiance-Autobiography-Goodread-Biographies/dp/0887801277), mainly out of fear of the international repercussions.

About 400 [other](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_towns_and_villages_depopulated_during_the_1947%E2%80%931949_Palestine_war#:~:text=List%20of%20towns%20and%20villages%20depopulated%20during%20the%201947%E2%80%931949%20Palestine%20war,-Article%20Talk&text=During%20the%201947%E2%80%931949%20Palestine%20war%20around%20400%20Palestinian%20Arab,entirely%20destroyed%20and%20left%20u) Palestinian towns and villages were not so lucky. They were all depopulated, and a majority was entirely decimated. Their inhabitants were either killed or kicked out. The properties in them were either demolished or confiscated. They were given new Hebrew names. Those Palestinians who tried to return to their homes were either shot or forcibly sent to neighbouring countries.

In his book, Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948, Meron Benvenisti, an Israeli political scientist, writes: “Not since the end of the Middle Ages had the civilised world witnessed the wholesale appropriation of the sacred sites of a defeated religious community by members of the victorious one.”

Since then, Israel has set its eyes on the people per se, regardless of its leadership or theirs. Palestinians are seen by Israel either as an enemy from within that must be eradicated or as a demographic threat that needs to be removed. It is no coincidence that since its inception, Israel has established an oppressive regime of “Jewish superiority”. This regime was extended after the 1967 war and occupation to the entirety of historic Palestine, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Hence the Palestinian cry, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

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For decades, Israel has used disproportionate force and carried out countless massacres against Palestinian civilians as a form of revenge, punishment and deterrence. Last month, the Palestinians commemorated the 70th anniversary of the massacre of Qibya, where, in retaliation for a Palestinian attack on an Israeli settlement that killed three people, including two children, Israeli forces under the leadership of Ariel Sharon attacked the West Bank village of about 2,000 inhabitants, killing 69 Palestinians, mostly women and children.

That same vengeful mindset has been applied 70 years later in Gaza. It is a deterrence strategy, deliberately aimed at harming civilians to distance them from their leaders and the groups fighting in their name. Today, the Israeli propaganda machine is busy collating desperate and angry cries, real and manufactured, from Gaza residents projecting blame on Hamas for bringing Israel’s wrath upon them.

Israel never accepts an “eye for an eye” in its confrontations with the Palestinians. It insists on a ratio of 1 to 10 or 20 when it comes to its civilian casualties vs Palestinian civilian casualties. Hence, the Palestinian civilian must pay a heavy price in each and every clash, regardless of any moral or legal consideration.

Nowhere is the dissymmetry more pervasive than in Israel’s 56-year military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, which by its very nature is a perpetual system of violence against civilians. Generation after generation of Palestinians have had to endure a racist, gruesome and illegal military occupation that has included daily humiliations, collective punishment, land confiscations, and the destruction of lives and livelihoods. For Gaza, this has meant a 17-year siege of the strip through a dreadful and inhumane military blockade, military incursions, bombings of civilian infrastructure and more.

Although Israel claims it has “no choice”, its occupation is in fact driven by strategy, not by necessity. Throughout the past six decades, Israel has controlled the Palestinian territories in part to colonise them through hundreds of illegal settlements on stolen Palestinian lands, in part to hold their population hostage until their leaders accept its political dictates, which is by definition a form of state terrorism, which means using violence against civilians for political ends.

Another important factor behind Israel’s violence against Palestinian civilians, as I explained [here](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/8/8/why-israel-hates-the-palestinians-so-much), is hatred – hatred that is propelled by fear, envy and anger.

Israel fears all that is Palestinian steadfastness, Palestinian unity, Palestinian resistance, Palestinian poetry and all Palestinian national symbols. Such fear generates hatred because a state that is always afraid cannot be free. Israel is angry at the Palestinians for refusing to give up or give in, for not going away – far away. They refuse to cede their basic rights, let alone concede defeat. Israel is also envious of Palestinian inner power and outward pride. It is envious of their strong beliefs and readiness to sacrifice.

In short, Israel hates the people of Palestine for impeding the realisation of the Zionist utopia over all historical Palestine. And it especially hates those living in Gaza, as I wrote last year, for turning the dream into a nightmare.

But the answer in Gaza and the rest of Palestine cannot be more killing and more occupation. In fact, Israel’s ongoing industrial-scale slaughter and nationwide repression of the Palestinians, in retaliation of Hamas’s gruesome October 7 attacks in southern Israel, is both utterly criminal and terribly foolish. Israel has tried to live by the sword for the past 75 years, but it has sowed more of the same insecurity, infamy and anger. Repeating the same strategy again and again and expecting different results is indeed stupid. If it continues to deny the Palestinians a life and a future, Israel also will end up with no life or future worth living in this Arab region.

A week into Israel’s war on Gaza, 800 eminent scholars and practitioners of law sounded the [alarm](https://twailr.com/public-statement-scholars-warn-of-potential-genocide-in-gaza/) about an imminent genocide in the territory. What made this warning both powerful and chilling was that so many legal experts came to this sombre conclusion together. It is not a claim that can be made easily.

Since that letter was released, the situation in Gaza has only gotten worse. The death toll has passed 11,000, while some 2,650 individuals, including approximately 1,400 children, are reported missing, potentially trapped or deceased beneath the rubble. Tens of thousands of wounded are overwhelming struggling medical facilities. The humanitarian situation has reached horrific levels, compounded by the lack of food, water, fuel and electricity.

To understand what is transpiring in Gaza, we must turn to the key legal frameworks that define genocide: Article 6 of the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court and Article 2 of the Genocide Convention.

According to these documents, genocide involves acts committed with the specific intent to destroy, either in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. These acts encompass killing members of the group, causing them serious harm, and imposing conditions of life aimed at physical destruction of the group in whole or in part, among other underlying acts. Notably, the people targeted can be a geographically limited part of the group.

Gaza’s devastating reality mirrors these components of genocide. Despite claiming to target only Hamas, Israel is engaged in an all-out assault on the whole population of Gaza. In just the first week of its relentless assault, it [dropped more than 6,000 bombs](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/israel-says-6000-bombs-dropped-on-gaza-as-war-with-hamas-nears-a-week) on the Strip – nearly as many as the United States used in Afghanistan in a full year.

Using high-impact munitions in one of the most densely populated places in the world inevitably leads to a high death toll among civilians, as we have witnessed already in Gaza. In a month, the Israeli bombardment has killed more than 4,400 children and 2,900 women, with many of the men in these horrific statistics also non-combatants

The Israeli army has also dropped any pretence to “precision strikes”, as its spokesperson [Daniel Hagari said](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/18/israel-gaza-what-international-law-says-about-the-deadly-hospital-strike) its emphasis is “on damage and not accuracy”.

It has also mass-targeted civilian buildings, including hospitals and schools sheltering the displaced. It has bombed residential buildings, wiping out whole families from the population registrar; more than 45 percent of homes were destroyed or damaged, many of them in the supposed “safe areas” of the south where the Israeli army had instructed Palestinians to evacuate to.

This mass killing of civilians is accompanied by the imposition of life conditions aimed clearly at the physical destruction of the Palestinian people. Israel has put Gaza under complete siege, with “no electricity, no food, no water, no gas”, as [declared](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/israel-announces-total-blockade-on-gaza) by Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant.Israel’s bombing of hospitals, the targeting of their solar panels and the blocking of fuel deliveries indicate an intent to prevent Palestinians from accessing life-saving healthcare. More than one-third of hospitals and two-thirds of primary healthcare in Gaza have already shut down.

The Israeli refusal to allow adequate amounts of much-needed humanitarian aid – including food and water – indicates it is willing to allow the Palestinian population to succumb to starvation and disease.

Israeli government and military officials have also verbalised their genocidal intent towards the Palestinian people. On October 9, when announcing the full blockade, Gallant described the 2.3 million people in Gaza as “human animals”. On October 29, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used Judaic scripture to justify the killing of Palestinians. “You must remember what Amalek did to you, says our Holy Bible,” he said, quoting a verse that goes on to say: “Now go and smite Amalek … kill both man and woman, infant.”

On November 5, Heritage Minister Amihai Eliyahu said one of Israel’s options in Gaza is to drop a nuclear bomb. He also explained that no humanitarian aid should be provided to Palestinian civilians as “there is no such thing as uninvolved civilians in Gaza”. While his statement faced criticism from Israeli officials, the concerns raised were primarily centred around the potential impact on “Israel’s image” rather than acknowledging the grave implications of such remarks as a potential tool of genocide.

There has been a litany of other official statements employing dehumanising language towards Palestinians, along with incitement by common Israelis for the “annihilation of Gaza”. These reveal the intent to commit war crimes, crimes against humanity, and, indeed, genocide.

In the words of genocide expert and survivor of the Bosnian genocide, [Arnessa Buljusmic-Kastura](https://law4palestine.org/full-transcript-of-webinar-gaza-on-the-brink-israeli-genocidal-intent/), “That sort of rhetoric is not uncommon when it comes to cases of genocide. It is obviously one of the most important stages when you really consider it, and to hear the openly dehumanising language spoken with so much fervour in the media from government leaders, and from regular people too, is horrifying and it all leads us to where we are at right now, which is the fact that what is happening in Gaza is a genocide.”

While what is happening in Gaza shares common features with other previous situations of genocide, there are also particular elements unique to it. Among these distinct features are the enduring occupation of Palestinian lands, the relentless siege on Gaza, and the staggering proportion of the Palestinian nation already displaced by previous acts of ethnic cleansing.

Additionally, at the heart of this tragedy lies a discourse of dehumanisation, serving both as a strategy and an outcome. The longstanding anti-Palestinian discourse, ongoing since the inception of Zionism, has systematically denied the existence and the rights of Palestinians. The narrative of Israel as “a land without a people, for a people without a land” has effectively erased an entire indigenous population, along with its history, heritage, and grievances.

In parallel, Palestinians have been systematically demonised through narratives that portray them as terrorists, anti-Semites, and even Nazis. Evoking absurd claims of the “Nazification of Palestinians”, Israel, a powerful settler colonial state that has presided over the longest occupation in modern history, is trying to depict itself as a victim; its tormentor – the people it has systematically oppressed and dispossessed for decades.

It is imperative to grasp these distinct aspects of the unfolding genocide in Gaza, as we confront and respond to it. We must not forget that what is happening now is part of a long history of Israeli actions against the Palestinians, extending beyond the Gaza Strip, with genocidal intent and practices targeting other Palestinian communities

We must not forget it as Israel and its allies try to decontextualise what is going on in Gaza and portray it as a war “provoked” by Hamas’s October 7 attack.

Talk about self-defence for Israel is dominating Western rhetoric, with minimal consideration for human lives and adherence to the rules of armed conflict, let alone the 56-year military occupation and 16-year siege of Gaza. This constitutes a fundamental flaw in the appraisal of these events, and, consequently, the ability to address their root causes, as [subtly alluded to](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/un-chief-says-clear-violations-of-international-humanitarian-law-in-gaza) by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his October 24 address to the Security Council.

The lessons of the Holocaust were meant to serve as safeguards against state violence and genocide, particularly for vulnerable groups. What we are witnessing today, however, is an unprecedented global dehumanisation campaign against the Palestinians, pushing their narratives, experiences, and histories to the margins.

Historically, the initiation of such campaigns has often been a precursor to genocide. Therefore, it is imperative to restore the Palestinian people’s humanity and recognise their shared history and rights, as a people, as we push for an immediate cessation of the unfolding genocide.

We are witnessing a rapidly growing anti-Palestinian sentiment not only in Israel but also in many European countries, clearly visible in how the authorities are dealing with demonstrations and support for the Palestinian people. It is incumbent upon the international community to address this hatred with the same vigour as it has addressed anti-Semitism.

While the 1949 Geneva Conventions require all state parties “to respect and ensure respect” of these conventions in all circumstances, the Genocide Convention places a legal obligation on every member state to prevent and punish even the attempt to commit this heinous crime, without waiting for it to fully manifest.

“Never again” was meant to be a warning for future generations, yet we have seen genocides occur since the Holocaust, met with global silence. It is time to make “never again” a living principle, an urgent call to action.

In Gaza, “never again” is now.

Following Hamas’s surprise assault on Israel and the subsequent Israeli [bombardments of Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/4/we-have-nothing-families-seek-safety-from-bombs-inside-gaza-hospitals), Jen Tao logged on to the Chinese social media platform Weibo to express her condolences for the thousands who had died on both sides of the conflict.

“I thought I was going to find kind words for the victims, but instead I was shocked to see a lot of hateful things posted about Muslims and Jews,”Tao was particularly appalled when a video of a Chinese Israeli woman being taken away on a motorcycle by Hamas appeared on Chinese social media.

In the comment section, one netizen wrote: “I do not want to pay attention to her!”

Another accused the woman of being a “Nazi monster” for having served in the Israeli military (most Israeli citizens have to complete military service).

“She is Chinese, but even she got such comments,”

The broader discussion of the [conflict](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/3/analysis-israels-gaza-bombing-campaign-is-proving-costly-for-israel) has similarly been marked by hate speech.

One online comment read: “Palestine has no civilians. It only has little terrorists, old terrorists, female and male terrorists, who should all be wiped out.”

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Another called for the killing of Arabs to end terrorism while a third stated that Muslims were terrorists who needed to be bombed for peace to be achieved.

Anti-Semitic comments have been more predominant, however.

“It is really the fault of Little Moustache [Hitler],” a netizen wrote. “If he had burned all of them [Jews], we wouldn’t have this much trouble.”

“In European wars, you will see the shadow of Jews making money, like vultures,” wrote another.

When asked to comment on the anti-Semitic comments on Chinese social media, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said this week that “China’s laws unequivocally prohibit disseminating information on extremism, ethnic hatred, discrimination and violence via the internet.”

But Tao does not see such laws being enforced.

And by allowing hatred to flourish, she believes the Chinese leadership is undermining its own [diplomatic strategy](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/28/will-the-israel-hamas-war-upend-chinas-middle-east-ambitions) in the month-long Israel-Gaza war.

The Chinese leadership has called for an immediate ceasefire, and in the long term, called for the realisation of peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel.

“When you tolerate hate at home, how can you call for peace internationally?”

A distant conflict

Hongda Fan is a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University.

“There are different opinions on the current Israel-Gaza conflict in the Chinese public sphere,”

But at the same time, the vast majority of Chinese people do not know the background of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, according to Fan.

“They are not very aware of the political divisions within Palestine and the differences in governance between Gaza and the West Bank.”

Hsia Liang Hou, 42, a cybersecurity specialist from Chengdu in central China, likewise believes that there are many [elements of the conflict](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/whats-the-israel-palestine-conflict-about-a-simple-guide) that are not broadly understood in China.

“Chinese people generally don’t know a lot about the conflict and its long history because it doesn’t affect China a lot,” he said.

Hsia believes that the general lack of insight regarding the conflict and its history explains some of the racist comments that have circulated on the Chinese internet.

“It is not because all Chinese people are racist towards Arabs and Jews,” although Tao was appalled by some of the content on social media, she also cautions against using online comments to make conclusions about the general sentiment of Chinese people regarding anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

“A lot of people don’t express their opinions on social media, and also the government blocks and censors all sorts of things on the [Chinese] internet all the time,” she said.

“You don’t get to see everything; you get to see what’s acceptable to the government.”

Israel-Palestine uncensored

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have not been limited to China’s internet, but unlike much of the rest of the world, online content is [strictly monitored and censored](https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/2/17/as-great-firewall-looms-fears-for-hong-kongs-free-internet) within China. For nine years in a row, China has been ranked as having the world’s worst environment for internet freedom. A recent example of the state’s online interference came with the sudden death of [former Chinese premier Li Keqiang](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/china-bids-farewell-to-former-premier-li-keqiang-at-beijing-funeral). After Li died on October 27, the authorities released instructions on the management of media content related to the former premier.

Subsequently, online discussions of Li were censored and quotes associated with him were removed from online forums.

Deaths of Chinese political leaders have led to political upheaval in the past and are, therefore, considered sensitive by the authorities.

“The authorities censor stuff online that they see as a threat to their power,” said Hsia, the cybersecurity specialist.

The anti-Semitic and Islamophobic content is not a threat to the Chinese government, and in some ways particularly the anti-Semitic content, is making the same arguments that the Chinese state is making – only in more racist terms, according to William Figueroa, an assistant professor at the University of Groningen, who has conducted research on China’s relationship with Middle Eastern countries.

While the top of the Chinese government has called for peace and coexistence, Chinese media and influential figures have been much more conspiratorial and antagonistic in their rhetoric towards Israel and Jewish people in general.

A post on the social media account of the government-controlled CCTV claimed falsely that three percent of Jews in the US control 70 percent of American wealth. The topic was one of the top-trending on the short messaging service, Weibo.

Meanwhile, Shen Yi, a prominent professor of international relations at Fudan University, compared Israel’s attacks on Gaza to acts of aggression perpetrated by the Nazis, while Hu Xijin, a leading commentator and former editor-in-chief of the state-run Global Times, expressed concern about Israel wiping “the Earth out of the solar system”.According to Lin Pu, who is a scholar of digital authoritarianism and Chinese influence at Tulane University in the US, the Chinese authorities refrain from censoring certain anti-Semitic comments because they do not disrupt the Chinese government’s messaging of showing sympathy and support for Palestine.

“Anti-Israel sentiment highlights one aspect of the Chinese stance toward this issue that the Chinese government does not want to express explicitly for diplomatic reasons,” he said.

More broadly, censuring offensive and racist speech is generally not a priority for the Chinese state, according to Figueroa.

“You can find all kinds of racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic sentiment on Chinese social media any given day of the week,” he said.

The only way that Figueroa sees that the Chinese government might be concerned with such content is if Western nations use it to portray China negatively.

“But this hasn’t been a significant issue so far.”

Tao believes that Beijing should stay true to its call for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

“That starts with shutting down the racism and the hate in the media and online here in China,” she said.

“If the government must use its censorship powers, it should use it on this.”

This time, Israel killed members of my own extended family. The crime scene was Khan Younis refugee camp in the southern part of the Gaza Strip – note, not in the north, but the south, where people were supposed to be safe, according to the Israeli army. An entire residential quarter of the camp where I was born and raised was ruthlessly bombarded and reduced to rubble by apartheid Israel.

People there experienced it as an earthquake. A brutal, man-made earthquake. It ended the journey on earth for 47 souls who have now returned to God. Of them, 36 were direct family and the remainder were people taking shelter in their homes, seeking illusory safety.

Mr Biden, two and a half years ago in a speech at the White House on the occasion of the conviction in the George Floyd trial, you spoke about the common purpose of people who rose up to say that Black Lives Matter, people who cried: “[Enough. Enough. Enough of these senseless killings](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/04/20/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-verdict-in-the-derek-chauvin-trial-for-the-death-of-george-floyd/).” But today, as members of my family are murdered, you refuse to even acknowledge that these senseless killings are happening. Instead, you offer words of encouragement to Israel. Today you say: “More. More. More of these senseless killings.”

And Israel is happy to grant your wish.

When a member of their community is mercilessly killed by the American militarised police forces, Black Americans honour their victims by saying their names out loud. As the Israeli forces – who are kindred in spirit and in arms to their American counterparts – kill my people now, I also want to honour them by saying their names.

Today, Mr Biden, we mourn the loss of my granduncle Nayif Abu Shammala, aged 79, alongside his wife, Fathiya, 76 – both survivors of the Nakba, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine that took place in 1948 to make way for the creation of Israel.

Their village, Beit Daras, about 30km (nearly 20 miles) north of Gaza, was ethnically cleansed and destroyed along with 530 other Palestinian towns and villages. Fathiya and Nayif, like many of the 750,000 refugees of the Nakba, sought refuge in Khan Younis refugee camp, which was supposed to be only temporary until their return home.

Nayif and Fathiya are no longer with us, Mr Biden. They died before they could exercise their UN-guaranteed right to return to their land.

Among the victims of the bombardment were also their three daughters: Aisha, the cutest, most cheerful face in Khan Younis; her sister Dawlat, one of the most beautiful women in my family who had just come back from the United Arab Emirates to visit her family; and Umaima, the youngest sister, along with her daughter Malak. They came to the family home seeking shelter from the constant bombardment.

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Four of Nayif and Fathiya’s sons were also killed: Hassan, Mahmoud, Mohammed and Zuhair along with their wives, Fadia, Nima and Easha. Zuhair’s wife survived only because she had gone to another family in the camp to offer condolences for their dead. Among the murdered were also Hassan’s three children: Mohammed, Ismail, and Salma. Nayif and Fatiya’s surviving son, Ibrahim, lost his eldest son, Nayif, named after his grandfather.

Members of the Qedeih family and Allaham family who had also sought shelter in my granduncle’s house were also killed.

As if this was not enough, Mr Biden, the home of my grandaunt was also bombed. Her name was Um Said. She was 92 years old, a survivor of the Nakba, also hailing from Beit Daras.

She lived in her home in Khan Younis with her daughter Najat. Both now find their resting place under the rubble. People tried to pull their bodies out but could not. The adjacent homes of her two sons, Marwan and Asaad, and her daughter Muna were also bombed.

Marwan survived but his wife, Suhaila, and four children – Mohammed, Mahmoud, Aya and Shahd – were killed. Muna also died along with her two sons, Amjad and Mohammed. Asaad; his wife, Imtiyaz; and his son Abdelrahman, a fourth-year medical student, are also gone.

Asaad’s home was wiped out along with his small grocery shop. This was a favourite place for my own son, Aziz, to visit when we would go back to visit our homeland. Asaad was known throughout Khan Younis camp as a gentle soul who sold goods for little money. He kept a thick ledger but often forgot to collect the debts and simply forgave them. Today, Asaad’s beautiful smile, his kindness, his family and his shop have all been taken from us.

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When the bombing occurred, many relatives and neighbours were in Asaad’s shop to buy necessities and use its solar energy unit, which he had bought to help people charge their phones and batteries for free. Among the murdered are also Akram, Riman, Beirut, Imad, Niema and others whose names I cannot recall.

Mr Biden, do you believe that the pain of an Israeli mother hurts more than the pain of a Palestinian mother? Is the life of an Israeli child more valuable than the life of a Palestinian child? This is the only explanation that I can find for what you are doing now – encouraging the mass killing of children in Gaza.

When I speak of children, I am referring to real, human children with their own unique faces, names, laughter and dreams. Israel has taken the lives of more than 4,000 children, including babies, with your complicity, Mr Biden; 4,000 beautiful souls have been taken from us.

Among them is my sister’s granddaughter, Julia Abu Hussein, who was just three years old. My nephew Amjad and his wife Rawan took Julia along with my sister Samia’s family to Khan Younis in search of safety. It took them three days to make the journey from their home in the north of Gaza – a trip that would normally take less than 30 minutes. They listened to the Israeli army’s calls to evacuate. But they found no safety.

When the bombardment began, Rawan took Julia into her arms and rushed to the kitchen with the rest of the family. The sheer force of the Israeli bombs damaged our home and shattered the windows. Several pieces of shrapnel got into the house through the broken windows, killing Julia in her mother’s arms and badly injuring her aunt Nagham.

So, Mr Biden, here is a child whose life was taken by the violence of the war machine you wholeheartedly support. Can you imagine that? Can you truly comprehend the magnitude of this and other tragedies? Or are you still intent on questioning whether Israel is guilty of the mass killing of Palestinians?

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As I hear of relatives and friends killed every day in Gaza, I struggle to find new ways of describing death – gone, taken, under the rubble, their souls in heaven. Meanwhile, the media is telling me that they either are not dead or that they are dead, but they are terrorists.

Last summer when I visited Gaza, Um Said kindly gave me her embroidered dress. She insisted that I take it back to Canada with me. I am grateful that I did. Today, Um Said also remains under the rubble of her home. Her embroidered dress is all that I have left to remember her by.

Mr Biden, when the history of what is going on today is written, I am confident that you will go down in it as the man who encouraged and enabled the Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people. You will be remembered as a man whose government actively partook in war crimes.

But more importantly, Mr President, as a man who professes his faith in God, what do you say to Him in your prayers to justify the blood on your hands?

Israel continues heavy shelling in the vicinity of several hospitals in the north of the Gaza Strip, officials in the besieged enclave say as all communications and internet services were once again cut.

“For more than an hour, intense bombings have been taking place around hospitals,” Salama Maarouf, head of the Hamas government’s media office, said on Sunday evening. The vicinity of the Palestinian territory’s largest hospital, Al Shifa, saw particularly heavy strikes, according to Marouf.

Al Jazeera’s Safwat Kahlout, reporting from Deir Al Balah in central Gaza, also said the most intense shelling on Sunday was taking place in the area surrounding the hospital.

“We can understand that these air strikes are aimed at pushing the Israeli troops surrounding Gaza City towards the Al Shifa Hospital. We know that thousands of people left their homes in these neighbourhoods towards the hospital, seeking shelter,” he said.

“Which indicates that the Israeli army is planning for something big, maybe in the coming hours or in the coming days in terms of the Al Shifa Hospital itself.”

Earlier on Sunday, an Israeli attack hit near Al Quds Hospital in Gaza City, wounding at least 14 people and damaging the building.

The bombing came after the Israeli military once again accused Hamas of using hospitals in their military campaign against Israel.

“Hamas places forces and weapons inside, under and around schools, mosques, homes and UN facilities,” Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari told reporters on Sunday.

“Among the worst of Hamas war crimes is the use of hospitals to hide their terror infrastructure.”

Hamas has repeatedly rejected the charge.

The Israeli army confirmed that “significant” strikes were under way in Gaza on Sunday, with a military spokesman claiming Israel’s ground assault had split the Palestinian territory in two.

Israeli forces “have encircled Gaza City… Now there exists a south Gaza and a north Gaza,” said spokesman Daniel Hagari. Troops “reached the coastline and are holding it,” he added.

Internet access advocacy group NetBlocks.org reported a “collapse in connectivity” across Gaza. The blackout was confirmed by the Palestinian telecom company Paltel.

“We have lost communication with the vast majority of the UNRWA team members,” UN Palestinian refugee agency spokesperson Juliette Touma told The Associated Press. The first Gaza outage lasted 36 hours and the second one for a few hours.

Concerns over health facilities sheltering civilians

The World Health Organization (WHO) has expressed concern for the safety of patients, health workers and the thousands of people sheltering in Al Quds Hospital. “WHO reiterates its call for an immediate ceasefire, active protection of civilians and healthcare, and respect for International Humanitarian Law,” the agency said in a post on X. “In our Al Quds Hospital, we are deeply concerned about the situation because of the heavy shelling in the last days, really hitting in the proximity of the hospital,” Tommaso della Longa, a Geneva-based spokesperson for the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, told Al Jazeera.

“Yesterday [Saturday], literally the building in front of the hospital was hit,” he said, adding that the attack broke windows and smoke entered the hospital, which is currently treating about 500 patients.

Hospitals and ambulances have been hit several times since the latest Israeli attacks began on October 7, killing patients, displaced civilians sheltering at the facilities as well as health workers.

According to the WHO, 39 health facilities have been damaged since the war began. Hospitals have also been forced to [shut down](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/1/gazas-only-cancer-treatment-hospital-shuts-down-after-running-out-of-fuel) or cut services after electricity and fuel supply was cut.

At least 9,770 Palestinians, including 4,008 children, have been killed in the Gaza Strip since the latest war began, while entire neighbourhoods have been reduced to rubble. More than 1,400 people were killed in an attack by Hamas on southern Israel, which started this war.

Nearly 1.5 million people are now internally displaced in Gaza, according to the United Nations.

At least 4,008 children have been killed in the ongoing war in Gaza as the death toll after nearly a month of Israeli bombings hits 9,770, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

On Sunday afternoon, an Israeli air strike hit several houses near a school at the Bureji refugee camp in central Gaza, killing at least 13 people, according to officials at Al-Aqsa Hospital.

The camp is home to an estimated 46,000 people and was struck last Thursday as well. Footage verified by Al Jazeera on Sunday showed people searching under the rubble of houses to retrieve the victims.

It was the third refugee camp to be hit by Israeli air strikes in the past 24 hours. More than 50 Palestinians were killed in attacks on Gaza’s al-Maghazi and Jabalia refugee camps.

‘True massacre’

Arafat Abu Mashaia, a resident of al-Maghazi camp, said the Israeli air strike flattened several multi-storey homes where people forced out of other parts of Gaza were sheltering.“It was a true massacre,” he said early on Sunday as he stood on the wreckage of destroyed homes. “All here are peaceful people. I challenge anyone who says there were resistance [fighters] here.”

The camp, a built-up residential area, is located in the evacuation zone where Israel’s military had urged Palestinian civilians to seek refuge as it focuses its [military offensive](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/5/israel-hamas-war-list-of-key-events-day-30) on the north.

Saeed al-Nejma, 53, said he was asleep with his family when the blast hit the neighbourhood. “All night, I and the other men were trying to pick the dead from the rubble. We got children, dismembered, torn apart flesh,” he said.

Israeli planes again dropped leaflets, urging people to head south of Gaza during a four-hour window on Sunday. Crowds of people were seen walking down the strip’s main north-south highway on foot with only what they could carry in their arms. Others led donkey carts.

One man said he had to walk 500 metres (1,640 feet) with hands raised while passing Israeli troops. Another described seeing bodies in damaged cars along the road.

“The children saw tanks for the first time. Oh world, have mercy on us,” said one Palestinian who declined to give his name.

Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Khan Younis, said there seems to be a “systematic attack” on Gaza’s refugee camps by Israeli forces.

“These repeated air strikes on refugee camps in central and southern Gaza are the reason why people are not taking the Israeli announcement of guaranteeing safe corridors to travel to the south seriously,”According to the United Nations, 1.5 million people are now internally displaced in Gaza out of a population of 2.3 million.

The strikes and displacement come as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the occupied West Bank on Sunday.

Blinken [reaffirmed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/4/blinken-reaffirms-us-support-for-humanitarian-pauses-in-gaza) Washington’s position calling for “[humanitarian pauses](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/4/whats-behind-antony-blinkens-call-for-humanitarian-pauses-in-gaza)” in Gaza to protect civilians and allow foreign nationals to leave while “still enabling Israel to achieve its objective” to defeat Hamas.

Both Egypt and Jordan rebuked that position publicly at a news conference on Saturday, instead calling for an immediate ceasefire – echoing the stance of other leaders in the region.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu again rejected the idea of halting the offensive, ignoring appeals and [protests across the world](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/5/people-march-in-us-cities-of-washington-san-francisco-for-gaza-ceasefire).

“There will be no ceasefire without the return of our hostages, we say this to both our enemies and our friends. We will continue until we beat them,” Netanyahu told air and ground crews at the Ramon Air Force Base in southern Israel on Sunday.

Israel says it is targeting Hamas fighters and assets, accusing the group of using civilians as human shields. Critics say Israel’s strikes are disproportionate, considering the large number of civilians killed.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) could return to power in the Gaza Strip only if a “comprehensive political solution” is found to the Israel-Palestine conflict, according to PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

Abbas on Sunday met with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is on yet another tour of the region as Israel’s [deadly military campaign](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/11/4/israel-hamas-war-live-heavy-israeli-bombing-pounds-northern-gaza) in Gaza nears a month

“We will fully assume our responsibilities within the framework of a comprehensive political solution that includes all of the [occupied] West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip,” Abbas was quoted as telling Blinken by the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

Israel says Hamas can no longer be left in control of the besieged enclave after the group’s October 7 attack that left about 1,400 Israelis dead – a sentiment backed by Washington.

Hamas, considered a “terrorist” group by the US and the European Union, is a rival of Abbas’s Fatah party. Hamas took over Gaza from the PA in 2007, after being blocked from exercising real power despite winning a parliamentary election the previous year.

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Israel fully withdrew its troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005 but imposed a crippling blockade on the coastal territory after Hamas took power.

Blinken made a surprise visit to the occupied West Bank on Sunday as Israel pressed on with its attacks on Gaza, where the death toll has reached nearly 10,000, almost half of them children.

Israeli ground forces also continue to [push into Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/5/analysis-israels-ground-war-in-gaza-could-get-much-bloodier), engaged in heavy fighting with Hamas fighters, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has consistently rejected [growing calls](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/5/people-march-in-us-cities-of-washington-san-francisco-for-gaza-ceasefire) for a ceasefire.

In what appeared to be the most direct US position since the start of the war on October 7, Blinken told Abbas the PA should play a central role in the future of Gaza, the Reuters news agency reported.

The agency quoted an unnamed senior US State Department official as saying the “future of Gaza was not the focus of the meeting but the Palestinian Authority seemed willing to play a role”.

Abbas and Blinken reportedly talked for about an hour in Ramallah but did not address the media, as Blinken had done during the previous legs of his regional trip.

Blinken said Washington is committed to getting aid into Gaza and restoring essential services after Israel cut access to food, water and electricity in the besieged enclave.

However, the US has also opposed a ceasefire, instead going only so far as to back a “[pause](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/4/blinken-reaffirms-us-support-for-humanitarian-pauses-in-gaza)” to facilitate humanitarian aid and allow some residents to exit Gaza through the Egypt-controlled Rafah border crossing

On October 24, a statement by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres caused a sharp reaction by Israel. While addressing the UN Security Council, the UN chief [said](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/un-chief-says-clear-violations-of-international-humanitarian-law-in-gaza) that while he condemned in the strongest terms the massacre committed by Hamas on October 7, he wished to remind the world that it did not take place in a vacuum. He explained that one cannot dissociate 56 years of occupation from our engagement with the tragedy that unfolded on that day.

The Israeli government was quick to condemn the statement. Israeli officials demanded Guterres’s resignation, claiming that he supported Hamas and justified the massacre it carried out. The Israeli media also jumped on the bandwagon, asserting among other things that the UN chief “[has demonstrated](https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-770186) a stunning degree of moral bankruptcy”.

This reaction suggests that a new type of allegation of anti-Semitism may now be on the table. Until October 7, Israel had pushed for the definition of anti-Semitism to be expanded to include criticism of the Israeli state and questioning the moral basis of Zionism. Now, contextualising and historicising what is going on could also trigger an accusation of anti-Semitism.

The dehistoricisation of these events aids Israel and governments in the West in pursuing policies they shunned in the past due to either ethical, tactical, or strategic considerations.

Thus, the October 7 attack is used by Israel as a pretext to pursue genocidal policies in the Gaza Strip. It is also a pretext for the United States to try and reassert its presence in the Middle East. And it is a pretext for some European countries to violate and limit democratic freedoms in the name of a new “war on terror”.

But there are several historical contexts for what is going on now in Israel-Palestine that cannot be ignored. The wider historical context goes back to the mid-19th century, when evangelical Christianity in the West turned the idea of the “return of the Jews” into a religious millennial imperative and advocated the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as part of the steps that would lead to the resurrection of the dead, the return of the Messiah, and the end of time.

Theology became policy toward the end of the 19th century and in the years leading up to World War I for two reasons.

First, it worked in the interest of those in Britian wishing to dismantle the Ottoman Empire and incorporate parts of it into the British Empire. Second, it resonated with those within the British aristocracy, both Jews and Christians, who became enchanted with the idea of Zionism as a panacea for the problem of anti-Semitism in Central and Eastern Europe, which had produced an unwelcome wave of Jewish immigration to Britain.

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When these two interests fused, they propelled the British government to issue the famous – or infamous – Balfour Declaration in 1917.

Jewish thinkers and activists who redefined Judaism as nationalism hoped this definition would protect Jewish communities from existential danger in Europe by homing in on Palestine as the desired space for “rebirth of the Jewish nation”.

In the process, the cultural and intellectual Zionist project transformed into a settler colonial one – which aimed at Judaising historical Palestine, disregarding the fact that it was inhabited by an Indigenous population.

In turn, the Palestinian society, quite pastoral at that time and in its early stage of modernisation and construction of a national identity, produced its own anti-colonial movement. Its first significant action against the Zionist colonisation project came with [al-Buraq Uprising of 1929](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/al-jazeera-world/2015/11/11/jerusalem-dividing-al-aqsa), and it has not ceased since then.

Another historical context relevant to the present crisis is the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine that included the forceful expulsion of Palestinians into the Gaza Strip from villages on whose ruins some of the Israeli settlements attacked on October 7 were built. These uprooted Palestinians were part of the 750,000 Palestinians who lost their homes and became refugees.

This ethnic cleansing was noted by the world but not condemned. As a result, Israel continued to resort to ethnic cleansing as part of its effort to ensure that it had complete control over historical Palestine with as few of the native Palestinians remaining as possible. This included the expulsion of 300,000 Palestinians during and in the aftermath of the 1967 war, and the expulsion of more than 600,000 from the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip ever since.

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There is also the context of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Over the past 50 years, the occupational forces have inflicted persistent collective punishment on the Palestinians in these territories, exposing them to constant harassment by Israeli settlers and security forces and imprisoning hundreds of thousands of them.

Since the election of the present fundamentalist messianic Israeli government in November 2022, all these harsh policies reached unprecedented levels. The number of Palestinians killed, wounded and arrested in the occupied West Bank [skyrocketed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/22/israeli-forces-kill-palestinian-in-northern-west-bank). On top of that, Israeli government policies towards Christian and Muslim holy places in Jerusalem became even more aggressive.

Finally, there is also the historical context of the 16-year-long siege on Gaza, where almost half of the population are children. In 2018, the UN was already warning that the Gaza Strip would become a place unfit for humans by 2020.

It is important to remember that the siege was imposed in response to democratic elections won by Hamas after the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the territory. Even more important is to go back to the 1990s, when the Gaza Strip was encircled by barbed wire and disconnected from the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords.

The isolation of Gaza, the fence around it, and the increased Judaisation of the West Bank were a clear indication that Oslo in the eyes of the Israelis meant an occupation by other means, not a path to genuine peace.

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Israel controlled the exit and entry points to the Gaza ghetto, monitoring even the kind of food that entered – at times limiting it to a certain calorie count. Hamas reacted to this debilitating siege by launching rockets on civilian areas in Israel.

The Israeli government claimed these attacks were motivated by the movement’s ideological wish to kill Jews – a new form of Nazim – disregarding the context of both the Nakba and the inhuman and barbaric siege imposed on two million people and the oppression of their compatriots in other parts of historical Palestine.

Hamas, in many ways, was the only Palestinian group that promised to avenge or respond to these policies. The way it decided to respond, however, may bring its own demise, at least in the Gaza Strip, and may also provide a pretext for further oppression of the Palestinian people.

The savageness of its attack cannot be justified in any way, but that does not mean it cannot be explained and contextualised. As horrific as it was, the bad news is that it is not a game-changing event, despite the huge human cost on both sides. What does this mean for the future?

Israel will remain a state established by a settler-colonial movement, which will continue to influence its political DNA and determine its ideological nature. This means that despite its self-framing as the only democracy in the Middle East, it will remain a democracy only for its Jewish citizens.

The internal struggle inside Israel between what one can call the state of Judea – the settlers’ state wishing Israel to be more theocratic and racist – and the state of Israel – wishing to keep the status quo – that preoccupied Israel until October 7 will erupt again. In fact, there are already signs of its return.

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Israel will continue to be an apartheid state – as declared by a number of human rights organisations – however the situation in Gaza unfolds. The Palestinians will not disappear and will continue their struggle for liberation, with many civil societies siding with them and their governments backing Israel and providing it with an exceptional immunity.

The way out remains the same: a change of regime in Israel that brings equal rights for everyone from the river to the sea and allows for the return of Palestinian refugees. Otherwise, the cycle of bloodshed will not end.

In a speech delivered on November 6, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [declared](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/6/un-chief-guterres-urges-ceasefire-as-gaza-becomes-graveyard-for) that “Gaza is becoming a graveyard for children”. While his comments garnered immediate media attention, they somehow still understated the reality for Palestinian children.

In Gaza, Israeli forces are killing Palestinian children at a previously unfathomable rate. Over the past 40 days, Israeli forces have murdered more than 5,000 children in Gaza – with an additional 1,800 children missing under the rubble of destroyed buildings, most of them presumed dead. That is more than 6,800 Palestinian children killed over a period of 40 days. That amounts to over 170 children killed each day.

In the West Bank, Israeli forces have killed 54 Palestinian children since October 7, according to documentation collected by Defence for Children International–Palestine (DCIP). This includes 38 Palestinian children killed in October alone, the highest number of Palestinian children killed in a single month since Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank began in 1967.

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As in previous Israeli military offensives on Gaza, Israeli attacks the DCIP has investigated have been overwhelmingly indiscriminate and disproportionate. The Israeli army has targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure in densely populated civilian areas with wide-area-effect explosive weapons. In other words, every bomb the Israeli army drops on Gaza potentially constitutes a war crime.

Make no mistake, Guterres was sounding the alarm because he knows that Palestinian children are living and dying in an unrivaled moment. Israeli forces killed more children in the first month of the war than state and non-state actors did in other armed conflicts over the past two years combined, according to the UN chief’s own annual reports.

Nearly 50 percent of the 2.3 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip are children. This incredibly youthful population has experienced 16 years of Israeli siege, which amounts to collective punishment. Palestinian children have faced repeated Israeli military offensives where direct, indiscriminate, and disproportionate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure and systemic impunity have been the norm.

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres has strengthened his calls for a ceasefire as Palestinian authorities reported that more than 10,000 people have been killed in [Israeli air strikes](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/6/number-of-palestinians-killed-in-israeli-attacks-on-gaza-tops-10000) on Gaza.

The secretary-general told reporters on Monday that Gaza was becoming a “graveyard for [children](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/5/true-massacre-gaza-children-death-toll-crosses-4000-as-raids-intensify#:~:text=At%20least%204%2C008%20children%20have,to%20the%20Palestinian%20health%20ministry.)”, with more than 4,100 killed since the fighting began, according to the Ministry of Health in the enclave

“Hundreds of girls and boys are reportedly being killed and injured every day,” he said.

“More journalists have reportedly been killed over a four-week period than in any conflict in at least three decades,” he said. “More United Nations aid workers have been killed than in any comparable period in the history of our organisation.”

“The unfolding catastrophe makes the need for a humanitarian ceasefire more urgent with every passing hour,” Guterres said to reporters at UN headquarters in New York City.

“The parties to the conflict – and, indeed, the international community – face an immediate and fundamental responsibility: to stop this inhuman collective suffering and dramatically expand humanitarian aid to Gaza.”

The remarks are some of the sharpest yet from [Guterres](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/31/un-chief-guterres-says-aid-trickling-into-gaza-is-completely), who has previously called for a ceasefire and said on Monday that Israeli strikes have targeted “hospitals, refugee camps, mosques, churches and UN facilities, including shelters”.

“No one is safe,” he said. Guterres also criticised the Palestinian armed group Hamas for using civilians as “shields” and continuing to “launch rockets indiscriminately towards Israel”, as he called for the release of captives still held in Gaza.

Hamas launched [an assault](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/11/horrific-scenes-as-dozens-of-bodies-found-in-israels-kfar-aza-near) on southern Israel on October 7 that Israeli authorities said killed more than 1,400 people, mostly civilians, and included the killing of women and children.

That attack was [widely condemned](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/we-are-at-war-reactions-to-palestinian-hamas-surprise-attack-in-israel), but Israel’s campaign of relentless air strikes on the besieged strip of more than 2.3 million people has also drawn criticism.

Israel has also placed Gaza under a siege, cutting off access to necessities such as fuel, food and electricity, while its bombardment has displaced more than 1.5 million people with few options for seeking refuge.

Guterres said clear violations of [international law](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/un-chief-says-clear-violations-of-international-humanitarian-law-in-gaza) were being committed in the fighting.

With fuel supplies strained by Israel’s siege, more than half of Gaza’s 35 hospitals have been forced to [suspend operations](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/1/gazas-only-cancer-treatment-hospital-shuts-down-after-running-out-of-fuel) while the number of people wounded in the strikes surpasses 25,000.

“The nightmare in Gaza is more than a humanitarian crisis,” Guterres said. “It is a crisis of humanity.”

Guterres also spoke about the need to get more humanitarian aid into Gaza, saying current levels of assistance represent a “trickle” against an “ocean of need” and that the Rafah crossing with Egypt does not have the capacity to fill the gap “alone”.

While Guterres did not mention specifics, Al Jazeera’s Diplomatic Editor James Bays said that he may be suggesting other crossings into Gaza currently sealed by Israel, such as Kerem Shalom, also known as Karam Abu Salem, should be opened for aid deliveries.

“It’s a hint, but it’s not one I’ve heard him make publicly before that Israel should open Kerem Shalom,” Bays said.

“I’m sure privately, they’ve been saying that to the Israelis all the way through this. Kerem Shalom is a much bigger [crossing]. It is where most of the trucks used to go in from Israel directly into Gaza, and it’s been completely closed since October 7,”

My last visit to Al-Shati refugee camp was early 2013. Located on the Mediterranean coast in the north of Gaza, Al-Shati was otherwise known as “Beach Camp”. Vendors sold fruit under multi-coloured parasols. Cats slept in the middle of narrow alleys. Children jostled over skipping rope in the shade.

Beach Camp was established in 1948 after 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced in the Nakba. Initially, the camp accommodated around 23,000 refugees. In the following seven decades, that number grew to 90,000, cramped inside 0.5 square kilometres (0.2 square miles) of land – 70 times more populated than London’s city centre.

People in Gaza have been living under a blockade for the past 16 years and the Israeli occupation controls most of what goes in and out of Gaza. Beach Camp was no different – and people there largely relied on aid and services from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to survive, including a health centre, a food distribution centre and several school buildings

Beach Camp Primary School was beautifully maintained. I was allowed up onto the roof, where I could see the fence with Israel on one side. Out to sea were several Israeli patrol boats keeping Palestinian fishermen from sailing more than six nautical miles out.

The school was run by inspiring and hard-working teachers, whose philosophy was to create a calm atmosphere for discovery, music, theatre and art. Some of the students showed me their work. Many were drawings of planes, fences and bombs. But there were other drawings too: of their parents, their brothers, their sisters and their friends. All of the children, obviously, had underlying trauma, but they also had a desire to learn, share and play.

On October 9, two days after the deplorable attack by Hamas in southern Israel, there were reports of an Israeli air strike on Beach Camp. This wasn’t the first strike on the camp. In May 2021, at least 10 Palestinians, eight of whom were children, were [killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/15/at-least-ten-killed-in-insraeli-strike-on-gaza-refugee-camp) in an air strike. Nor was it the last. Beach Camp has been repeatedly [targeted](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/13/israeli-attack-on-gaza-refugee-camp-kills-dozens-of-palestinians) in the past three weeks.

When I hear news of bombardment in Gaza, I think about that school at Beach Camp. I don’t know if it is still there. I don’t know if those children and teachers are still alive. I don’t know.

The Israeli army has dropped 25,000 tonnes of bombs onto a tiny strip of land, populated by 2.3 million people. There is no meaningful sense whatsoever that they are trying to avoid civilian deaths. More than [9,900 people](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/11/6/israel-hamas-live-news-communications-blackout-across-gaza) in Gaza have been killed, including more than 4,800 children.

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Survivors still under siege are running out of the basic means of survival: water, fuel, food and medical supplies. Doctors are performing surgery without anaesthesia. Mothers are watching their babies fight for survival in incubators running out of electricity. People are being forced to drink seawater. More than 1 million people have been displaced from their homes.

The attack by Hamas, which killed 1,400 Israelis and took 200 hostages, was utterly appalling and must be condemned. The victims and hostages are young people who wanted to listen to music. They are nieces and nephews. They are jewellery designers. They are factory workers. They are peace campaigners. The pain and anguish that their families feel will last forever.

This cannot justify the indiscriminate bombing and starvation of the Palestinian people, who are being punished for a heinous crime they did not commit. In the aftermath of horror, we need voices for de-escalation and peace. Instead, politicians around the world continue to give the Israeli government the green light to starve and slaughter the Palestinian people in the name of self-defence.

Every person in Gaza has a name and a face; we grieve for babies in incubators just as deeply as we grieve for middle-aged men killed crossing the road. In any case, we are mourning the theft of beautiful, creative lives. Artists whose paintings we will never see. Singers whose songs we will never sing. Authors whose books we will never read. Chefs whose kunafa we will never eat. Teachers whose lessons we will never learn.

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For as long as I can remember, Gaza has been reduced on our TV screens to a site of debris and despair, but underneath the rubble are the quiet, unremarkable foundations of our shared humanity. Morning coffee rounds, hot showers, shopping trips, card games and bedtime stories. Friendship, heartbreak, love, disappointment, boredom and suspense. Schools, mosques, theatres, universities, libraries, playgrounds and hospitals. Hopes, dreams, fears, cares and joys. We are not just witnessing mass death. We are witnessing the erasure of an entire culture, an identity and a people.

The International Criminal Court [defines](https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Elements-of-Crimes.pdf) genocide according to several criteria. Genocide can be committed by killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction, imposing measures intended to prevent births, or by forcibly transferring children. In each case, there must be an intention to destroy, in whole or in part, a particular national, ethnic, racial or religious group.

On November 2, seven UN Special Rapporteurs [said](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/un-experts-demand-ceasefire-warn-gaza-is-running-out-of) they “remain convinced that the Palestinian people are at grave risk of genocide”. This followed the resignation of [Craig Mokhiber](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/qa-former-un-official-craig-mokhiber-on-gaza-and-genocide), the Director of the UN’s office in New York, who characterised the horrors in Gaza as a “textbook case of genocide” aimed toward “the expedited destruction of the last remnants of indigenous life in Palestine”.

In his resignation letter, he referenced the “wholesale slaughter of the Palestinian people…based entirely upon their status as Arabs”, as well as the continuing seizure of homes in the West Bank. He highlighted the “explicit statements of intent by leaders in the Israeli government and military”.

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He did not cite a specific statement, perhaps because there are too many to fit in one letter. He could have been referring to Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir who posted that “as long as Hamas does not release the hostages in its hands – the only thing that needs to enter Gaza are hundreds of tons of explosives from the Air Force, not an ounce of humanitarian aid”. Or perhaps he was referring to Galit Distel Atbaryan, an MP from Israel’s ruling Likud party, who called for Gaza to be “erased from the face of the earth”.

Genocide is a term that should be used carefully. There are many horrors in history that are hideous enough on their own terms without warranting that label. The term has a legal definition, a legal basis and legal implications. That is why, when international experts in this field warn us about genocide, we should sit up and listen. And that is why we need an immediate ceasefire, followed by an urgent investigation by the International Criminal Court.

The ICC should not just investigate the crime of genocide, but every single war crime committed by all parties over the past month. The UK government has the authority and responsibility to call for this investigation. So far, it has refused to call out the atrocities unfolding before our very eyes. [Blackouts in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/1/israel-imposes-communication-blackout-on-gaza-second-time-in-five-days) may be temporary, but impunity is permanent and our government continues to give the Israeli army the cover it needs to commit its crimes in darkness.

We will carry on demonstrating as long as it takes to bring about a ceasefire. To secure the release of hostages. To stop the siege of Gaza. And to end the occupation. We make these demands because we know what is at stake: the curiosity, creativity and kindness of the Palestinian people.

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I remember, on our way home from the school, we passed a food-growing project. The project had purchased 50 hectares of a former Israeli settlement. All the buildings had been destroyed by those who had since departed – and Palestinians had turned the debris into a cooperative farm. Soon, I was told, olives and fruits would grow.

I will never give up hope that these olives and fruits will grow. The people of Gaza have lent me their joy, empathy and humanity. One day, I hope I can give it back to them – in a free and independent Palestine.

In 2014, nine years prior to Israel’s [current annihilative efforts](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/17/mapping-the-israel-palestine-war-major-events-on-the-ground) in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli army undertook what it dubbed “Operation Protective Edge” in the same territory. The 51-day campaign extinguished 2,251 Palestinian lives, among them 551 children.

Not long after the 2014 killing spree, a psychoanalyst acquaintance of mine in Barcelona sent me some photographs that he had acquired from a colleague in Gaza. The photos were of drawings by children in the town of Khuzaa in the southern Gaza governorate of Khan Yunis, close to the border with Israel.

At first glance, many of the drawings appear to be your standard children’s artwork, featuring colourful houses, smiling stick figures, grass, clouds, sun and so forth. Stylistic similarities aside, however, the illustrations depict a troublingly distinct landscape – one in which missiles, tanks, bulldozers and jets have clearly come to occupy central positions in the respective universes of the young artists.

In one drawing, for example, a projectile descending from the sky is about to impact an orange house with a red roof and a Palestinian flag flying overhead. In another, missiles from an aircraft are bound for a smiling stick-figure group. In offering a glimpse of the world as seen through Palestinian children’s eyes, the artwork also constitutes yet further proof of the psychologically depraved nature of Israel’s operations in the Gaza Strip.

The children who drew those drawings are now teenagers – provided, that is, that they have survived the [latest ongoing round](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/10/31/israel-hamas-war-live-israeli-air-attacks-continue-across-gaza) of Israeli-induced carnage in Gaza, which has killed close to 10,000 people including more than 4,800 children. There is not a single safe place in the entire territory, as Israel proceeds to target homes, schools and hospitals alike with abandon. Israeli military officers have admitted to dispensing with pretences to “surgical” precision.

Obviously, the conversion of daily existence in Gaza into a literal nightmare means that, even if the Israeli bombs stop falling, psychological trauma will remain the name of the game – presumably to a greater degree than it was already. Five years ago, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) reported severe “mental health issues and psychological deterioration” among Gaza’s youth. In 2020, the [majority of children](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/6/14/trauma-and-mental-health-in-gaza) in the besieged enclave were found to suffer from PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder

And in May 2021 – in a quintessential can’t-make-this-up episode of savage irony – twelve of the more than 60 children killed by Israeli air strikes on Gaza in one week were participating in an NRC psychosocial programme for victims of war trauma.

In addition to the physical slaughter, then, there appears to be a calculated effort to inflict psychological devastation in Gaza as well.

The English term “psyops” is not quite sufficient to describe what Israel is doing. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, psyops is a plural noun denoting “military operations usually aimed at influencing the enemy’s state of mind through noncombative means (such as distribution of leaflets).”

To be sure, Israel has long excelled at the practice of dropping leaflets from aircraft onto civilian populations in Palestine as well as in Lebanon, often with instructions to evacuate a given area; nowadays, such psyops are also easily conducted by cellular phone.

However, given Israel’s habit of bombing people as they comply with evacuation orders, none of this really qualifies as “noncombative means”. In the case of the blockaded Gaza Strip, from which there are currently exactly zero evacuation routes, this sort of psychological warfare becomes even more mentally disturbing.

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Of course, there is nothing terribly psychologically reassuring about living trapped in an overcrowded sliver of land, even at times when Israel is not conducting an all-out war. Back in 2005, the year of Israel’s [withdrawal-that-wasn’t](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2005/8/15/israel-begins-gaza-pullout) from Gaza, the late Dr Eyad El-Sarraj – founder of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme – condemned Israel for endeavouring to induce “learned helplessness to the Palestinians in Gaza with the aim of making the whole population captive to fear and paralysis”.

In the 2009 documentary On Gaza’s Mind, El-Sarraj blamed the ongoing Israeli occupation for the “disintegration” of society in the Gaza Strip and for “generational problems” owing to “the accumulated toxic kind of trauma over the years and years”. And the mental health crisis only deepened over the ensuing years, with increasing rates of depression and suicide.

The psychological effects of the illegal Israeli siege of Gaza, now going on 17 years, cannot be overstated – nor can its contributions to crippling [unemployment](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/27/gaza-graduates-demand-unrwa-solutions-for-high-unemployment-rate) and poverty, factors which in turn further fuel general anxiety and depression. The attendant lack of adequate food, water and electricity in Gaza only exacerbates feelings of powerlessness and precludes mental stability.

Meanwhile, Israel simultaneously inflicts mass psychological trauma on the people of Gaza and blocks the import into the territory of critical medications including psychiatric drugs. It naturally also does not help when Israel bombs hospitals and other healthcare infrastructure in the Gaza Strip.

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But what sort of future awaits Gaza, in the end, when Israel insists on killing and traumatising its children? In 2018, when the Israeli army killed [hundreds](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/12/gaza-protests-all-the-latest-updates) of Palestinians in Gaza in the context of the [Great March of Return](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/5/16/palestinians-great-march-of-return-the-human-cost), the Washington Post reported on the mental health disaster in the enclave, highlighting the case of 14-year-old Mohammad Ayyoub.

As the Post noted, at his young age Ayyoub had already lived through no fewer than three wars, which had left him “deeply traumatised”. The United States’ decision that year to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem made him “upset”, the article explained, and, after telling his mother that he would be willing to sacrifice his life for the city, he “slipped away to a demonstration” on the Gaza-Israel border on April 20, “where an Israeli sniper shot him through the head”.

Now that US [complicity](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2023/10/24/whats-the-extent-of-us-military-aid-to-israel-in-its-war-on-gaza) in physical and psychological devastation in Gaza has reached transparently [genocidal proportions](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/12/israel-is-manufacturing-a-case-for-genocide) – with the Israeli military systematically wiping out [entire Palestinian families](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/31/al-jazeera-engineer-loses-19-family-members-in-israeli-bombing-of-jabalia) – it will be less than surprising, perhaps, if more Palestinian youth pursue the path of martyrdom.

As Dr El-Sarraj once commented to PBS, people are a “product of the environment”; if you impose an environment of total “hopelessness and despair” on someone – like a young Palestinian in Gaza who has “seen so much of bombing, of killing, of murder, of blood, of humiliation” – you might just end up with “a martyr, somebody who thinks death is the beginning of life”. Indeed, not only does the Gaza Strip serve as an on-site laboratory for Israel to test out its weaponry, it also serves as a testing ground for sick mind games. And as Israel continues to preside over an [unprecedented killing spree](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/31/gaza-has-become-a-graveyard-for-thousands-of-children-un) that can only be described as utterly psychotic, the question remains: What will the children of Gaza draw from now on? Will there still be houses and sun, or will there just be blood and rubble?

In the early hours of November 22, Qatar formally [announced](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/22/israel-agrees-to-ceasefire-deal-paving-way-for-some-captives-release) that an agreement had been reached for an Israeli-Palestinian exchange of captives. The available details suggest it largely reflects the proposal offered by Hamas several weeks ago that was initially rejected by Israel.

Тhe announcement was made just a week after Israeli tanks and soldiers stormed into the [al-Shifa Hospital compound](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/15/why-is-gazas-al-shifa-hospital-so-important-for-the-israeli-army) in Gaza City, causing international outrage. Israel had claimed that there was a Hamas command centre there and repeatedly vowed to destroy it. As it happened, the only facility to be found within the compound was a hospital. The United States fully supported Israel’s violation of al-Shifa’s sanctity and even claimed it had independent intelligence about a Palestinian Pentagon beneath it but produced no evidence in support of this assertion.

At the time, this led to speculation that these events may have been the product of an informal US-Israeli agreement: The Biden administration would support Israel’s seizure of al-Shifa and would cover for this war crime politically and diplomatically with lies of its own, thus allowing an Israeli military with few achievements since October 7 to have its “Iwo Jima moment” atop “Mount Shifa”.

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But once it would become clear that there was nothing of military significance within the premises, the US would proceed to finalise a deal with Hamas and Israel would have to agree to its implementation.

It does indeed appear to be the case that in exchange for US support for Israel’s systematic destruction of the health sector in the Gaza Strip, a deal with Hamas has been reached.

The agreement is significant in several respects. Perhaps most importantly, the US and Israel, which repeatedly vowed to eradicate Hamas, are now negotiating with the Palestinian movement and reaching agreements with it. Qatari-Egyptian mediation, while indispensable, is ultimately a formality. The US and Israel are not negotiating with Egypt and Qatar but with Yahya Sinwar, the head of Hamas in the Gaza Strip and architect of the October 7 attacks.

The tenor of Israeli press reports in recent days has been that Hamas is desperate for a respite, however brief and at almost any price, from the ferocious Israeli onslaught against the Gaza Strip.

Yet the available reports about the deal suggest otherwise: Israel has committed to releasing three times as many imprisoned women and children as the Palestinians; no Israeli soldiers are included in the exchange; significantly more humanitarian supplies, including fuel, will reach the Gaza Strip; the exchange of captives will be implemented during a continuous four-day truce rather than one in which the slaughter is paused for a brief period each day; and Israeli jets and drones will be prohibited from using the airspace over the Gaza Strip for several hours each day.

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This is quite close to the deal initially offered by Hamas several weeks ago, and it appears the bulk of its demands have been conceded by Israel and the US. If the adage that negotiations reflect reality on the ground rather than overturning it applies, Hamas – in contrast to the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip, which has been Israel’s main target – seems far from desperate. Instead, it appears sufficiently confident to stick to its priorities until these are accepted by the US and Israel.

Pursuant to the agreement, Hamas has also forced the US and Israel to consent to the supply of large amounts of essential humanitarian supplies to the Gaza Strip. In other words, Hamas has in one fell swoop achieved exponentially more on the humanitarian front than the much-vaunted US diplomacy to secure humanitarian relief for Gaza’s Palestinian civilians during the past month.

This confirms that the entire US effort was in essence a circus – a diversionary charade to enable Israel to continue with its mass killings and transform the Gaza Strip into a wasteland and a killing field.

It bears repeating that Hamas has forced the US and Israel to allow significant quantities of food, water, medicine and fuel to reach the civilian population of the Gaza Strip. Yet Hamas is the anointed terrorist organisation in this equation while Israel is the light unto nations with the world’s most moral army and the US – the world’s greatest democracy dedicated to spreading freedom and human rights to the rest of the planet.

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What happens next is difficult to assess. According to reports, only Israeli and dual nationals are to be released, presumably to help the Israeli leadership swallow this very bitter pill and to allay Israeli concerns that the release of foreign nationals would be privileged in negotiations with Hamas. Yet by insisting on this formula, Israel has ensured that further negotiations to release foreign citizens would continue, potentially leading to an extension of the truce.

At the same time, it is difficult to believe that the Israeli leadership can accept a temporary truce that metamorphoses into an indefinite one. It is clearly in the Israeli premier’s personal and political interest to keep this conflict going while the security establishment is also desperate to wipe away the stain of October 7. Other members of Israel’s governing coalition partners see this war as a golden opportunity to unleash the apocalypse and want it to escalate further rather than wind down.

Although the Gaza Strip has been substantially destroyed, Hamas has yet to be significantly degraded, and the Israeli army has yet to kill more Hamas commanders than United Nations staff.

If Israel is confident it can once again flout US policy without consequences, it will. This could take the form of sabotaging the truce or resuming hostilities to ensure it is not extended. Farther afield, the Israeli-Lebanese front also seems to be rapidly heating up.

So further escalation is likely, but it is also possible that the implementation of this deal could cause Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government to collapse under a combination of public pressure and internal conflicts among leaders who mutually detest and distrust each other.

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The US leadership is also a question mark. With respect to the impact of this crisis on US interests in the region and beyond and particularly the question of regional escalation, US President Joe Biden appears not to care, Secretary of State Antony Blinken appears not to know while CIA Director William Burns and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin look mortified. Which faction gains the upper hand remains an open question.

The one conclusion that can already be drawn is that the various “day after” scenarios produced by the Washington echo chamber can be safely discarded because they uniformly require the eradication of Hamas and not negotiated agreements with it.

There is a problem with Israel’s new propaganda and PR techniques that aim to burnish its military’s image in the West as one of the world’s most “moral armies”. The problem is that the world sees the inhuman severity and scale of Israel’s killing, starvation, and siege of Palestinian civilians on TV and social media, which has an impact that outstrips its PR capabilities. Even its most ardent supporters, like the United States, now call for a “humanitarian pause” to allow ravaged Palestinian civilians to access life-sustaining essentials like food, water, and medicine.

As Israel keeps attacking hospitals, schools that shelter women and children, and the few remaining water tanks and bakeries, its propaganda includes “[warning](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2012/11/20/israel-urges-gazans-to-evacuate-their-homes)” civilians in northern Gaza to vacate their homes and neighbourhoods before it bombs them. On October 13, the army dropped leaflets and sent phone messages to the 1.1 million inhabitants in and around Gaza City, giving them 24 hours to leave for the south. Otherwise, the leaflets said, they could be considered “accomplices in a terrorist organisation”. It repeated the warning several times since then, but many Palestinians did not evacuate.

Israel says its warning aims to minimise risk to civilians. Such claims are widely discounted by anyone who follows these conflicts, but they seem to play well to Western audiences (which may be why some leaflets are in English as well as Arabic). Yet this amateurish public relations stunt is belied by the fact that most Israeli missile attacks are not preceded by warnings. That may be one reason why an average of nearly 1,000 Palestinians are killed or injured every day, of whom nearly half are children – and half of Gaza’s population of 2.2 million has been internally displaced.

Israel’s forcing civilians to leave their homes could well be a [war crime](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/israel-opt-israeli-army-threats-ordering-residents-of-northern-gaza-to-leave-may-amount-to-war-crimes/), according to Amnesty International representative Saleh Higazi, who noted after the flyers started to be dropped on Gaza in October: “Deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian property and infrastructure are war crimes, as are disproportionate attacks. The International Criminal Court has an active investigation into the situation in Palestine and should urgently investigate these attacks as war crimes.”

“Israel’s genocidal intent is clear,” Rutgers University law professor Noura Erekat told me in an interview this week. “Any ‘warnings’ are meaningless and inadequate, because it’s clear that the aim is to drive the Palestinians out of Gaza, or force them into its southernmost region.”

These “warnings” are not credible efforts to reduce the number of civilian deaths, for many reasons:

* Israel remains the “occupying power” in Gaza, despite its 2005 withdrawal, because it still exercises key elements of authority over the Strip as it maintains total control of its borders. The use of force by a state is only allowed by international law and conventions in proportion to the force used against it, and international law also prohibits bombing occupied lands.
* The Fourth Geneva Convention requires the occupying power to ensure the food and medical needs of the civilian population under its occupation. Israel does exactly the opposite.
* If Israel really wanted to kill or capture individual Hamas leaders, it has many other options than collapsing entire neighbourhoods on their inhabitants.
* If Israel really wanted to safeguard civilians, it would direct them to safe roads that lead to safe areas, rather than killing them as they try to flee south.
* No safe places exist in all of Gaza, so asking people to flee for safety is a cruel hoax.
* Thousands of civilians are unable to leave for the south even if they wanted to, due to their physical condition or their status in hospitals or schools turned into shelters.
* Considering those who refuse to leave their homes, hospitals, or shelters as accomplices to terrorism is a form of collective punishment that is prohibited by international law.
* Even if Israel warns civilians to move, it does not have the right to attack them. Omar Shakir, the Israel and Palestine director for Human Rights Watch, told The New York Times recently: “Many who left found that they were still in the line of fire … Giving warning does not absolve parties from the requirement to protect civilians.”

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Amnesty International noted in 2014, after examining Israeli attacks against alleged military targets within civilian areas of Gaza: “In those cases where Amnesty International has been able to determine the possible intended target, it has found either that it was not in fact a military objective, that the devastating toll on civilians and civilian property was out of all proportion to any military advantage from the attack and/or that Israel failed to take necessary precautions to minimize harm to civilians and damage to civilian objects.”

Israel’s charade of advising residents in Gaza to leave their homes for their safety looks to informed analysts like a sign of Israel’s intent to empty all or most of Gaza by driving its residents into Sinai or elsewhere – otherwise known as ethnic cleansing, even genocide. Palestinians see in this a gruesome repeat of their 1948 Nakba which saw half the Palestinian population become permanent refugees.

Lex Takkenberg, who for decades was UNRWA’s general counsel and chief of ethics and is now a senior adviser to the NGO Arab Renaissance for Development and Democracy, said in an interview, “Beyond revenge and trying to destroy Hamas, the Israeli government sees a golden opportunity to rid itself of Gaza once and for all.

“Israel cannot easily pursue such ethnic cleansing and genocidal goals while the world watches the immense suffering of Palestinian civilians. They might need, with US backing, a humanitarian pretext to push many or all Gazans into Sinai. Or they keep creating panic, as they did in 1948, this time by cutting all communications and depriving Gazans of food, water, or medicine, while the bombings continue. This forces desperate and fearful people to move elsewhere to survive.”

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If this is Israel’s aim, the world can see through its stunts like flyers asking Palestinians to move to safety – when Israel has made sure there is no safety for them in Gaza. Israel’s parliament has passed an amendment to the country’s counterterrorism law that introduces the “consumption of terrorist materials” as a new criminal offence.

The bill, which was approved by a 13-4 majority in the Knesset, is a temporary two-year measure that amends Article 24 of the counterterrorism law to ban the “systematic and continuous consumption of publications of a terrorist organization under circumstances that indicate identification with the terrorist organization”.

It identifies the Palestinian group [Hamas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-tothe-palestinian-group) and the ISIL (ISIS) group as the “terrorist” organisations to which the offence applies. It grants the justice minister the authority to add more organisations to the list, in agreement with the Ministry of Defence and with the approval of the Knesset’s Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee.

The “consumption of terrorist materials” offence carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison.

The bill outlines that it is aimed at tackling the phenomenon of “lone-wolf terrorism”, or the radicalisation of individuals through media consumption. Human rights groups in Israel have said it is tantamount to thought policing.

“This law is one of the most intrusive and draconian legislative measures ever passed by the Israeli Knesset since it makes thoughts subject to criminal punishment,” said Adalah, the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. It warned that the amendment would criminalise “even passive social media use” amid a climate of surveillance and curtailment of free speech targeting Palestinian citizens of Israel.

“This legislation encroaches upon the sacred realm of an individual’s personal thoughts and beliefs and significantly amplifies state surveillance of social media use,” the statement added. Adalah is sending a petition to the Supreme Court to challenge the bill.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel also slammed the amendment, saying it has “no precedence” in democratic countries, and that its ambiguity ultimately leaves its interpretation to the enforcing authorities.

Some 1.2 million Palestinians hold Israeli citizenship and constitute about 20 percent of the country’s population.

Since the war began on October 7, Palestinian citizens of Israel have been subject to an unprecedented campaign of arrests for speech-related offences, mostly over social media posts. Dozens have been [suspended](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/15/from-friend-to-enemy-palestinians-in-israel-suspended-from-jobs-over-war) or expelled from jobs, universities and colleges.

Knesset legal adviser Gur Bligh, who had raised concerns about the bill’s previous version, said that adding a provision that specifies that the individual should also identify with the group publishing the content is sufficient to avoid “excessive criminalisation”, Israeli media reported.

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At least 10,569 Palestinians, including 4,324 children, have been killed in the Gaza Strip as Israel continues its ground and aerial offensive, which has reduced entire neighbourhoods to rubble. An estimated 1.5 million people are now internally displaced in Gaza, according to the United Nations.

More than 1,400 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in an attack by Hamas on southern Israel on October 7.

A humanitarian aid convoy has come under fire in Gaza City, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Two trucks were damaged and a driver lightly wounded as the ICRC convoy, which was carrying “lifesaving medical supplies to health facilities including to Al Quds hospital of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society,” was hit by fire, the medical NGO said on Tuesday. The ICRC said it was “deeply troubled” about the incident and reminded the warring “parties of their obligation under international humanitarian law to respect and protect humanitarian workers at all times”.

The statement did not identify the source of the fire on the convoy, which consisted of five trucks and two ICRC vehicles.Following the incident, the convoy altered its route to reach al-Shifa Hospital, where it delivered the medical supplies, the ICRC said.  The convoy then accompanied six ambulances with critically wounded patients to the Rafah crossing from Gaza to Egypt.

“These are not the conditions under which humanitarian personnel can work,” said William Schomburg, head of the ICRC sub-delegation in Gaza.

“Ensuring that vital aid can reach medical facilities is a legal obligation under international humanitarian law.”

ICRC, a neutral organisation based in Geneva, has escorted patients and transported freed captives out of Gaza.

Since October 7, the Israeli bombardment has killed more than 10,000 Palestinians, about 40 percent of them children, according to counts by Gaza’s health officials.

Nearly two-thirds of Gaza’s 2.3 million residents are internally displaced, according to United Nations figures, with thousands seeking refuge at hospitals, including in makeshift canvas shelters in their car parks. Hospitals across the enclave have come under fire, with many struggling to continue operating amid shortages of fuel and medical supplies.The UN says Gaza’s health, sanitation, water and food services are nearing “breaking point”.

Over the past month and a half, Israel’s genocidal goals in Gaza have become increasingly clear. Not only is the Israeli army mass-slaughtering civilians, but it is also carpet-bombing the enclave with the aim of destroying all civilian infrastructure meant to sustain life.

Hospitals, schools, water treatment plans, any source of electricity – including solar panels – warehouses and farms have been targeted. This has rendered the strip unliveable, forcing the Palestinians there into another Nakba.

But it is not only in Gaza that Israel hopes to get rid of the Palestinian population. The Israeli ethnic cleansing effort extends to the occupied West Bank where Israel is moving forward with a similar – albeit a more surreptitious – plan.

Annexation plans and a problem

To separate the continuing genocide in Gaza from the broader Palestinian context is to deny that the target of Israeli crimes is neither Hamas nor the Gaza Strip, but rather the Palestinian existence in historical Palestine as a whole.

This is not an imagined Palestinian fear, but a reality that even the forefathers of the Israeli state constantly and openly admitted to.

“There is no way besides transferring the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries, and to transfer all of them, save perhaps for [the Arabs of] Bethlehem, Nazareth and Old Jerusalem,” Joseph Weitz, the director of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) wrote in his diary in 1940. “Not one village must be left, not one [Bedouin] tribe. And only after this transfer will the country be able to absorb millions of our brothers and the Jewish problem will cease to exist. There is no other solution,” he concluded.

The Jewish militias that carried out a campaign of massive ethnic cleansing of Palestinians to establish Israel did not take over the West Bank and Gaza in 1948 not because they did not desire it, but because they lacked the capacity. International pressure and the limit of their own military capabilities prevented it.

At the same time, these territories conveniently served as destinations for the Palestinians expelled from the Mediterranean coastline, cities such as Yaffa, Safad, Lydd and the villages around them, which the militias had taken over.

The war of 1967 gave Israel the opportunity to fulfil its goal to rule over all of historical Palestine. It occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, in addition to Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula and Syria’s Golan Heights, which remains occupied to this day.

Since then, various plans have been drawn up for annexing a part of, or the whole of, the West Bank and Gaza while pushing out the Palestinian population either into isolated bantustans or towards neighbouring Jordan and Egypt.

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The building of more than 150 illegal Israeli settlements and 120 outposts throughout the occupied West Bank is a policy that stems from these plans. It was also the plan in Gaza until 2005 when Israel dismantled its settlements and besieged the strip two years later.

Under the pretext of “protecting” the 700,000-strong settler population, Israel has encroached on more and more Palestinian land, expelling more and more Palestinians from their communities and denying them access to their farms, grazing land and olive groves. This has harmed Palestinian livelihood and self-sufficiency.

It has also emboldened and encouraged settlers to harass, torture and kill Palestinians in their own land. This, combined with policies aimed at strangulating the Palestinian economy and pushing the majority of Palestinians into a state of constant precarity, has the ultimate goal of forcing the Palestinian population to “voluntarily” leave.

Preparing for the Nakba

Over the past year, the Israeli government under Benjamin Netanyahu ramped up these policies. By the time Hamas launched its October 7 offensive, the situation in the occupied West Bank had long been intolerable.

The year 2023 was shaping to be [the deadliest for Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/5/israeli-troops-kill-two-palestinians-in-occupied-west-bank-clash) in the occupied West Bank since the UN began documenting fatalities in 2006. By October 7, Israeli forces and settlers had killed some 248 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians, including at least 45 children.

The Israeli military, in coordination with the Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces, undertook violent raids and massacres across the West Bank with a focus on the northern districts of Nablus, Jenin, and Tulkarem.

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The number of settler attacks on Palestinian communities also skyrocketed and grew in both scope and violence. In February, settlers carried out a pogrom in the Palestinian town of Huwara.

In June, the Israeli government and its Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich announced new measures facilitating and accelerating the annexation of Palestinian land. By July, the approved expansions of Israeli settlements had [reached record highs](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-advances-peak-number-west-bank-settlement-plans-2023-watchdog-2023-07-13/).

The Palestinian economy – already on the verge of disaster – suffered even more from the destruction of infrastructure and the curbing of the freedom of movement by Israeli forces and settlers.

Demolitions of Palestinian homes and livelihood structures increased. More than 750 such buildings had been destroyed by October 1, displacing more than 1,100 Palestinians.

All these processes, aimed at the ultimate expulsion of Palestinians and the annexation of their land, were already going in full force before October 7. Israel then used the opportunity following Hamas’s October 7 attack to accelerate them.

And while until then, the “death to Arabs” chants could be heard publicly mostly at settlers’ gatherings, after October 7, a majority of Israelis felt quite comfortable with voicing openly this sentiment between themselves and to the world.

Over the past 50 days, Israel [has killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/26/israeli-forces-carry-out-deadly-raids-in-the-west-bank-amid-gaza-truce) [249](https://snd.ps/post/114308/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-249-%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B6%D9%81%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B0-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%B7%D9%88%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%89) Palestinians in the West Bank, including at least 60 children. The Israeli raids on Palestinian villages, towns and refugee camps across the occupied West Bank have intensified in scope, severity and the use of lethal weapons, including automatic rifles, tanks and [“Maoz” suicide drones](https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-759752).

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We have reached record highs of Palestinians arrested and put under administrative detention – Israel’s formalised version of kidnapping. At least 3,260 Palestinians have been arrested across the occupied West Bank since October 7, including many children. The 150 Palestinians released so far under the hostage exchange deal are also likely to be re-arrested.

[Reports](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/11/1/he-threw-up-blood-palestinian-detainees-face-abuse-in-israeli-custody) and video evidence of abuse and torture in detention have multiplied. Palestinians are also routinely harassed and beaten even within their homes or in the streets.

Encouraged and armed by the Israeli authorities, the Israeli settlers have also [become even more violent](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/30/bilal-went-out-to-harvest-his-olives-an-israeli-settler-shot-him). They have ramped up forced expulsions of Palestinian Bedouin communities in the south near the Jordan Valley and in the central areas near Ramallah, displacing more than 1,000 people since October 7.

These practices have also had a [devastating](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/29/there-is-zero-work-occupied-west-bank-paralysed-as-economy-stalls) impact on the Palestinian economy. The Israeli army has closed major checkpoints across the occupied West Bank, paralysing transportation almost completely. Day labourers have struggled to earn a living, while food stocks are dwindling and [imports](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/29/there-is-zero-work-occupied-west-bank-paralysed-as-economy-stalls) are held for longer at Israeli ports.

The health sector is also in a state of crisis, unable to handle the spiking number of injured people alongside patients. To make matters worse, the Israeli army has also taken to besieging hospitals in the West Bank.

These tactics all serve to spread fear and despair among the Palestinians, ultimately preparing them for annexation and expulsion.

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Eliminating resistance

Today, we are witnessing a continuation of the Nakba in Gaza and the West Bank. The Israeli goal is to ultimately expel the Palestinians and attempt to assimilate the survivors, as it tried to do with the 1948 Palestinians.

Today, those survivors have Israeli citizenship, but are treated as second-class citizens and often exposed to discriminatory and violent practices by Jewish-Israeli citizens and the authorities.

Facing this looming catastrophe, the Palestinians in the West Bank are left to fend for themselves.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) is the only Palestinian actor with access to weapons, but it has done nothing to protect Palestinians against Israeli violence. The 10,500-strong National Security Forces are trained by the United States and Jordan in policing, not in confronting another armed force.

Worse still, these forces and the intelligence units, have directly assisted Israel in attacking and dismantling any pockets of armed resistance in the West Bank in recent years. Contrary to Israeli propaganda claims, the youth that have decided to take up arms – mostly concentrated in Jenin and Nablus – are not part of Hamas; some are members of Fatah or are defectors from the PA’s forces, but many have no political affiliation at all.

Since October 7, the Israeli army has focused on eradicating these resistance groups so that the civilian population in the West Bank would be completely defenceless in the face of violence, dispossession and expulsion.

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But as Israel ramps up the violence, the Palestinian resistance is coming to the fore. The Palestinians will not stop struggling against occupation and apartheid simply because they cannot afford to.

No one wants to live on the brink of survival, pushed and kept there at gunpoint by a foreign regime.

The least the world can do is stop falling for Israeli propaganda and uphold the Palestinian right to resist its coloniser and oppressor in pursuit of liberation. This is the time to muster up the bravery to speak up and stop Israel’s genocidal drive. This is where the history books offer us the sobering recognition that violent apartheid states built on massacres are neither legitimate, nor sustainable. Israel’s sadistic war on Gaza, the culmination of a long series of criminal policies, may well prove suicidal in the long term and lead to the demise of the mighty “Jewish State”.

Indeed, Israel’s deliberate, industrial-scale murder of the Palestinian people under the pretext of “self-defence” won’t enhance its security or secure its future. Rather, it will produce greater insecurity and instability, further isolate Israel and undermine its chances for long-term survival in a predominantly hostile region.

In truth, I never thought Israel could have much of a future in the Middle East without shedding its colonial regime and embracing normal statehood. For a short while in the early 1990s, it seemed as if Israel was changing direction towards some form of normalcy, albeit dependent on the United States. It engaged the Palestinians and Arab states in the region in a “peace process” that promised mutual existence under favourable American auspices.

But Israel’s colonial nature dominated its behaviour at each and every turn. It wasted countless opportunities to end its occupation and live in peace with its neighbours. To paraphrase Israeli diplomat Abba Eban’s infamous quip, Israel “never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity”. Instead of ending its occupation, it doubled down on its colonisation project in the occupied Palestinian territories. It has multiplied the number of illegal Jewish settlements and settlers on stolen Palestinian lands and networked them through special bypass roads and other planning projects, creating a dual system, a superior, dominating one for the Jews and an inferior one for the Palestinians. As one apartheid was dismantled in South Africa, another was erected in Palestine

In the absence of peace and in the shadow of colonisation, the country has slid further towards fascism, enshrining Jewish supremacy into its laws and extending it to all of historic Palestine, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. In no time, the fanatical and far-right parties gained momentum and took over the reins of power under the opportunistic leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, undermining Israel’s own institutions, and all chances of peace based on coexistence between two peoples.

They rejected all compromise and have begun devouring the entirety of historic Palestine, expanding the illegal Jewish settlement on stolen Palestinian lands throughout the occupied West Bank in an attempt to squeeze the Palestinians out. They also tightened their siege of the Gaza Strip, the world’s largest open-air prison, and dropped all pretence of ever allowing it to unite with its Palestinian hinterland in a sovereign Palestinian state.

Then came the October 7 attack – a rude wake-up call reminding Israel that its colonial enterprise is neither tenable nor sustainable, that it could not lock in two million people and throw away the key, that it must address the root causes of the conflict with the Palestinians, namely their dispossession, occupation and siege.

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But the Netanyahu regime, true to its nature, turned the tragedy into a rallying cry and doubled down on its racist dehumanisation of the Palestinians, paving the way for a genocidal war. It declared war on “evil”, by which it meant, not only Hamas, but also the people of Gaza. One Israeli leader after another, starting with the president himself, implicated all the Palestinians in the gruesome attack, claiming there are no innocents in Gaza.

Since then, Israel turned vengeful, tribal and adamant on destruction and expansion with total disregard for basic human decency and international law. Israel’s colonial war became a war on hospitals, schools, mosques and residential buildings, financed, armed and protected by the United States and other Western lackeys and killing thousands of Palestinian civilians – children, doctors, teachers, journalists, men and women, old and young, as if they were enemy combatants.

But this foreign tribe has no chance of surviving among all the indigenous people of the region, who have coalesced more than ever before against the bloody intruder. Israel can no longer use its fanciful theological claims to justify its violent racist practices. God does not sanction the slaughter of innocent children. And nor should Israel’s American and Western patrons.

As Western public opinion turns against Israel, its cynical leaders will also change course, if not to preserve their moral standing, then to safeguard their interests in the greater Middle East. The change in the French position, demanding Israel stop the killing of children in Gaza, is an indicator of things to come.

Israel has no good options after its bad war ends. This may be its last chance to pull away from the brink, stop the war, embrace US President Joe Biden’s vision of a two-state solution, impractical as it is today, and accept America’s red lines for Gaza: no to reoccupation, no to ethnic cleansing and no to shrinking its territories. But Netanyahu, along with his fanatic coalition, who’ve long taken America for granted, have once again ignored – read rejected – America’s advice to the detriment of both sides.

Long before the war on Gaza, a leading Israeli journalist, Ari Shavit, predicted the demise of Israel “as we know it”, if it continued on the same destructive path. And last week, Ami Ayalon, a former head of Israel’s Shin Bet secret service, [warned](https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1575796/middle-east) that the government’s war and territorial expansion will lead to “the end of Israel” as we know it. Both have written books warning Israel about the dark future ahead if it continues its occupation.

Like all other violent intruders, from the ancient crusaders to the modern-day colonial powers, this last colonial entity, Israel, as we know it, is destined to vanish, regardless of how much Palestinian, Arab and Israeli blood it sheds.

The Gaza war may turn out to be the beginning of the end, but not for Palestine. Just as apartheid South Africa’s bloody supremacist regime imploded, so will Israel’s, sooner or later.

Many of us did not dare go out on the first day of the temporary truce in Gaza. We were too afraid it would not hold. On the second day, we gathered our courage and stepped out.

The daylight illuminated the destruction caused by Israel’s non-stop bombardment of Gaza over the past seven weeks. We did not recognise our neighbourhoods and streets

There are whole stretches of land where there is not a single building standing. Nothing has been spared: houses, residential towers, shops, bakeries, cafes, schools, universities, libraries, children’s centres, mosques, churches.

The destruction was the first thing we saw. Then came the pain.

Amid the panic, alarm and scurrying to survive the bombs, many of us did not fully grasp the loss of loved ones, the wounds sustained, the lives, bodies and dreams shattered and destroyed. Many could not bury their dead. Many could not grieve.

As Sabri Farra, a medical student from Gaza, [wrote](https://twitter.com/sabrifarra24/status/1728003462502223948?s=46) in a post on social media: “The word catastrophe is insufficient to describe this. It is a collective inferno of extermination against the Palestinian people.”

I left my home in Gaza City during the first week of the war. I was lucky to have made it. On the same day, the Israeli army [bombed a convoy](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/dozens-killed-while-fleeing-gaza-homes-as-israel-conducts-ground-raids) of evacuees, killing at least 70 people.

The road that Israel designated as a “safe route” for people to evacuate from the north to the south has been anything but safe. Throughout the past seven weeks, people who made it south reported seeing harrowing scenes of bodies of civilians lying everywhere. The horror was documented on videos circulated on social media.

When the truce came into effect, more Palestinians decided to evacuate from the north, hoping it would be safe to do so.

But as they made their way south, they encountered Israeli army checkpoints, where they were stopped and searched and their belongings confiscated. Women in my family and friends told me that Israeli soldiers even took their gold. They were forced to walk with their hands in the air, carrying nothing but their IDs.

Those who made it through were lucky, as Israeli soldiers have also been systematically abducting evacuees. I have friends with siblings who were taken and are still missing after trying to evacuate through the designated “safe route”. The Israelis arrested even Palestinian poet [Mosab Abu Toha](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyvHpWCtbqU). He was let go only after a massive international campaign for his release. We still don’t know the true number of those who have been abducted.

The walk from the north to the south is almost eight hours if you don’t stop. This is a trip many Palestinians are struggling to make as they are too old, too young, too tired, too starved and dehydrated, injured or disabled.

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While going north to south can be risky and could lead to abduction, going in the opposite direction can cost you your life. The Israeli army dropped leaflets on us warning us not to attempt that trip. Israeli soldiers killed at least two people trying to go back to the north on the first day of the truce.

I, like hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, am banned from returning to my home in Gaza City. I am heartbroken that I cannot go and check on my house to see if it is still standing. Many others who have family and friends shot in the streets or stuck under the rubble cannot go retrieve their bodies and give them a proper burial.

Israel controls everything: where we go, what we do, how much we eat or drink, whether we can save the wounded or those stuck under the rubble for days. It even decides how we tend to our dead. Its army is forcing more and more of us into an ever-shrinking space before it resumes the indiscriminate bombardment and the genocide.

The trucks of humanitarian aid Israel is allowing to enter Gaza cannot alleviate the humanitarian disaster. We are barely surviving. If the bombs don’t kill us, the hunger, the thirst, the lack of medicine, the cold will.

This pause has been more painful than the 50 days before it. It is the first time the people of Gaza were able to look at their open wounds, martyred children, slaughtered families, destroyed homes and shattered lives. Just imagine living for six days just to prepare and wait for your death on the seventh.

Israel before October 7 was a riven nation. After nine months of mass demonstrations against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his judicial coup, polarisation was at an all-time high.

The bitterness and determination to bring down his government had galvanised more than half of the country. Remarkably the protests were joined by former officers from the army, Mossad and Shabak, as well as employees of leading high-tech companies which make up the backbone of the Israeli military industrial complex (MIC).

It looked like Netanyahu would fall within months. As all eyes were focused on a much-awaited verdict of the Supreme Court on one of his government’s judicial legislation changes, no one was paying much attention to Gaza. Despite intelligence warnings from Egypt, Hamas’s attack on October 7 came as a surprise.

To fully comprehend the shock it inflicted on the Israeli society, one needs to go back to the point of creation of the Israeli nation.

A nation-building institution

The building of the Israeli army started well before the creation of Israel. The Zionist leadership in British-ruled Palestine was well aware of the need for a modern military force to take the land from its indigenous population. Zionist organisations controlled [less than 7 percent](https://www.un.org/unispal/history2/origins-and-evolution-of-the-palestine-problem/part-i-1917-1947/) of the Palestinian territories as late as 1946.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, three competing organisations – Haggana, Irgun and Lehi – secretly and illicitly trained and armed tens of thousands of fighters and built rudimentary but efficient armament plants. By the end of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, their ranks swelled to 120,000 troops, as thousands of British soldiers who had fought in World War II and survivors of Nazi Germany’s death camps joined them. During the 1948 war, this formidable force easily defeated the few thousand untrained irregulars from Palestine and the rather inferior forces from the surrounding Arab polities – Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Iraq. As a result, some 750,000 Palestinians were expelled while the new state of Israel came to control 78 percent of Palestine.

Newly created Israel had a large army but had no nation. The 650,000 Jews within the new polity were far from a homogenous group: They spoke numerous languages, came from diverse cultures and did not share a political ideology.

This was immediately noted by Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. The nation he would create would be a nation at arms, in a permanent state of neither peace nor war. To make this mode of existence into Israel’s modus vivendi, a major social engineering project lasting decades would follow, requiring constant renewal.

Thus, just as the Israeli state was created by the Zionist army, so too was the Israeli nation. After all, it was the largest, richest, and most powerful institution in Israel. Drafting all male adults, as well as many women, created a common experience on the basis of which common identity started to emerge, grounded in conflict with the Palestinians and the Arab nations.

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Through a long series of wars initiated by Israel, as well as more limited military campaigns in between, a national identity was created totally dependent on the Israeli army. Other issues could divide the Israelis, but – almost – all were members of the largest club in society, one which cut across class, culture, language and religious boundaries. The army became an organisation trusted by all Israeli Jews, as opposed to all other, civic and state organisations, which divided rather than united Israelis.

Israel became a warrior democracy akin to a modern Sparta, with a citizen army of Jews and a small minority of Druze and Bedouins.

From a professional army to a colonial police force

The army in Israel was elevated in public opinion to such heights that even when the Egyptian and Syrian forces dealt it a devastating blow in the 1973 war, the blame was mainly put on the politicians, like Prime Minister Golda Meir and Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, rather than on army officers.

The partial defeat was an early sign of an important process which had started in 1967, transforming the army into a glorified colonial police force. Its troops, instead of focusing on the threat of fighting back foreign armies, were tasked with subjugating more than a million Palestinians in the newly occupied West Bank and Gaza. As the Israeli state started settling these lands illegally, the military was deployed to guard and facilitate the process.

Another factor that further accelerated this transformation was peace-making and normalisation with Arab states achieved with the help of Israel’s closest ally, the United States, pressuring these nations. These diplomatic efforts totally disregarded the Palestinians.

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Normalisation started with Egypt signing a peace treaty in 1979, which was followed by Jordan in 1994. Then came the Abraham Accords of 2020 with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan also normalising relations, and Saudi Arabia declaring plans to follow suit.

This process removed the threat of military attacks from neighbouring Arab countries on Israel, allowing the Israeli army to focus on suppressing the Palestinian population.

More confident than ever in its security arrangements, the Israeli state became also much more extreme in its policies towards the Palestinians. This escalated even further in 2023, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned to power, buoyed by the Abraham Accords and supported by extreme far-right settler parties.

His government started to move even more aggressively towards the final stage of the Zionist project – that of dispossessing Palestinians of the 12 percent of historical Palestine still under their partial control.

Recently, as tension heightened in the West Bank due to settler pogroms, thousands of Israeli troops were moved there from the envelope around Gaza, to protect settlers in their continuing attacks on Palestinians and facilitate the expulsion of Palestinian families from their land.

Amid this escalation, Netanyahu continued to believe that trouble from Gaza is most unlikely, as Hamas and Islamic Jihad could not possibly face the might of the Israeli army, with its technological superiority and vast intelligence apparatus. This only fitted his policy of helping Hamas in order to weaken the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinians were a disorganised, poor, and isolated nation, without a proper army, with no heavy weapons of any kind – what was there to worry about?

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The shock of October 7

But then, out of the blue, came Hamas’s attack of October 7 and the sky caved in. A small Palestinian force of just more than 2,000 fighters moved in to take over several military bases and strongholds in Israel’s south. Like in 1973, the surprise attack caught the Israeli army unprepared, with some Israeli soldiers still in their underwear and without their rifles when they came under fire.

Within hours, using a combination of missile attacks, drones, small arms, motorcycles, and power gliders, Hamas’s fighters were able to defeat all the forces defending the Gaza theatre, kill hundreds of Israeli soldiers, carry out massacres of civilians, and return to Gaza with more than 250 hostages, which they planned to exchange for the thousands of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

After the initial shock, the Israeli army struggled to launch a coordinated response. Some back-up units took hours to arrive on the scene and when they did, the battles with Hamas’s fighters were anything but well-thought-out. According to [reports](https://mondoweiss.net/2023/10/a-growing-number-of-reports-indicate-israeli-forces-responsible-for-israeli-civilian-and-military-deaths-following-october-7-attack/), civilians held as hostages and Israeli troops may have been killed in the [crossfire](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTQcjyhPOIk) or due to the use of indiscriminate firing, air raids and tanks to target Hamas fighters in the kibbutzim. The military was unable to re-establish full control over the south for several days.

This was perhaps unsurprising given that the Israeli army has never won a battle decisively since 1967 and has not fought a regular army since 1973. When facing small resistance groups, like the PLO, Hezbollah, or Hamas, its success has been rather limited.

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The reason for this is the transformation of the Israeli army into a brutal colonial police force that for decades has mostly fought unarmed men, women and children. It is no longer trained to fight a war and continuously underestimates the capabilities of its enemies.

What was especially shocking for Israelis about Hamas’s attack was the fact that army spokespeople and commanders admitted to the utter chaos and the innumerable mistakes made by all involved in the military response. The Israelis realised their army was not able to protect them, despite the enormous budget it has, the huge number of soldiers it retains, the advanced technologies it employs, etc. That the painful defeat was dealt by such an inferior opponent is the most hurtful insult to Israeli militarised identity.

As most Israeli adults, men and women, served in the army, their identity, both personal and socio-national, owes more to it than to any other institution in Israel. When the army fails so dramatically, it is a failure shared by all Israelis. The defeat of the Israeli military is a defeat of all Israeli Jews.

The socio-political change in Israel was immediate and all-encompassing, turning the Jewish Israelis sharply to the racist right that many of them opposed before the Gaza crisis. Even famous academics, like the sociologist Sami Shalom Chetrit, found it acceptable and necessary to write, just two days after the attack: “First I wish to clarify: All Hamas members, from the head to the lowest murderer, will all die. I dislike wars (one was enough for me) but I am not a pacifist. I would shoot them myself.”

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This is typical of many reactions of the professional middle class, and is certainly not the most disturbing. One is tempted to think that this was written in the heat of the moment, but this is not so – the reaction to the Hamas attack, and the deep humiliation it caused to all Jewish Israelis has pushed them to a position which before was held by the far-right settler militias carrying out the pogroms, against all Palestinians.

“Everyone in Gaza is Hamas” is a normalised by-line of many of the journalists and columnists right now, and the stakes are raised daily and ratchetted up, with the full support of the population.

I do not believe this is either short-term or reversible. And there are no signs of any soul-searching in the Israeli public now that it is crystal clear that there is no military solution to the colonial conflict, unless Israel decides to undertake the elimination of everyone in Gaza.

This genocidal option has already been floated around by some Israeli ministers – one even suggested using nuclear weapons for the task. Unfortunately, as activist and journalist Orly Noy [pointed out](https://www.mekomit.co.il/%D7%94%D7%A1%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%98%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%96%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%94-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%A1%D7%97%D7%A8%D7%A8%D7%AA-%D7%A9%D7%9C-%D7%93%D7%A2%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%A7%D7%94%D7%9C-%D7%94%D7%99%D7%A9/) in a recent article, large sections of Israeli society have also embraced it.

An internal document dated October 13 leaked to the Israeli media lays bare the Israeli endgame after the “expected defeat of Hamas”. It outlines three phases of the planned Israeli takeover of the Gaza Strip which include a bombing campaign focused on the north, a ground attack to clear the underground network of tunnels and bunkers and finally the expulsion of Palestinian civilians to Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula with no option for return.

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Over the past few days, we have been witnessing this three-phase programme take shape in the terrible landscape of the Israeli destruction of Gaza. At the time of writing, Israel has killed more than 10,000 Palestinians and injured tens of thousands, apart from nearly [3,000 missing](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/10/this-israel-war-has-no-mercy-gaza-civil-rescuers-say) under the rubble of destroyed buildings.

Israel’s ire knows no bounds. The Israeli dehumanisation of Palestinians is not a sign of social strength, but of a terminal ailment of the social fabric of Zionism. It is what will bring its dissolution, I believe.

The Israeli army, the author and the executioner of the 1948 Nakba and the 1967 Naksa now carries out the 2023 Nakba. It is a terrifying act of genocide and ethnic cleansing, unlikely to be the last.

There are still more than four million Palestinians between the river and the sea. The plan to expel them has been written a long time ago. The leaders of the West, in their [political and moral criminality](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/29/in-dehumanising-the-palestinians-biden-has-surpassed-trump), have enthusiastically signed up to this plan, without even reading it. If they think this will help Israel and bring stability to the region, they must be very deluded. “The residents of Gaza, who saw fit to turn the hospitals into terrorist nests in an attempt to take advantage of Western morality, are the ones who brought their destruction upon themselves – terrorism must be eliminated everywhere and in any way. Attacking terrorist headquarters located inside a hospital is the right, and even the duty of the IDF.”

Upon initial examination, one might think these are sentences written by extremists or fanatics, giving an army permission and encouragement to bomb hospitals. What is shocking is not only the statement itself, but that it is signed publicly by dozens of Israeli doctors and shared widely on various social media platforms.Instead of immediate outrage and condemnation, the statement resulted in what some called a “legitimate” public debate within the Israeli medical community, to bomb or not to bomb Palestinian hospitals.

We, six Palestinian physicians working within the Israeli healthcare system, are sickened to our core by the statements made by some of our colleagues, Israeli doctors we work with, calling on the Israeli army to bomb hospitals in the Gaza Strip.

Regrettably, we cannot say we were surprised. As doctors trained and practising in this system, we are all too aware of its embedded racism, militarism and hypocrisy covered up by a false image of a medical sector where Arabs and Jews work together in harmony and respect.

The recent letter by our Israeli colleagues issued at a time of an unfolding massacres is a telling example of what the Israeli health system is really like. It is a system where some doctors, shamelessly and publicly, adopt the role of consultants to the army. They use their position and profession, not to save lives, not to preach about the devastating effects of war on civilians on both sides and the necessity of finding a peaceful political solution, but actually to validate attacks on medical facilities, knowing full well that this means the killing of fellow doctors and patients.

At the same time, this health system has adopted a distinctly McCarthyist witch hunt approach towards us, Palestinian physicians. As a result, we cannot engage in any intellectual or moral conversation about the war. We are expected to condemn Hamas and join the patriotic Israeli military frenzy, while watching silently our Jewish colleagues cheering for the killing of innocent Palestinian civilians and endorsing the tightening of the blockade.

We drive to work every day, listening to the devastating news about the death toll and destruction in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. When we arrive, we put on that mask of “everything is fine” and endure the daily loyalty test and scrutinising eyes of our colleagues. During coffee breaks, we are forced to listen with a straight face to our Israeli colleagues casually dropping phrases like “flattening Gaza” and discussing the merits of displacing its people.

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We are also seeing our Palestinian colleagues being interrogated, fired and shamed without a valid reason. We are very aware of how the hospitals and clinics we work in have become disciplining arenas. In a “normal” place, we would be in the streets, demanding an end to the war and massacres and advocating for a peaceful solution. We would use our profession and position to denounce the inhumane attacks on healthcare workers, facilities and civilian infrastructure.

We are deeply aware that the situation is much more complex than choosing sides and we know that every life lost is a tragedy, whether it is Israeli or Palestinian. But precisely because of this, we also know that history did not begin on October 7 and that our people have been displaced, killed, injured and humiliated for decades, with the full endorsement and involvement of our fellow Israeli doctors.

We come to work every day, knowing that our people are killed, tortured and maimed by illegal Israeli settlers and the Israeli army in the occupied West Bank land. However, we also know that we cannot ask our fellow Israeli doctors “Do you condemn?”

We have been forced to live in a coercive environment where Palestinian death is normalised and often celebrated, but Israeli Jewish death is seen as a tragedy that cannot be accepted and necessitates revenge.

This is the reality, where Israeli national security is of high value but Palestinian national security is a dark joke. It is Jewish supremacy in life and death that is so normalised, particularly at such tragic times when it explodes to uncover the true face of our Israeli colleagues and sadly also of the Western world and its medical institutions.

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The normalisation of Palestinian dehumanisation reflects the complicity of the entire world in the massacres which are taking place in the Gaza Strip.

The medical profession has a long and rich history of opposing war and its devastating effects on health. It has stood up against racism, colonialism and imperial expansion, which have driven deadly wars.

We can vividly remember the massive organising of doctors against the US wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. We saw how doctors in the US, in the aftermath of 9/11, organised to oppose and lobby against the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, knowing it would lead to more deaths and not security.

But we are also aware that the majority of our fellow Israeli Jewish colleagues are on the opposite side of this urge to protect civilians, as the entire Israeli health system has been mobilised to join the war effort and support it.

The Israeli health system not only does not oppose Israel’s war, occupation and apartheid but also prevents Palestinian doctors living in Israel from speaking up and organising against them.

In this tragic and regrettable environment we live and work in, we need to hide our names and write anonymously to state the obvious, following our professional duty and oath. We have reached such a level of demoralisation and dehumanisation that we are forced to watch massacres, with Palestinian children burned by Israeli phosphorus bombs and entire populations starved of food and water, without batting an eye, as if everything is just “normal”.

Not only are we barred from volunteering to provide medical aid to the innocent Palestinian civilians, but we are also not allowed to speak up against those state crimes without risking our jobs and safety.

We want this letter to serve as an apology to our Palestinian people and colleagues in the Gaza Strip, exposing our profound powerlessness and complete impotence.We and the world have failed you.We can only hope that in future calmer days, we can bear witness and speak and write about the conditions that have allowed for massacres to unfold and to take part in healing those who survived.

 “From the river to the sea, Israel will be free.”

OK, that is not the way it is supposed to go, is it? But at this moment of war and mass death, this proposition is worth reflecting on: Palestine cannot be free without Israel – or at least the Israelis – being free. True freedom between the river and the sea can only be achieved by breaking free from the chains of settler-colonialism but also the narrow bounds of the nation-state. Before I explain further, let me get into the current debate over the slogan “river to the sea”.

When most Israelis, and no doubt a significant number of Palestinians, hear the phrase “river to the sea,” they imagine it in exclusivist terms. This is not surprising.

The zero-sum understanding of the nation-state – a specific territory under the exclusive control of one national community, has been the determinative communal identity for at least four centuries. Its logic is as simple as it is violent: if this territory belongs to my group, it cannot belong to yours.Not every country’s identity and politics are based on this logic, but many are. Even countries with a long tradition of intercommunal tolerance can rapidly veer towards chauvinism.

The dynamics are even clearer in settler-colonial societies, where the settler community has to conquer the territory and subdue or expel the Indigenous population in order to build its own society. Genocide is more often than not a core experience of this process.

Israel is, of course, the quintessential settler-colonial society; yet it is also one whose maximalist impulse has yet to be realised. Palestinians have not been reduced to a manageably small minority who can be given formal political rights and then ignored, repressed and extracted without meaningful resistance – as was the fate of Indigenous Americans and Australians.

Given the violence inherent to colonialism, Indigenous resistance has naturally been imagined by settler societies as the mirror image of their eliminationist impulses and policies: We want them gone and will commit whatever violence is necessary to achieve that goal, so they must want and would do the same. Not surprisingly, when resistance does take the form of mass violence, as happened on October 7, that imagination is powerfully reinforced.

In this context, when most Zionist Israelis and Israel supporters hear the phrase “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”, they hear “[a genocidal call](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/08/world/middleeast/rashida-tlaib-palestine-israel.html) to violence to destroy the state of Israel and its people to replace it with a Palestinian state extending from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea”. The fact that some Palestinians, particularly Hamas, have leaned hard into a violently exclusivist connotation of the phrase only serves to reinforce the idea.

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But Hamas has never represented most Palestinians, despite the concerted efforts of the movement and successive Israeli governments (for very different reasons) to elevate its status. Its popularity in, if not control over, Gaza had waned significantly before the October 7 attack.

Into this deeply dysfunctional mix enters Representative Rashida Tlaib, currently the only Palestinian American member of the United States Congress. Along with her colleague Ilhan Omar and occasionally other members of “The Squad”, she has been the only national political voice advocating unhesitatingly for Palestinian rights.

For the vast majority of her congressional colleagues and most who describe themselves as “pro-Israel”, Tlaib’s use of the “river to the sea” slogan permanently marked her as an enemy of Israel. This was why, on November 6, she was officially censured by the House of Representatives.

Of course, Palestinians are not the only ones advocating a “river-to-sea” discourse. It has more or less been the official policy of the Israeli state since 1967, when it occupied the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights. Since then, every Israeli government has pushed for the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, rendering the two-state solution an impossibility well before the Oslo peace process began.

Within the Israeli political space, from the far-right to the liberal left, the idea of sharing the land with the Palestinians as equals was never on the table.

The problem Israel has faced – like other settler-colonial powers – has been that Indigenous populations rarely if ever go gentle into that good night. Revisionist Zionism founder Ze’ev Jabotinsky would not have disagreed with Tlaib’s argument in the immediate aftermath of the Hamas attack, that the “suffocating, dehumanising conditions” of permanent occupation inevitably “lead to resistance”.

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Exactly a century ago, in his 1923 manifesto, The Iron Wall, he advocated overwhelming Jewish power to turn Palestine from the river to the sea into a Jewish ethnostate precisely because of the inevitability of Palestinian resistance.

Regardless of whose side one is on, as long as the understanding of the “river-to-sea” discourse is filtered through the prism of the inherently colonial nation-state, one’s imagination of other possibilities will be highly constrained. And a far more expansive imagination is precisely what is most desperately needed today, not only to establish freedom, justice and peace for all the inhabitants of Palestine/Israel in the midst of the present horror, but to address humanity’s myriad existential problems, in which the Israeli occupation is deeply embedded.

In that regard, Tlaib’s argument – echoed by innumerable Palestinian activists and their allies, including many Jews – that “from the River to the Sea is an aspirational call for freedom, human rights and peaceful coexistence, not death, destruction or hate” represents a radically post-nationalist imagination of the future in Palestine and Israel. In fact, it is one that Palestinians on the front lines of the occupation, joined by Israeli and international solidarity activists, have been putting into practice, however tentatively and against overwhelming force, for decades, as anyone who is engaged in solidarity work in the occupied territories will attest.

To share a communal meal in Nabi Saleh or Bil’in, Atwani or the Jordan Valley after a day spent planting or harvesting olive trees, walking children to school, facing off against Israeli settlers, bulldozers or tear gas – and now to struggle daily together in the US and across the West, is to repeat an experience common to the [Freedom Riders](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/31/us-freedom-riders-remember-summer-of-change-60-years-later), the multi-racial African National Congress, and others who struggled for freedom.

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Intercommunal solidarity and joint action towards a common future were central to all these struggles, as they pushed for imagining possibilities for sharing land, resources and power that previously seemed naïve, far-fetched or even dangerous.

Every day, more and more Jews and others join Palestinians in causing precisely the sort of “good trouble” that previously helped end – however imperfectly – apartheid in America and South Africa, and formal colonial rule across the Global South. There is a growing awareness, particularly among young people, that the stakes of Gaza extend beyond Palestine and Israel, representing the front lines of a battle for the future, for the possibility of humanity not being engulfed by growing violence and inequality as we veer towards ever more deadly threats to our collective survival.

For those still trapped inside binary identities and safely ensconced in an increasingly psychopathic global capitalist system, a free Palestine from the river to the sea – indeed, a truly free, equal and sustainable world – remains an unthinkable proposition.

But as the latest wave of violence confirms, Israel cannot be free until Palestine is free, and the price of that freedom is real decolonisation. This means the creation of a political order, whatever its name or form, in which all people living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea are accorded the same fundamental rights and freedoms.

In the face of the horrors of Gaza, we should be working to encourage real decolonisation not just in Israel/Palestine, but globally, before the violence engulfs us all.

On the morning of Sunday, November 12, I received a plea, an SOS, from my dear friend Shireen, a Christian Palestinian in Bethlehem. “Ghada, do you know any institutions in Gaza, other than the Red Cross, that can help evacuate people trapped in the north?” I had to respond: “No…”

Shireen is just one of many friends, loved ones and acquaintances who got in touch with me in recent days desperately looking for a way to find help for those stuck in the besieged Gaza Strip.

Israel’s ongoing war on Gaza has created three simultaneous crises.  First, there is the crisis experienced by every individual in the besieged Strip who is unable to escape. Then, there is the crisis of conscience that has seemingly taken over the international community, which is ignoring the desperate plight of civilians in Gaza.  Finally, there is the global crisis resulting from the apparent collapse of all the mechanisms supposedly designed to promote and protect human rights.

A crisis of humanity

Every day, I receive dozens of SOS messages, cries for help, from Gaza. As a Palestinian from Gaza who is currently out of the Strip, I am living a nightmare, because there is very little, if anything, that I can do to help those who are under siege and under attack there. I know there is nothing I can do to stop Israel’s war machine. I know this because I spent most of my life, about 36 years, in the besieged and occupied Gaza – the open-air prison that has since been transformed into a slaughterhouse. Still, I desperately try to do something, anything. Action is imperative – staying idle, doing nothing, feels like being stuck in another hell

So despite not knowing how I could help, I messaged Shireen back: “Can you send me more details?”

“Nour al-Nakhala’s family is trapped in their home in Gaza City due to heavy bombardment,” she responded quickly. “Nour is the wife of Dr Hammam Alloh. Their residence is in front of al-Basma kindergarten, on Abu Hasira Street in Gaza. Here is their cell number. Please help.”

Shireen’s plea to rescue al-Nakhala and Alloh families triggered a flood of memories and made me think of all the other families I know in Gaza. I thought of the Luthun family, Bilbaisi family, al-Birwai family… I thought of the Awad family, which lives, or once lived, near the blood bank and the German representative’s office – at the very heart of middle-class Gaza.

I did not know the fate of any of these families. I did not know if they were alive or dead. But I feared the worst. And we still had no news from al-Nakhala and Alloh families.

Then, I received a desperate plea from the al-Bayid family – a household of six members, some with special needs, trapped in their home on al-Halabi street next to the Civil Affairs office. They were stranded without food or water.

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Another cry for help came from the al-Saqa family, besieged in their home not far from al-Shifa Hospital. They were also trapped, immobile, together with their children and the elderly with little access to food or water. Tanks had ravaged their surroundings and were firing at anything that moved.

Then, on the same day, Dr Majdy Alkhouly, who lives in Qatar, also took to Facebook to try and find someone to help al-Nakhala and Alloh families. He said they needed immediate evacuation because many of them, including Dr Hammam Alloh, and his father-in-law, Mahmoud, have been critically wounded as a result of the bombardment, and are bleeding.

Simultaneously, the Abu Hashish family, a group of around 15 people who are not far away from al-Shifa Hospital, sent out a heart-wrenching cry for help. The family said some among them have been severely wounded, and their lives are hanging in the balance. But the bombs were raining from the sky, and the presence of tanks around their home rendered them completely immobile.

All these family names echoed in my mind, repeatedly, filling me with a feeling of dread that I know I will never be able to forget or get over for the rest of my life.

All of this, repeated two million times over, every single day, is the first crisis that was born out of Israel’s latest war on Gaza.

A crisis of conscience

The second crisis is one that is caused by the world’s indifference to the pleas of Gaza’s doctors and hospital workers. This is a crisis of conscience.

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Israel’s military continues to target doctors, nurses, patients and medical facilities. At least 200 doctors and medics have been killed in the ongoing genocide. In stark numerical terms, the occupying force has claimed the lives of six doctors and medics on average every single day since the beginning of its latest assault on the besieged Strip.

Just a few days ago, my own brother, a doctor at the Nasser hospital, narrowly escaped death. He had stepped out of his office to check on a patient when a nearby mosque was struck. The shelling also damaged the radiology unit of the hospital. The ceiling collapsed, creating a scene of devastation.

Meanwhile, my cousin Nour, a recent graduate of medicine, continues to work at the UN school in Khan Younis camp, which has been turned into a concentration camp with tens of thousands of people crammed into classrooms, using just eight washrooms between them. Despite the dire conditions, Nour is still tirelessly working, seeing at least 500 patients a day and offering advice and prescriptions to the sick, even though obtaining medications is nearly impossible.

Whenever we can speak, she tells me how shortages have become the norm in Gaza, causing tragedies. She explains people are grappling with kidney problems, and diseases like diarrhoea, due to a lack of clean water. She tells me that they are also suffering from hunger-related illnesses and anaemia.  That communicable diseases like chickenpox are spreading rapidly. Newly married girls expecting their first babies live in fear that when the time comes to deliver the baby, no one will be able to assist them. Two children in the school she works in lost their lives in the past week due to a lack of medication. The desperation is overwhelming.

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As I pen these words, most Gaza hospitals have run out of essential supplies, and become literal graveyards. The bodies of those murdered, lie both inside and outside of al-Shifa Hospital, which is now occupied by Israeli soldiers.

The world has ignored the calls from Gaza’s doctors for fuel to be delivered to keep hospitals operational. Remarkably, countless locals, who are under a communications blackout and often do not even know exactly what is happening just around the corner from where they have taken refuge, heard these calls and rushed to the hospitals offering what little petrol they have in their cars or homes.  Even though each one fears for their own life, they believed taking the risk, in the hope of helping someone even more desperate than themselves, was the right thing to do. This is the true spirit of Gaza.

A crisis of human rights protection mechanisms

Finally, Israel’s war on Gaza led to a global crisis in the systems and mechanisms designed to protect civilians. All international institutions proved impotent.  The International Criminal Court (ICC), which has supposedly been investigating the situation in Palestine for many years, is still doing nothing in the way of offering any justice and help to long-suffering Palestinians. The United Nations Security Council is powerless to even condemn Israel’s indiscriminate attacks on Gaza despite there being ample evidence for crimes against humanity and genocide being committed in the besieged Strip and on the occupied West Bank. The best of what these institutions offer are hollow words, and in most cases, they cannot even achieve that.

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So this is an SOS call.  An SOS call on behalf of every family in Gaza who needs an immediate ceasefire. An SOS call on behalf of the world’s conscience and governance structures.  Unless we act today and immediately, we risk accepting a world order where impunity is rewarded, the powerful is allowed to crush the weak, and no civilian is truly safe.

As I conclude this article, Dr Majdy has posted that Dr [Hammam Alloh](https://x.com/AJEnglish/status/1724389451835609144?s=20), and his father, Mahmoud, are no longer with us. They bled to death while the children watched. I am engulfed in darkness.

And we still don’t know what has happened to their relatives, the al-Nakhala family.

We are living in a world of glaring double standards. A dangerous message has been sent by key policymakers in the international community that Palestinian lives matter less than Israeli ones and international humanitarian law can be applied selectively.

The Geneva Conventions explicitly prohibit the targeting of civilians and essential civilian infrastructure in armed conflict. And yet, there has been muted criticism of the Israeli bombardment of civilian hospitals, schools and apartment buildings in Gaza; instead, it is justified by Israel’s right to self-defence.

There is also no mention of the right of the Palestinian people to defend themselves from such egregious violations of international law, or their right to basic human rights under an inhumane and illegal occupation that has continued for 75 years.

Under the laws of occupation which form part of the law of armed conflict, Israel does not have the “right to defend itself” using military means as it is the occupying power. This is a fact and not an allegation. It has been [confirmed](https://english.legal-agenda.com/israel-does-not-have-right-to-self-defense-in-international-law-against-occupied-palestinian-territory/) by the International Court of Justice in a 2004 ruling.

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As the occupying power, Israel can use tools applicable to the rule of law, including policing powers to deal with criminal actions. An occupying state cannot exercise control over territory it occupies and simultaneously militarily attack that territory on the claim that it is “foreign” and poses an exogenous national security threat.

The notion of Israel’s right to defend itself through military means has been used erroneously by some and deliberately by others to justify its unlawful use of force on the people of Gaza and the West Bank.

We categorically reject the myopic and distorted international responses that ignore the context and root causes of this war, which is Israel’s systemic oppression of the Palestinians, the occupation of their land and their ongoing ethnic cleansing.

International human rights bodies, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, along with local NGOs – among them [at least 17](https://www.english.acri.org.il/post/state-of-the-occupation-year-56-a-joint-situation-report) Israeli organisations – have characterised the oppressive Israeli military occupation of Palestinian land as constituting the crime of apartheid.

They condemn Israel’s cruel blockade of Gaza for the past 17 years as having created the world’s largest open-air prison in which 2.3 million Palestinians are unable to freely enter or exit the confined strip of land, while the provision of water, electricity and goods remains at the discretion of their occupiers.

When Palestinians have resorted to non-violent protests, they have been [mown down with live ammunition](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/3/30/gazas-great-march-of-return-protests-explained). This is what happened to Black South Africans who peacefully protested against apartheid conditions in 1960 and were gunned down by their oppressors. The futility of non-violent resistance to oppression is what gave rise to the armed struggle in South Africa, which has similarly been the case in Palestine.

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According to international law, those living under occupation have the right to resist. Armed struggle against a colonial occupation force is not just recognised under international law but specifically endorsed. Wars of national liberation have been expressly embraced through the adoption of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 as a protected and essential right of occupied people everywhere.

But just as South African freedom fighters were labelled terrorists and most Western governments turned their backs on our peoples’ rights to freedom, human rights and self-determination, the rights of the Palestinians to security, human rights and self-determination on their own land have been ignored or paid lip service to by governments around the world for far too long.

There is no Middle East “peace process” to speak of, and no intention on the part of the current Israeli government to compromise on the issue of land or the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. There can be no sustainable peace without a negotiated political solution which ensures that Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side in peace.

Unfortunately, the current trajectory is being driven by Israeli extremists who seek to fully take over Palestinian lands by force, no matter the consequences in human lives or utter destruction. Similarly, the desperation of occupation has also led to extremism on the Palestinian side and the targeting of Israeli civilians which is prohibited under international law.

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The killing and kidnapping of Israeli civilians must also be condemned and the world has done so. But the disproportionate use of force by Israel and collective punishment of a besieged and helpless people which has been both cruel and unconscionable has not only been accepted but enabled.

When Russia resorted to similar tactics in Ukraine, it was roundly condemned and punished with the harshest set of economic sanctions the world has seen. But in the case of Israel’s bombardment of civilians and essential infrastructure in Gaza, there have been no sanctions and no marginalisation, only unqualified and unconditional support by most Western governments.

It is the people in the streets of Arab, Asian, Latin American, African and Western capitals who have been the voice of conscience, condemning Israel’s campaign of genocide against the Palestinians, calling out the international community for their double standards and demanding justice for the Palestinian people. It is the ordinary people around the world who have defied the Israeli government’s dehumanisation of the Palestinian people and rejected their demonisation.

The lessons of World War II are still heeded by freedom-loving people who recognise that the dehumanisation of a group of people is usually done in an attempt to eradicate them, and the pushback against this type of genocidal language must be strong and unforgiving.

There can be no more apathy in the face of the decimation of Palestinian men, women and children who are bombed as they sleep in their beds. We hear the piercing screams of babies as they are pinned under the rubble of their apartment buildings in a wholly preventable war crime. We know that the vast majority of those killed in the current military onslaught on Gaza have been women and children.

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Palestinians are not children of a lesser God, and it is incumbent on all of us to put maximum pressure for an immediate ceasefire and an arms embargo on Israel. The hostages must be released, humanitarian aid bodies must be given full access to Gaza, and those who have directed this war must be held accountable for their war crimes.

We fully reject the forced displacement of the Palestinian people from their land, and we will not stand by and watch as every red line in war is crossed and the region descends into a zero-sum game of death and destruction. Our common humanity dictates that all human lives matter. The time to act is now

in the West, this is the season of remembrance.

It is an almost sacred time, when we are obliged to pause and reflect on loss and sacrifice and to thank, among others, the remaining survivors and the honoured dead – many of whom fought the fascist agents of a Holocaust. It was mostly ordinary men and women from largely ordinary places who did the right and necessary thing when the urgent moment demanded the defeat of a rancid regime and ideology that had not only to be vanquished but eradicated.

So, one day every year, we applaud the ordinary men and women from ordinary places who are still alive as they march together gingerly to pay quiet homage to their comrades-in-arms buried in faraway places, where they perished saving others and making history.

The irony, of course, is that the hypocrites who led the solemn ceremonies this weekend in Europe, North America and beyond and who will make recycled speeches about the imperative to remember, now want us to forget.

More than that, the presidents and prime ministers expect us to forget. They will, I suspect, be counting on it. They are convinced that, soon enough, we will be too preoccupied with the demands and vagaries of life to recall what they have done and failed to do in this urgent moment, when we confronted the blatant human consequences of deliberate, state-sanctioned inhumanity.

Above all, these presidents and prime ministers want us to forget their complicity in the genocide we are witnessing being committed minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, week after week, against imprisoned Palestinians in the shattered, apocalyptic-like hellscape called Gaza and bit by inevitable bit, in the occupied West Bank, by another so-called “champion of democracy”.

The presidents and prime ministers want us to forget the carte blanche licence they have, for decades, guaranteed to their dear friend, Benjamin Netanyahu and other fanatical Israeli prime ministers, to kill as many Palestinians as they want to, whenever they want to, for as long as they want to.

The presidents and prime ministers want us to forget the pilgrimages they made recently to Tel Aviv to hug and shake the hand of a strutting murderer who has a long, odious record of ordering Palestinians to be killed instantly with bullets, bombs and drones.

The presidents and prime ministers want us to forget their lectures tarring us as “terrorist sympathisers” while praising the resolve and righteousness of a wretched sociopath who has ordered Palestinians to be killed slowly by depriving them of water, food and fuel.

The presidents and prime ministers want us to forget the appalling scenes of the exodus of hundreds of thousands of exhausted Palestinians forced to flee certain death on foot, makeshift carriages and mules for miles with whatever little they could carry or rescue.

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The presidents and prime ministers want us to forget when their dear “democratic” friend bombed schools, hospitals, ambulances and convoys of spent Palestinian refugees trying to escape the murderous madness.

The presidents and prime ministers want us to forget the images of limp, dead children pulled from the flattened remnants of their homes, where they once slept, laughed, played and lived and were cared for by doting mothers and fathers whom they loved in equal measure.

The presidents and prime ministers want us to forget the charred, bloodied and dirt-caked faces and bodies of haunted children on hospital gurneys calling out to their gone mamas and babas for comfort against the darkness and the horror.

The presidents and prime ministers want us to forget the sobbing babas carrying the bodies of their children wrapped in white shrouds and the mamas weeping over their hasty graves.

The presidents and prime ministers want us to forget that they said that Palestinians lied about the number of brothers and sisters, including infants and children, killed or maimed by their dear, “democratic” friend, whom a legion of Israelis believe is a habitual liar, career crook and cocky authoritarian. The presidents and prime ministers want us to forget that when we shouted “stop” – again and again – they told the habitual liar, career crook and cocky authoritarian to keep killing Palestinians whenever he wants to, wherever he wants to, for as long as he wants to. But take note: We will remember.

“They have got to go in there and I mean really go in… I want everything that can fly to go in there and crack the hell out of them. There is no limitation on mileage and there is no limitation on budget. Is that clear?” That was the order US President Richard Nixon gave his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, on December 9, 1970.

Minutes later, Kissinger relayed the order to his deputy, General Alexander Haig: “He wants a massive bombing campaign in Cambodia. He doesn’t want to hear anything. It’s an order, it’s to be done. Anything that flies, on anything that moves. You got that?

Over five decades ago, the US Air Force executed “Operation Menu” followed by “Operation Freedom Deal” to eradicate the Vietcong, the People’s Army of Vietnam, from Cambodia. It focused on carpet bombing vast swathes of land to destroy the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a massive network of pathways and tunnels used by the North Vietnamese through the jungle linking North to South Vietnam, via Cambodia and Laos. The bombing of Cambodia had already started in 1965 under the Johnson administration; Nixon merely stepped it up. Between 1965 and 1973, 2.7 million tonnes of bombs were released over the country. In comparison, the Allies dropped an estimated 2 million tonnes of bombs during all of World War II.

Thus, Cambodia may be the most heavily bombed country in history. By square kilometre and thermic value, however, it might have already lost that tragic record to Gaza.

On day 25 of the war, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant boasted that more than 10,000 bombs and missiles had been dropped on Gaza City alone. According to the Geneva-based [Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor](https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5908/Israel-hit-Gaza-Strip-with-the-equivalent-of-two-nuclear-bombs), the explosives used on the exclave as of November 2 may be twice as powerful as a nuclear bomb, thus exceeding the TNT-equivalent of Little Boy, the 15-kiloton atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. On November 5, an Israeli cabinet minister, Amichai Eliyahu, dropped another type of bomb by suggesting that the use of nuclear weapons on Gaza was an option. While he was “suspended” from the cabinet, his remarks may well have been the first time a sitting Israeli official confirmed publicly the open secret of Israel’s nuclear arsenal.

The first glaring difference between the bombing of Cambodia and the bombing of Gaza is that the former was kept secret from the US Congress, the American people and the world as bizarre as it may sound today; it was obviously not-so-secret to the Cambodians. The incessant bombardment of Gaza, however, is boasted about to the world by Israeli leaders and receives overt encouragement and material support from the US and other Western powers.

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The second difference is that while Cambodian civilians could try to run away from the terrifying roaring sound of incoming B-52 squadrons, Palestinians in Gaza, overwhelmingly refugees or descendants of refugees themselves, have nowhere to flee to in the hope of living another day.

Strangely, US President Joe Biden has questioned the accuracy of the death toll the Palestinian Ministry of Health has released, giving credence to similar Israeli claims. This is despite the fact that his own staff believes in those numbers, and even estimates that they may be higher, as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf recently [stated](https://www.newarab.com/news/us-state-dept-gaza-death-toll-could-be-higher-reported).

US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, has also repeated the Israeli narrative that Hamas “terrorists” use UN schools, hospitals, mosques and churches as command-and-control posts, munition and arms storage depots, which makes them legitimate military targets.

International humanitarian law, however, suggests otherwise for even if the unproven Israeli claims were substantiated, the principle of proportionality prohibits attacks against military objectives when they are “expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated”.

Israel would be hard-pressed to make its case when over 11,000 Palestinians civilians have been killed, including more than 4,500 children and infants, with additional thousands decomposing under the rubble.

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Worse still, Israeli government and military officials have repeatedly demonstrated genocidal intent by declaring that there are “no innocents” in Gaza. Before the UN Security Council, Israel has even accused UN ambulance drivers, medical staff and aid workers of being members of Hamas, trying to justify the murder of over 100 such workers and the direct, wilful targeting of Gaza’s hospitals

In view of the patent commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide as eminent jurists allege, the majority of governments the world over have disgracefully remained silent. It is distressing to witness the cautionary stance of states ready to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel in the face of its all-out bombardments of the civilian population of Gaza

When Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Morocco or Turkey – not to mention Western powers, China or India – continue to maintain diplomatic and economic relations with Israel, why should the latter revisit its decade-long policies of apartheid, of dehumanisation and delegitimisation of Palestinians, of oppression and subjugation of the Palestinian people, if there is no price to pay?

Why should Israel stop its relentless bombing of the Gaza exclave? Why should it rethink its illegal occupation and colonisation? Why should it even listen when the secretary-general of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, accuses it of perpetrating “genocide” and Arab leaders make perfunctory declarations but take no decisive action at the Arab-Islamic Summit?

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Calling for a “humanitarian ceasefire” as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has, or for a straightforward “ceasefire” he hasn’t even dared demand, is necessary but grossly inadequate. After 37 days of unrelenting bombardment to “eradicate Hamas”, there is little evidence that goal is within reach.

For one, Hamas is not only present in Gaza but also in the occupied West Bank and elsewhere. And even if, theoretically, Israel were to effectively terminate Hamas in Gaza, just as it had once sought to do with Yasser Arafat’s Palestine Liberation Organisation, what comes next?

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself doesn’t really know, does he? Or maybe he knows, but can’t tell. As he has put it, “a long and difficult” war lies ahead. Translated, this means the continuation of the genocidal onslaught on the Palestinians, unless and until the position of his Western backers – and Arab bystanders – shifts in words and in deeds.

To date, only Bolivia has severed diplomatic relations with Israel to protest against the ongoing war crimes perpetrated against the Palestinians. Unless Egypt, Jordan, UAE and Morocco sever their diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv as their people demand; unless countries such as Turkey, South Africa and Brazil, which have denounced Israel’s war crimes, align their diplomacy with their own pronouncements; unless these countries emulate Bolivia’s principled diplomatic move and put pressure on their Western partners; unless Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, Qatar, Azerbaijan and other large exporters of oil and natural gas use their economic leverage on Israel’s blinded backers, Gaza and its population will be destroyed, inch by inch, soul by soul. And no one would be able to say: “We didn’t know.”

Biden, Blinken and Netanyahu should be reminded that the horrific carpet bombing of Cambodia for years produced only one seminal political outcome: Cambodia’s takeover by the infamous Khmer Rouge. What the posited annihilation of Hamas would yield is thus not a frivolous question. “Anything that flies, on anything that moves” and bombing to “crack the hell out of them” sowed death and craters still visible today. It produced infamy and misery, but no military victory.

Genocide is not an event; you don’t simply wake up one morning and begin exterminating an entire people out of the blue. Genocide is a process; you have to work your way up to it.

And like all processes, genocide has its stages – 10 stages in all if we are to refer to the list prepared by Dr Gregory Stanton, founding president and chairman of [Genocide Watch](https://www.genocidewatch.com/), an organisation that does exactly what its name implies.

One of those stages is dehumanisation. This is an important one because committing genocide is not easy; murdering men, women and children in thousands tends to take a toll on the psyche, causing one to perhaps face all kinds of uncomfortable questions, to counter all manners of unwelcome thoughts that intrude into even the most closed of minds like single spies sneaking into a well-guarded fortress.

Those who pull the trigger on children, those who drop bombs on schools and hospitals, are after all presumably as humans as the ones they murder. How then, one wonders, do they sleep at night? How do they not see the blood on their hands every waking moment, like Lady Macbeth wandering the halls of the Dunsinane castle? The answer is simple; you live with it by convincing yourself that those being killed are not in fact human, or at the very least not as human as you are. If you do that right and repeatedly, you will successfully convince yourself that murder is not murder; it’s pest control.

Dehumanisation has to be an ongoing process, running concurrently with the actual extermination because, you see, it is not just your own public you have to convince, it is also the governments and publics of the countries that are arming, aiding, abetting and, in some cases, cheering you on while you go about your bloody but necessary business. This gets harder to do as eviscerated babies pile up in the courtyards of besieged hospitals, as body bags choke the streets, and as the world livestreams the apocalypse on smartphones.

It’s in this context that last week’s infamous [Washington Post cartoon](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/8/racist-vile-cartoon-in-washington-post-ignites-controversy) must be viewed.

On November 6, as Israel continued its deliberate and direct targeting of civilians in Gaza in bakeries, hospitals and homes, while clearly announcing its intention to eradicate the Palestinians, The Washington Post published a caricature titled “Human Shields”.

The caricature depicts a man with bestial features in a dark, striped suit, which has Hamas in bold white letters emblazoned on it. His comically large nose is jutting out from beneath sunken eyes crowned by bushy eyebrows. He has several children and a typically helpless-looking abaya-clad Arab woman tied to his body. To his left is a Palestinian flag and to his right a partial image of Al-Aqsa and, of course, an oil lamp. Just in case the symbolism was not clear enough. The cartoon ticks many boxes. In his landmark study on dehumanisation, scholar Nick Haslam writes that among the categories of dehumanisation by imagery are depictions of the enemy as a barbarian, a criminal and a harasser of women and children.

The outrage was immediate and effective; having removed the cartoon, the editor of the editorial page, David Shipley, wrote in a note to readers that while he saw the drawing purely as a “caricature” of a “specific Hamas spokesman”, the outrage convinced him that he had “missed something profound, and divisive”.

It’s not David’s fault, really. Like so many people across the world he’s grown up with media and film depictions of hooknosed Arabs as either bumbling sheikhs, bumbling bandits, or else brutal (and bumbling) fanatics. This is a phenomenon author Jack Shaheen wrote about extensively in his book Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People, which was later made into a documentary.

Coming back to cartoons, Arabs are not the only ones to get this treatment – far from it. Nazi Germany was replete with images (they’re just a Google search away) which depicted Jews in much the same way: Their eyes are beady and their noses are hooked or bulbous, sometimes both. All precisely calculated to produce revulsion in the viewer, to separate the righteous “us” from the bestial “them”.

Take a cursory look at anti-Japanese propaganda cartoons in World War II, some drawn by none other than famous children’s author Dr Seuss, and you see the same techniques applied. Anti-Irish cartoons published in the UK and US in the late 19th century also depict Irish immigrants as beasts, and Black Americans – or Black people in general – still find themselves portrayed as apes or monkeys. The purpose is as simple as it is insidious and effective: to tie character to appearance, and then ensure that said appearance is hideous.

The Nazis went a step further, of course, and routinely depicted Jews as rats with (barely) human faces scurrying before the cleansing Aryan broom. Proving that the classics never really go out of style, in 2015, the Daily Mail took a page out of Goebbels’s playbook by depicting rats scurrying into Europe alongside silhouetted Muslim migrants who are turbaned and carrying AK-47s. The lone visible woman was of course duly veiled and wearing an abaya. But at least the Daily Mail didn’t portray the actual migrants as rats, thereby completely dehumanising them.

That honour falls to none other than Michael Ramirez, the two-time Pulitzer Prize winner who drew The Washington Post “Human Shields” cartoon. In 2018, the same year as the Palestinian Great March of Return – when Israeli snipers killed 266 unarmed protestors and crippled tens of thousands more – Mr Ramirez saw it fit to draw a cartoon showing a tide of rats, carrying Palestinian flags and under fire, hurtling off a cliff while blaming Israel for their fate. Clearly, this is also something “profound and divisive” that The Washington Post seems to have somehow missed.

Like many around the world, I am emotionally drained.  I spend most of my waking hours scanning the news, reading about one tragedy after the other,  and yearning for a lasting end to the relentless war in Gaza. I am also physically worn out. My weekends are spent marching, driven by a desperate hope that maybe, if enough of us consistently take to the streets and speak up, our collective voice could urge our leaders to finally call for a permanent ceasefire.

But beyond this physical and emotional exhaustion, I am also consumed by a deep anger, a profound disappointment, towards feminists in my country, the United Kingdom, and beyond, who appear completely disinterested in the suffering of women in Gaza.

Every day, I come across opinion pieces and social media posts by feminists rightly condemning Hamas’s egregious actions towards Israeli women during their October 7 attack and their treatment of female hostages in its aftermath. These arguments and statements are unquestionably valid and undoubtedly necessary. Such grave crimes against women and girls, against anyone, should never be ignored, excused or forgotten.

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And yet, these very individuals, these self-proclaimed feminists, are eerily silent about Israel’s similarly egregious actions against Palestinian women.

Israel’s near-total siege and indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza have already killed, maimed and disappeared under the rubble tens of thousands of Palestinian women and children. Many more have been displaced and left to survive the harsh winter without appropriate shelter and supplies. The almost complete breakdown of the healthcare system, coupled with the lack of food and clean water, means that some 45,000 pregnant women and 68,000 breastfeeding mothers in Gaza are facing the risk of anaemia, bleeding, and death. Meanwhile, hundreds of Palestinian women and children in the occupied West Bank are still imprisoned, many without trial, and trying to survive in abominable conditions.

This catastrophe is playing out in the open, but the majority of feminists in Britain, and more generally in the West, seem to have nothing to say about it.

Why are the stories of Palestinian women ignored? Why do the struggles of Palestinian women and children seemingly not merit the same level of concern? Increasingly, I am led to believe that this is not just a lapse in attention, but wilful blindness – the consequence of a moral compass that may be broken beyond repair.

In the past three months, I’ve pondered these questions deeply.  I immersed myself in numerous “feminist” texts by authors I once held in high regard, to try and understand their interpretation of feminism, and why it does not seem to include Palestinian women.

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Gradually, I’ve come to realise that their brand of feminism perceives Palestinian women as oppressed primarily not by Israel or any other outside force, but by Palestinian men. For them, Palestinian women have little to no agency and are perpetual victims of a society that has gender-based violence engrained in its very core. Further, in their eyes, Palestinian men are synonymous with deeply patriarchal, religious, and socially conservative groups like Hamas that are known to abuse and oppress women. Thus, these “feminists” buy into Israel’s claims that its assault on Gaza will help “liberate” Palestinian women from the clutches of Hamas, and ignore the actual, grave harm the war has been inflicting on them.

This approach is part of a disconcerting historical pattern – a form of feminism imbued with colonial and imperial prejudices and preconceptions. “Feminists” of this ilk supported the US invasion of Afghanistan because it supposedly aimed to “liberate Afghan women”, but they would never think of arguing for the forceful “liberation” of, for example, Jewish women living in deeply patriarchal and religious communities in Israel.

In this brand of feminism, empathy and outrage is aligned not with universal feminist tenets, and a desire to give all women agency and power, but  with personal identities and political affiliations. This results in a hierarchy of concern, where some feminist struggles – and especially those against Muslim, brown men – are given precedence over others, allowing for the rhetoric of women’s liberation to be co-opted to further the aims of the powerful, often at the expense of the oppressed.

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In this context, the Western feminist silence on the necessity of a ceasefire in Gaza represents not only a moral lapse, but also a political one. It perpetuates a brand of feminism intertwined with colonial and imperial power structures, which have historically inflicted harm under the pretence of protection.

This silence is emblematic of a modern “colonial feminism”, where the rhetoric of “liberating women” conceals deeper acts of violence. It justifies invasions and occupations under the guise of aid, portraying Palestinian women as mere victims in need of rescue, while simultaneously denying their right to resistance. Ultimately, the selective empathy of Western feminists serves to reinforce power structures that continue the cycle of violence.

Meanwhile, some feminists excuse their refusal to call for a ceasefire by pointing to the Palestinian society’s complex stance on LGBT rights. Hamas imprison or do worse to LGBT individuals, they say, so the war should continue until the group is eliminated in full.

However, this rationale overlooks a crucial element often heralded in feminist discourse: intersectionality. While the challenges faced by the LGBT community in Gaza under Hamas’s rule are indeed significant, using these as a pretext to abstain from advocating for an immediate ceasefire sidesteps the larger humanitarian crisis at hand. Such a selective approach not only disregards the pressing needs of thousands of women and children enduring daily violence and oppression, but also belies a concerning trend of selective empathy. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that Israel’s war is also killing and maiming LGBT Palestinians.

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Withholding support for a ceasefire due to Palestinian society and Hamas’s perceived animosity towards the LGBT community undermines the core tenet of feminist solidarity – the commitment to protect and uplift all women and marginalised communities, irrespective of their sociopolitical circumstances. By withholding support for a ceasefire on these grounds, these feminists inadvertently place ideological purity above the urgent necessity to halt further loss of life and suffering. True feminist activism should transcend geopolitical biases, upholding the rights and dignity of all women and vulnerable groups, regardless of their background or the complexities of their societal contexts.

Beyond those who point to Hamas and the wider Palestinian society’s oppression of women, and apparent prejudices against the LGBT community, as reasons for not endorsing the calls for an immediate ceasefire, there are also feminists who remain silent on the issue because they want to remain “neutral” on a “complex” issue. Perhaps this stance perplexes, and infuriates, me more than any other.

In the face of such overwhelming terror, there can be no neutrality.

Today, Palestinian women are living through horrors that fundamentally challenge the core values of feminism. Mothers are burying their children with bare hands; families are grieving for their lost homes and shattered lives hungry, and under a rain of bombs.

Under these circumstances, silence is not a neutral stance. Silence today is a passive endorsement of the ongoing tragedy. How many more lives must be torn apart before these careful and politically “neutral” feminists find the courage to call for a ceasefire? The rising death toll isn’t just a tally; it represents individual lives, stolen futures, and a direct challenge to the principles that underpin feminism itself.

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Today, what remains unsaid has as much importance, and impact, as what has been said.

Numerous prominent “feminist” voices, always vocal in their views on gender, sex and society, are still conspicuously silent on the struggles of Palestinian women. While their platforms have the power to bring critical issues to light, they also have the subtle power to relegate others to the sidelines. Too often, we see that the concerns of non-Western women are being pushed to the periphery by the reluctance of these high-profile activists to write and speak about them.

This selective silence challenges the universality of feminist solidarity. Especially when it comes from prominent feminists who many others look up to, silence becomes a form of complicity. Do you believe your silence on the tragedy of Palestinian women has gone unnoticed? I hate to break it to you, but your silence is deafeningly loud, and has stripped your work of any credibility in the eyes of many.

If you are one of those “feminists”, who do not speak about the suffering of Palestinian women, or endorse the calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, for whatever reason, I have one, very simple demand from you. Look at the photographs coming out of Gaza. You may have been avoiding them, dismissing them as mere propaganda – but for one second, leave your biases and smart excuses behind, and look at them. Look at the images of mothers cradling the lifeless, bloodied bodies of their children. Look at the images of confused toddlers, often missing limbs and flesh, lying alone on hospital floors. Look at the images of young women, with dead eyes, trying to collect fragments from their lives and murdered families in the rubble of their destroyed homes. Look at those images, really look at them, and then explain to me why you think “it is not right to demand a ceasefire now”. And after seeing those images, really seeing them, you still want to stay “neutral”, stay silent, or talk about “Islamist oppression” and “LGBT intolerance”, don’t call yourself a feminist. Because you are not one

United States President Joe Biden has delivered two different messages on the [Israel-Hamas war](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/) to pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel Americans, NBC News has [reported](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/biden-tells-two-different-stories-israel-hamas-war-letters-americans-rcna125682), based on copies of official White House correspondence.

While one letter showcased [Biden’s support](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-bottom-line/2023/11/18/is-bidens-stance-on-israel-out-of-sync-with-mainstream-america) for Israel against Palestinian group Hamas’s “terrorism”, the other spoke about the US administration’s efforts to protect [civilians in the Gaza Strip](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/18/israeli-forces-strike-al-fakhoora-school-in-northern-gaza).

According to NBC, the letter sent to pro-Israelis invoked the Holocaust in relation to the October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel. It also pledged continuous support to Israel and efforts to [return the captives](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/18/march-from-tel-aviv-arrives-in-jerusalem-calling-the-release-of-captives) taken by Hamas and being held in Gaza.

“The people of Israel lived through a moment of pure evil” that “resurfaced horrible memories” and amounted to the “deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust”, NBC reported Biden’s letter, dated November 1, as saying.

“The United States stands with Israel,” it continued. “We will continue to ensure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself against terrorism in accordance with international humanitarian law.”

On the other hand, Biden’s letter to pro-Palestinians focused on aid to Palestine and made no mention of the Holocaust or of US support for Israel. “We mourn the many innocent Palestinians who have been killed,” NBC reported Biden’s second letter saying, dated November 8.

It added that the administration “is working closely with partners to ensure that life-saving assistance – including, food, water, and medicine can urgently reach innocent Palestinians in Gaza” and emphasised that “the United States stands unequivocally for the protection of civilians during conflict”.

While the two letters do not appear to contradict one another, or Biden’s policies, NBC reported that it was not common for the White House to craft different versions of a letter on the same topic that vary so much in their emphasis.

It added that the incident “reflects the political tightrope Biden is trying to navigate as pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian elements of his coalition fray over the war”, and with less than a year to go before elections.

In an opinion piece published on Saturday in the Washington Post, Biden wrote that Gaza and the occupied West Bank “should be reunited under a single governance structure” – a revitalised Palestinian Authority.

“Gaza must never again be used as a platform for terrorism. There must be no forcible displacement of Palestinians from Gaza, no reoccupation, no siege or blockade, and no reduction in territory,” he wrote, adding that “after this war is over, the voices of Palestinian people and their aspirations” must be at the centre of “post-crisis governance in Gaza”. Earlier this week, the US president and two of his cabinet members were being [sued for failing to prevent](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/14/us-president-biden-sued-for-complicity-in-israels-genocide-in-gaza) as well as aiding and abetting “genocide” in Gaza.

A federal complaint ([PDF](https://ccrjustice.org/sites/default/files/attach/2023/11/Complaint_DCI-Pal-v-Biden_w.pdf)), filed on Monday against Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, accused them of “failure to prevent and complicity in the Israeli government’s unfolding genocide”.

The complaint noted that Washington was Israel’s closest ally and strongest supporter, as well as its biggest provider of military assistance – with Israel being the largest cumulative recipient of US foreign assistance since World War II.

Because of this, it said, the US could have a “deterrent effect on Israeli officials now pursuing genocidal acts against the Palestinian people”.

Also this week, police in riot gear [clashed with demonstrators](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/16/us-capitol-police-clash-with-protesters-calling-for-gaza-war-ceasefire) calling for a ceasefire outside the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in Washington, DC.

Wednesday’s protest came a day after many thousands of [pro-Israeli protesters](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/15/no-ceasefire-israel-supporters-gather-in-washington-dc-amid-gaza-war) gathered on the National Mall, holding placards with words like, “Let Israel finish the job”, “From the river to the sea, Israel is all you’ll see” and “No ceasefire”.

At least 12,000 people, including 5,000 children, have been killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza since October 7, according to Palestinian officials. In Israel, the official death toll from Hamas’s attacks stands at about 1,200.

Palestine solidarity activists have claimed their space in mainstream politics and demanded the dismantling of the Israeli settler colonial project. But this has raised a very elementary question: “What is settler colonialism?”

Some commentators were quick to dismiss this charge of settler colonialism against Israel as “just another form of anti-Semitism”. Others insinuated that “settler colonialism” is nothing but a [trendy academic theory](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/01/curious-rise-settler-colonialism-and-turtle-island/677005/) conjured up by left-wing academics and activists.

But settler colonialism isn’t just an academic fad. It’s a real political project that has scarred the past and present of Indigenous communities around the world.

A central feature of this project is that it seeks to erase the Indigenous population to make way for the establishment of a settler society. Ideologically, this erasure is seen as justified and inevitable because, for the settler, the Indigenous don’t have any distinct peoplehood or any historically rooted claim to the land they inhabit. So, when faced with the civilisational, technological and military superiority of the settler state, it is all but expected that the “barbaric” Indigenous society would simply capitulate and “go away”.

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We see this in depictions of clashes between westward settlers and indigenous communities in American folklore. They usually end with the demise of the latter. I saw a similar narrative in the apartheid-era Voortrekker Monument, dedicated to Boer frontierism, outside Pretoria. Exhibits there celebrate the white settler as having brought the “light of civilisation” to the untamed southern African hinterlands.

Israel-Palestine is no different. The ideology of erasure was written into the founding myth of the State of Israel – the myth that Israel was built on “a land without a people for a people without a land”. A popular slogan among Zionists, it helped both perpetuate the assumption that the “Holy Land” was virgin territory and characterise Palestinians as not “a people” with a distinct identity, and therefore lacking any legitimate claim to the land

The father of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, outlined his utopian vision for a modern Jewish State in his novel Altneuland (The Old-New-Land), where he wrote, “If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct”. Here too, the insinuation was that Palestinians and any sign of their existence on and connection to the land would inevitably be erased by the settler state.

When Israeli geographers drew up their own map of Palestine, they also based their work on the understanding that the Palestinians are “not a people”. They were convinced of their incontrovertible right to the “ancestral land” and remapped Palestine in a way that entirely erased all evidence of Indigenous Palestinian presence.

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Following Hamas’s attack on October 7, we have heard Israeli politicians call Palestinians “human animals”. They have also demanded that Palestinians “go away” from Gaza and be settled elsewhere. Evidently, the settler-colonial ideology of erasure is alive and well today.

But settler colonialism is not just an ideological force. This ideology of erasure often motivates efforts to materially upend all pillars of Indigenous life and existence.

We are witnessing this in Gaza today – and not just in terms of the catastrophic loss of human life. The urge to erase is self-evident in the way all institutions, including universities and hospitals, are being targeted. Israel’s war on Gaza seems to be an effort to make it impossible for Palestinians to maintain their existence in the Gaza Strip.

The parallels with the Nakba of 1948 are unmistakable. Oral histories and declassified Israeli government documents have revealed, there was a systematic effort to erase all evidence of Palestinian existence. Israeli military leader and politician Moshe Dayan confirmed as much when he said: “Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I do not blame you because geography books no longer exist—not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either.” Of course, such a manner of genocidal violence is commonplace in settler-colonial contexts and accounts for a significant portion of the Indigenous population decline in settler states such as Australia and Canada.

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Though, the capitulation of Indigenous communities is also a consequence of a process of cultural genocide. This includes the way the church in settler states played an active role in the erasure of Indigenous cultural identity and heritage through the Christianisation of the native population. It also includes the removal of Indigenous children from their families in Canada and Australia. The ostensible purpose was the “protection” of these children. However, in practice, it was a “civilising” mission meant to annihilate the cultural identity of generations of indigenous children.

Palestinians too face a settler project that aims to annihilate their cultural heritage. This includes the [deliberate targeting of archaeological sites](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/14/a-cultural-genocide-which-of-gazas-heritage-sites-have-been-destroyed) in the Gaza Strip. Civil society organisations have argued that this is not an “empty gesture”. Rather it is an attempt to strip Palestinians of the “very substance [ie, culture] that forms the backbone of their right to self-determination”. The wholesale appropriation of Palestinian cuisine as Israeli, similarly erases key evidence of distinct Palestinian cultural heritage. And when Israeli forces destroy or steal olive trees, they are not just attacking an important source of income. They are also stealing an important [symbol of Palestinian resilience](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/11/20/palestine-symbols-keffiyeh-olive-branch-watermelon). Just like the olive tree that bears fruit despite growing in harsh conditions, the Palestinian national struggle also persists despite the harsh conditions of the occupation and siege.

In end, it is important to think about settler colonialism as a tool for better understanding what is happening in Gaza and across Palestine today. In part, it tells that what we are witnessing is structural, in that it is the deeply entrenched structures and institutions of a settler-colonial state that justify and rationalise the assorted forms of erasure we are currently witnessing in Gaza. But equally it helps connect Palestine to a global history of settler colonialism – a history that might explain why Indigenous communities from around the world have stood in solidarity with Palestinians, while settler states like the United States, Canada and Australia seem to perpetually waver in their support for Palestinian rights.

Israeli tanks close in on a Palestinian hospital. Doctors and medical staff are warned that they must leave — with or without patients in need. Artillery assaults follow, even if thousands of people are still inside.

On Monday, it was the turn of the Indonesian Hospital in Beit Lahia, Gaza. At least 12 people have been killed in Israeli attacks on the facility, even as armoured vehicles edge closer and closer to the hospital.

But it was only the latest medical centre to face the wrath of the Israeli army.

Six weeks into its war on Gaza, Israel’s attacks on hospitals have emerged almost as a motif of the conflict, even though [refugee camps](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/1/israels-deadly-attack-on-the-jabalia-refugee-camp-what-we-know-so-far), [schools](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/18/israeli-forces-strike-al-fakhoora-school-in-northern-gaza) and [churches](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/20/we-were-baptised-here-and-we-will-die-here-gazas-oldest-church-bombed) have not been spared either. At least 21 of Gaza’s 35 hospitals — including the strip’s solo cancer centre — are completely out of service, and others have been damaged and are short of medicines and essential supplies.

On Sunday, [31 premature babies were evacuated](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/19/babies-evacuated-from-al-shifa-and-transferred-to-southern-gaza) from al-Shifa Hospital to Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip after weeks of being fed formula mixed with contaminated water, without incubators that shut off from a lack of fuel caused by Israel’s near-complete siege on the enclave since the October 7 Hamas attack. At least eight babies had already died.

Israeli forces have, in effect, occupied al-Shifa since last week after bombarding parts of the hospital. As with Gaza’s other hospitals, al-Shifa was sheltering thousands of civilians displaced by Israeli bombing, in addition to patients and medics. On Friday, Israel’s military extended its approach in Gaza to the occupied West Bank, where armoured vehicles [surrounded at least four hospitals](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/17/israeli-forces-raid-jenin-surround-hospitals-in-occupied-west-bank). The Ibn Sina Hospital, one of the largest in the West Bank, was raided. And in early November, Israeli forces arrested some patients and their attendants from an [East Jerusalem hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/11/6/my-father-is-missing-israel-arrests-gaza-patients-in-jerusalem-hospital).

But why does Israel target Palestinian hospitals given that this also brings significant criticism from leading human rights organisations, which have [accused it of war crimes](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/14/israels-attacks-on-hospitals-should-be-investigated-as-war-crimes-hrw)?

Let them know: ‘Nowhere is safe’

Officially, Israel insists that it is targeting facilities that house Hamas fighters or infrastructure.

Israel [claimed Hamas was using al-Shifa as a command centre](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/19/israeli-army-says-it-found-a-55-metre-tunnel-under-gazas-al-shifa-hospital), for instance. But Hamas has denied that claim, and days after taking control of the facility, Israel has been unable to provide strong evidence to back its assertions.

The real reason Israel targets hospitals is different, according to Omar Rahman, a fellow at the Doha-based Middle East Council on Global Affairs. It is a form of psychological warfare, he said.

“Attacking hospitals tells the population that nowhere for [Palestinians] is safe,” Rahman told Al Jazeera, adding that Israel acts with “total impunity”.

Tahani Mustafa, a senior Palestine analyst at the International Crisis Group, said the act of making Palestinians feel unsafe in every facility in the strip is to quell any form of resistance.

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“This is part of a longstanding pattern of harassment of medical staff and services, in which Israel demonstrates to Palestinians that no one and no space is safe,” Mustafa told Al Jazeera.

“It is a systematic attempt to intimidate local populations and undermine their will to resist,” she added.

Throughout the war, Israel has targeted a number of ambulances and medical facilities in the West Bank and Gaza, claiming that Palestinian fighters use them to move around and shelter, without providing evidence for these claims, the analyst said.

Green light from the US

Israel also targets civilian buildings like hospitals because it can get away with it, said Trita Parsi, the executive vice president at the Washington-headquartered Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

“The only scrutiny and the only imposed limits that matter are the ones that come from the United States,” Parsi told Al Jazeera.

“Israel’s calculation is that international outcry doesn’t matter as long as the [United States refuses to put any limits](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-bottom-line/2023/11/18/is-bidens-stance-on-israel-out-of-sync-with-mainstream-america) on Israeli actions,” he added.

In the absence of this pressure from the US, combined with the “most extremist” and right-wing government Israel has ever had, “Israelis are taking the opportunity to do things they otherwise could not do”, Parsi explained.

Still, as the war wages on, the US may be compelled to urge its ally to dial down the ferocity of its attacks, as its image wears down around the world. “The US’s global standing and credibility is plummeting as a result of its green light for Israeli actions of this kind,” said Parsi.“It’s possible [this may not] continue for much longer, because the damage this is doing to the United States is simply not tolerable.”

“The Indonesian Hospital staff are insisting they will stay to treat the wounded. There are about 700 people, including medical staff and injured people, inside the hospital,” he said.

The Israeli military, which rarely publicises troop movements, had no immediate comment.

The Palestinian news agency Wafa said the facility in the northeast Gaza town of Beit Lahiya had been hit by artillery fire. Palestinian health officials said there were frantic efforts to evacuate civilians out of harm’s way.

Hospital staff denied there were any armed militants on the premises.

Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi condemned Israel’s actions and urged Tel Aviv’s partners to “stop its atrocities”. “The attack is a clear violation of international humanitarian laws. All countries, especially those that have close relations with Israel, must use all their influence and capabilities to urge Israel to stop its atrocities,” The advance on the facility, set up in 2016 with funding from Indonesian organisations, came a day after the World Health Organization evacuated 31 premature babies from al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City.

They were among more than 250 critically ill or wounded patients stranded there since Israeli forces entered the compound.

The territory’s largest health facility is being [evacuated](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/18/israel-gives-gazas-al-shifa-hospital-one-hour-to-evacuate) at gunpoint after being under siege for several days with 7,000 people inside.

The United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA has reported the “collapse of services” at hospitals across northern Gaza following widespread air strikes and the lack of fuel and medical supplies.

The Israeli military claims Hamas, the group that rules Gaza, has built underground infrastructure below hospitals for military usage, which Hamas and medical officials deny.

Marwan Abdallah, a medical worker at the Indonesian Hospital, said Israeli tanks were visible from the windows.

“You can see them moving around and firing,” he said. “Women and children are terrified. There are constant sounds of explosions and gunfire.”

Abdallah said the hospital had received dozens of dead and wounded in air raids and shelling overnight. Israel launched its offensive against Gaza after a wave of cross-border raids by Hamas on October 7 killed more than 1,200 people, the majority of them civilians, according to Israeli authorities.

The Hamas-run government says the death toll from Israel’s aerial bombardment and ground operations in the Palestinian territory has reached 13,000, thousands of them children.

World Children’s Day, celebrated annually on [November 20](https://www.unicef.org/world-childrens-day), is a global initiative promoting children’s rights, safety, education, health and happiness.

It comes this year amid Israel’s war on Gaza. About half of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million people are children.

Since October 7, Israeli attacks have killed at least 5,500 [children](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker), according to Palestinian officials. That is one Palestinian child killed every 10 minutes, or about one out of every 200 children in the Gaza Strip.

An additional 1,800 children are missing under the rubble, most of them presumed dead. A further 9,000 children have been injured, many with life-changing consequences. Many of these children have lived through the [trauma](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/19/israels-war-against-gazas-children-explained) of multiple wars.

The infographic below lists the names and ages of less than half of those children killed over the past six weeks.

Claims and denials of a potential ceasefire in Gaza continue. Some reports refer to a [three-day pause in fighting](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/16/are-israel-and-hamas-nearing-a-hostage-deal-what-to-know), while others extend the truce to a full five days. Still, others claim the ceasefire could begin imminently. And so on.

Even statements from the horse’s mouth differ. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied the report published by The Washington Post on Saturday that a tentative deal had been reached; a United States representative confirmed that talks were continuing but that a breakthrough was still awaited.

On Sunday, [Qatar’s Prime Minister](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/20/qatar-pm-says-only-minor-challenges-to-israel-hamas-captive-deal) Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani announced in Doha that the differences remaining between Hamas and Israel were “very minor”. Qatar has been central to mediation efforts in the war, including for the release of Israeli captives.

The last to be heard on the subject was Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh who on Tuesday told Reuters news agency that the parties are “close to reaching a truce agreement”. Another Hamas official told Al Jazeera that negotiations were centred on the duration of the truce, details of aid delivery to Gaza and the exchange of hostages and prisoners.

Where there’s smoke, there’s fire. With most parties involved looking to temporarily halt the carnage in Gaza, one must hope for the small step to a temporary respite.

It is also prudent to examine why the two warring sides are considering such a hiatus

While such a pause would benefit Hamas politically, militarily there seems to be no obvious gain — as I’ll explain on Wednesday.

For Israel, on the other hand, pausing the war could be advantageous from a military point of view and disadvantageous from a political one.

The Israeli war machine has been going at full strength for six weeks in the air and three weeks on the ground in Gaza. Since the Hamas attacks, Israel’s [aerial bombardment](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/11/20/why-does-israel-target-palestinian-hospitals-psyops-say-analysts) has continued at a surprisingly high rate.

It was clear from day one that the primary purpose of such merciless pounding of Palestinian civilian targets was not military. Initially, many analysts believed that the intense aerial attacks served to demonstrate to the Israeli populace that the armed forces were doing something and that bombing would be eased once land forces moved in.

Even a country that boasts of its preparedness for war needs to maintain substantial reserves of weapons and ammunition.

Omar Bradley, a US Army general during World War II, once said “amateurs talk strategy, professionals talk logistics”. Israeli forward commanders may be eager to continue pounding Gaza come what may, but the rear echelon has done the maths and does not like the result. There are reliable reports escaping the net of military secrecy that the Israeli Air Force (IAF) is running out of smart bombs.It is always difficult to judge the credibility of allegations in military matters. Sometimes an officer who is disillusioned with his side — especially when it is fighting outside its borders or inflicting heavy civilian losses — will anonymously leak crucial details.

Several specialised online forums claim that the IAF, having expended more than 2,500 joint direct attack munition (JDAM) smart bomb kits over Gaza, has just 10 days of stocks remaining.

Every military regulates how much ammunition must remain in reserve for emergencies. Exact figures are a guarded secret, but everything points to Israel’s quartermasters having sounded alarms, asking for urgent replenishment.

Specialised military items can be bought to fill gaps. In 1973, when Israel was on the verge of running out of stocks fighting Syria, Egypt and their Arab allies, the US launched “Operation Nickel Grass”, the biggest military airlift in history. The US Air Force flew almost 1,000 tonnes of weapons and ammunition to Israel per day, for a total of more than 22,000 tonnes.

That is [being repeated now](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/3/us-house-passes-14-5bn-military-aid-package-for-israel), albeit on a smaller scale. For the past two weeks, US C-17 transports have been landing regularly at Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv and at Nevatim airbase in the Negev desert.

Most aircraft fly in from the Ramstein airbase in Germany, where the US has warehouses full of “prepositioned stock” — equipment set aside for military emergencies.

There is little doubt that heavier and less urgent supplies are being [shipped to Israel by sea](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/7/us-protesters-block-ship-allegedly-carrying-weapons-to-israel). Among them will surely be replenishment rockets for the tracked version of the high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS), the M270 multiple-launch rocket system (MLRS) that saw heavy use in Gaza.

In October, the US released its own missiles for the Iron Dome air defence system to Israel. Israel’s response to initial heavy Hamas rocket attacks and attacks from Hezbollah and the Houthis had depleted Israel’s stocks to such an alarming level that it requested all of the Tamir interceptor missiles that the US had bought and kept in Israel until deployment.

The Israeli forces would also welcome a break in fighting to evaluate its tactics so far in light of its performance against Hamas tunnels. As many analysts have warned — me included — despite dogs, robots, ground-penetrating radars, and other technology, the [tunnels](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/9/analysis-how-would-israel-find-map-take-and-keep-gazas-tunnels) can be destroyed only once soldiers get inside. That is a bloody task, as was proven last week when four commandos were killed by an improvised explosive device after opening a tunnel cover.

A few days ago, an unidentified Israeli officer briefing reporters embedded with the Israeli forces admitted, “We don’t want to go down there. We know that they left us a lot of side bombs.” London-based weekly The Jewish Chronicle reported on November 16 that standing orders were clear: “No one is allowed to [go into a tunnel](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/13/very-risky-israel-faces-months-long-campaign-against-hamas-gaza-tunnels).”

The Israeli forces must also look into the effectiveness of their allegedly sophisticated and specialised training in simulators of Gaza City. Some of the simulation assumptions based on 2009 and 2014 incursions into Gaza have proven not applicable in 2023. It will also have to analyse why so many [Merkava tanks](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/analysis-what-does-israels-gaza-incursion-propaganda-video-reveal), believed almost invincible, were incapacitated. Reliable reports indicate up to 30 have been destroyed or are too damaged to use.

While the military would welcome three or five days of respite — but would likely not admit it — politicians would clearly see it as their loss.

Netanyahu and his hawks have been staunchly against any pause so if they accept it now, the public will see it as their weakness, no matter how they try to justify bowing to international pressure. The fact that US President Joe Biden, notionally Israel’s closest ally, has put his weight behind securing a break must be rubbing salt into the Israeli PM’s wounds.

If the agreed period without fighting is observed, which is always a big risk, Israeli politicians will face new pressure at its end; the world might ask, “If it was a success, why don’t you just extend it?”

Netanyahu’s greatest nightmare would be to get to a point where he not only failed to destroy Hamas but de facto recognised it by negotiating, even if indirectly. Deprived of Gaza, fuming Israelis would certainly go for his political skin instead.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh has said a truce deal with Israel was close and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he hoped for “good news soon” about captives held by the Palestinian group, even as Israel’s bombardment of the Gaza Strip has continued unabated.

After weeks of [war in the Gaza Strip](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/11/21/israel-hamas-war-live-medics-patients-remain-trapped-in-gaza-hospitals), US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday of the talks mediated by Qatar: “We have been working on getting hostages out for weeks. We’re now very close.”

“We could bring some of those hostages home soon, but nothing is done until everything is done,” he said.

Haniyeh said Hamas officials delivered their response to Qatari mediators in the ongoing talks, according to the Reuters news agency.

The statement gave no more details, but Hamas official Ezzat el-Reshiq told Al Jazeera that negotiations were centred on how long the ceasefire would last, arrangements for delivery of aid into Gaza and the exchange of Israeli captives held by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners in Israel.

Both sides will free women and children and details will be announced by Qatar,

The agreement will include a ceasefire, arrangements for aid trucks to supply all areas in Gaza, and the transfer of the injured to other countries for treatment, according to el-Reshiq.

‘We will continue to be at war’

Hours later, Netanyahu appeared to temper expectations, saying that Israel will continue its war against Hamas, even if a temporary ceasefire is reached to release captives.

An unnamed US official who spoke to Reuters said the agreement being discussed would see the release of 50 Hamas-held captives, mostly women and children, in exchange for 150 Palestinian prisoners and a pause in fighting of four or five days.

Netanyahu was convening with his war cabinet, security cabinet and full government in consecutive meetings to discuss whether to accept a proposed short-term truce deal that would see some captives released, as well as Palestinian prisoners.

In comments ahead of an expected cabinet vote on a ceasefire proposal, Netanyahu vowed to press ahead.

“There is nonsense talk outside that after returning our abductees we will stop the war,” he said.

“So I want to clarify: We are at war, we will continue to be at war, we will continue to be at war until we reach all our goals. We will destroy Hamas, we will return all our abductees and the missing and we will ensure that in Gaza there won’t be any party that poses a threat to Israel,” he said.

He added any pause will allow Israel’s military to “re-prepare” for fighting.

Israel’s far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich have opposed the deal. Both are members of Israel’s security cabinet and main government cabinet. reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, said it was “fully expected that this deal will be approved”.

“They have said that what the Israeli military has been doing in Gaza has been effective, that that’s how this deal has been reached – but they opposed any kind of Palestinian prisoner release,” Jamjoom said of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich.

But “that is not enough of a vote to keep this vote from happening”

According to Jamjoom, in terms of public sentiment, it remains unclear whether the deal is going to receive major backlash.

“There is some concern that perhaps because Palestinian prisoners are being released, that [it] could cause some people to become upset,” he said. But Israeli officials have said they are “vetting these Palestinian prisoners very carefully

UN resolution

Talk of an imminent deal on captives has been circulating for days as Qatari mediators sought the agreement for Hamas and Israel to exchange captives for prisoners in return for a temporary ceasefire that would boost emergency aid shipments to Gaza civilians.

Last week, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution calling for “urgent and extended [humanitarian pauses](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/11/10/will-israels-humanitarian-pauses-mean-much-for-gaza-no-say-experts) and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip” to allow for aid delivery and medical evacuations after four failed attempts to respond to the Israel-Hamas war.

The UN chief, Antonio Guterres, said on Monday that the world was witnessing an “unparalleled and unprecedented” level of civilian death in Gaza compared with any other conflict since he became the international organisation’s secretary-general in 2017.

“What is clear is that we have had in a few weeks thousands of children killed, so this is what matters,” Guterres said in New York while presenting a new UN environmental report.

The government media office in Gaza released updated casualty figures on Tuesday since Israel launched its air and ground assault on Gaza after the October 7 attacks by Hamas targeting Israel.

More than 14,128 Palestinians have been killed since October 7, including at least 5,600 children and 3,550 women. At least 33,000 people have been injured, it said, while more than 6,800 people are missing, either trapped under rubble or dead and not yet identified.

Hamas and allied groups took about 240 captives during their incursion into southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people, according to Israeli authorities.

Hospitals in northern Gaza are now completely out of service, according to the besieged enclave’s Ministry of Health.

Israel bombed and destroyed parts of al-Shifa Hospital, the largest in Gaza, where more than 700 people are still held captive under a siege by the Israeli army, according to al-Qudra.

Last week, Israeli forces [seized the hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/17/more-than-20-patients-die-at-gazas-al-shifa-hospital-amid-israeli-raid) to search for what they said was a Hamas tunnel network and command centre built underneath the complex. Hamas has denied the allegations.

A group of 28 [premature babies](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/20/photos-dozens-of-premature-babies-evacuated-from-gaza-to-egypt) were evacuated from the al-Shifa Hospital to Egypt to receive treatment on Monday, according to the Palestinian authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO).

‘Circle of death’

Al-Qudra also said that about 120 people were evacuated from northern Gaza’s Indonesian Hospital to Nasser Medical Complex in the south of the Strip.

There are still more than 400 injured people inside the Indonesian Hospital, in addition to about 200 medical staff and more than 2,000 others taking refuge, he added.

The Israeli army has put those inside the hospital in a “circle of death”, targeting anybody who moves around the hospital or inside it, al-Qudra said.

Gaza’s health ministry had said on Monday that at least 12 Palestinians were [killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/20/israel-targets-gazas-indonesian-hospital-here-is-whats-to-know#:~:text=There%20are%20about%20700%20people,people%20inside%20Gaza's%20Indonesian%20Hospital.&text=There%20was%20intense%20fighting%20reported,12%20Palestinians%20in%20the%20complex.) and dozens wounded by attacks on the hospital funded by Jakarta, which is currently [surrounded](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/20/israeli-tanks-surround-gazas-indonesian-hospital-after-killing-12-people) by Israeli tanks.

The WHO said on the same day that the Indonesian Hospital was only able to provide basic services, with the lives of those with severe injuries and other medical emergencies being at immediate risk.

Al-Qudra also said that Israeli air strikes targeted the house of Gaza’s deputy undersecretary of the health ministry on Tuesday morning, adding that there were 56 of his relatives in the house who had been displaced from different areas of Gaza.

Rescue teams managed to find 17 bodies while the rest are still under the rubble, according to the spokesperson.

Dire conditions

Hospitals in northern Gaza and Gaza City have faced power outages due to a lack of fuel and Israeli attacks.

They have also faced severe shortages of water, essential medicines and supplies as Israel continues its ground operations and air strikes on the enclave.

The WHO says it has recorded 335 attacks on health complexes in the occupied Palestinian territory since October 7, the beginning of the Gaza war, including 164 attacks in the Gaza Strip and 171 attacks in the West Bank.These attacks have resulted in forced mass evacuations from hospitals, and multiple fatalities and casualties among patients, their companions, and displaced people taking refuge there, according to the WHO.

At least 13,000 Palestinians – about 5,600 of them children and 3,500 women – have been killed in Gaza since Israel launched its air and ground assault on Gaza after the October 7 attacks by Hamas targeting Israel, according to the enclave’s health ministry.

Hamas and allied groups took about 240 captives during their incursion into southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people, according to Israeli authorities.

“It’s the first thing I want to do. I’m tired of all the continuous bombing,” he says.

Since the attack by Hamas fighters on southern Israel on October 7, in which they killed 1,200 people, Israeli aerial bombing and artillery shelling has killed [more than 14,000 Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) in Gaza, including more than 5,600 children. An estimated 1.7 million people out of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million have been displaced, with many moving from the northern part of the Gaza Strip to the south following warnings from the Israeli military.

But Israel’s bombing has extended to central and [southern Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/22/more-than-100-people-buried-in-mass-grave-in-khan-younis) too, leaving no part of the enclave safe, with refugee camps, schools and hospitals also attacked.

Now, the declaration of a four-day truce that could come into effect soon is promising the first hope of some respite for Gaza’s people.

“We can regain our soul a little,” says Loz. “We want to provide water for our homes, we want goods to enter instead of empty shops where we cannot find what we need.”

But it is also the first opportunity for thousands of families to finally grieve loved ones lost in the bombing. Others are hoping that the pause in fighting allows them to search for missing relatives and friends.

Loz says the home of his mother’s family in Gaza City was bombed. “I don’t know who is left of them, and I don’t know who was martyred. I want to check on my uncle,” he says. “Where are they, where have they fled to?”

“We want to grieve for those we lost. They [Israel] did not give us a chance to express our feelings, even to cry for our friends.”

According to Hamas, the truce will enable the free movement of people from the north of Gaza to the south along Salah al-Din Road, the territory’s main highway. But there is no such guarantee of movement towards the north, where Gaza City is based, so it is unclear whether those like Loz who want to search for missing relatives in the north will be able to make their way there.

Etaf Hussien Musataf al-Jamalan, a father of five children, was displaced from [Sheikh Radwan](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/27/palestinian-family-taking-shelter-at-al-shifa-hospital), a district of Gaza City, and was hoping to return to check on his house during the pause in fighting. He says he has “mixed feelings” about the truce.

“We wanted to check our houses. Maybe grab some supplies or anything,” he says, adding that he is “sad” that the truce terms might not allow that. He doesn’t know if his house is still standing — the United Nations estimates that half of north Gaza’s homes have been damaged or destroyed in the bombing — but he says he would prefer to “live in a tent in our neighbourhood” than as a displaced person.

Enas al-Jamalah, 12, is also from Sheikh Radwan. Displaced to Deir el-Balah, he and thousands of others sleep outdoors as winter sneaks up on Gaza, with temperatures dropping at night to 15 degrees Celsius (59 degrees Fahrenheit). His reason to go back home — if it still stands — is simple. “We just want to be warm,” he says.

That longing for home pulls at Fatima Qudayh, too. The 37-year-old from the town of Khuza’a fled to nearby Khan Younis in southern Gaza two days into the war.

Her home in Khuza’a had been damaged in the 2021 war, but she and her family had lovingly rebuilt it. Now, she doesn’t know if it’s still fine, damaged or destroyed. She hopes to visit once the truce comes into effect.

Her six children have barely slept since the war started, she says. “Every night, there is bombing everywhere. Every day, they ask me about the house. Is it OK? Are their [toys OK](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/9/displaced-gaza-children-cling-to-toys-in-al-shifa-hospital) and their rooms OK?”

“I tell them I pray that they are OK — but that the most important thing is that you are OK.”

The BBC has been accused by its journalists of failing to tell the story of the Israel-Palestine conflict accurately, investing greater effort in humanising Israeli victims compared with Palestinians, and omitting key historical context in coverage.

In a 2,300-word letter written to Al Jazeera by eight UK-based journalists employed by the corporation, the BBC is also said to be guilty of a “double standard in how civilians are seen”, given that it is “unflinching” in its reporting of alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine.

Fearing reprisal, the journalists requested anonymity. The group does not plan to send the letter to BBC executives, believing such a move was unlikely to lead to meaningful discussions.

They sent Al Jazeera the letter as a humanitarian disaster in Gaza escalates, and as grim milestones are reached at pace. At the time of writing, more than 14,500 Palestinians have been reported as [killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) by Israeli bombardment, including at least 6,000 children.

“The BBC has failed to accurately tell this story – through omission and lack of critical engagement with Israel’s claims – and it has therefore failed to help the public engage with and understand the human rights abuses unfolding in Gaza,” the letter reads. “Thousands of Palestinians have been killed since October 7. When will the number be high enough for our editorial stance to change?”

Israel declared war against [Hamas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-tothe-palestinian-group) after the Palestinian group, which governs the densely populated enclave, attacked southern Israel on October 7, killing about 1,200 Israelis and taking more than 200 hostage.

Rights groups and hundreds of thousands of [protesters worldwide](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/20/photos-palestine-solidarity-rallies-around-the-world), outraged by the soaring Palestinian death toll in Gaza, have called for a ceasefire.

The war has also divided newsrooms globally, with disagreements over how each side is being portrayed, the allegedly unequal level of empathy shown to Israeli and Palestinian victims, and the use of language.

The BBC journalists said that across British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) platforms, terms like “massacre” and “atrocity”, have been reserved “only for Hamas, framing the group as the only instigator and perpetrator of violence in the region. This is inaccurate but aligns with the BBC’s overall coverage”.

The Hamas assault, while “appalling and devastating … does not justify the indiscriminate killing of thousands of Palestinian civilians, and the BBC cannot be seen to support – or fail to interrogate – the logic that it does,” their letter reads.

“We are asking the BBC to better reflect and defer to the evidence-based findings of official and unbiased humanitarian organisations.”

‘Humanising coverage of Palestinian civilians has been lacking’

The journalists appealed to the corporation to “ensure that the equal treatment of all civilians is at the heart of its coverage”.

They claimed that the broadcaster carefully portrays Israeli suffering by, for instance, telling audiences the names of victims, covering individual funerals, and interviewing affected families.

“In comparison, humanising coverage of Palestinian civilians has been lacking. It is a poor excuse to say that the BBC could not better cover stories in Gaza because of difficulties gaining access to the [Gaza] Strip … This is achieved, for example, by telling and following individual stories across weeks. Little attempt has also been made to fully utilise the abundance of social media content from brave journalists in Gaza and the West Bank.”

The journalists acknowledged “some strong isolated examples”, but said sensitively told stories about Palestinians were not “consistent”, particularly after the outbreak of war.

“It is largely in the last few weeks – as civilian deaths have exponentially increased and Western countries’ appetite for Israel’s attacks has waned – that the BBC has made more effort to humanise Palestinian civilians. For many, this feels too little too late, and shows that the positions taken by governments in the UK and US have undue influence on coverage.”

“This organisation doesn’t represent us,” “For me, and definitely for other people of colour, we can see blatantly that certain civilian lives are considered more worthy than others – that there is some sort of hierarchy at play. That is deeply, deeply hurtful because actually, none of us struggle to empathise with Palestinian civilians.”

The journalist said that to them, it appears some staff members and senior reporters “don’t empathise as much with [Palestinians], as they do, for example, with Ukrainian civilians”.

The second co-writer Al Jazeera interviewed said they felt “sickened by the senseless loss of civilian life” during the Hamas attacks.

“I also felt a number of overlapping fears [including] that the coverage of my employer, the BBC, would fail in its duty to sufficiently interrogate this [Israeli] response or provide adequate context on decades of occupation.”

“My fears were immediately confirmed.”

The letter says that the BBC has organised “trauma support and listening sessions” for staff affected by the conflict.

“But for many of us – especially people of colour – the BBC’s coverage has been part of our distress,” the letter says. Further critiquing the BBC’s storytelling, the journalists argue that while Palestinians have been asked whether they “condemn Hamas”, the same cannot be said for guests who defend Israel’s actions.

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“[They] are not equally asked to ‘condemn’ the actions of the Israeli government, however high the civilian death toll in Gaza.”

On October 9, the BBC was criticised as lacking compassion over its interview with Husam Zomlot, the head of the Palestinian Mission to the United Kingdom, who lost several members of his family during the early days of Israel’s bombing campaign.

Zomlot, who does not represent Hamas, told presenter Kirsty Wark of his emotional pain. He listed the relatives who had been killed, describing them as “sitting ducks for the Israeli war machine”.

Wark replied: “I am sorry for your own personal loss. I mean, can I just be clear though, you cannot condone the killing of civilians in Israel, can you? Nor the killing of families?”

Zomlot, taken aback, then said: “No we don’t condone, no we don’t.”

The letter also claims that the BBC is failing to provide audiences with important background about Israel’s occupation and the history of Palestinian suffering.

“For Israel’s bombardment to be considered ‘self-defence’, events must begin with the Hamas-led attack,” they said. “News updates and articles neglect to include a line or two of critical historical context – on 75 years of occupation, the Nakba, or the asymmetric death toll across decades.”

[The Nakba](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/23/the-nakba-did-not-start-or-end-in-1948), or catastrophe, refers to the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians between 1947 and 1949, when Zionist paramilitaries and then Israel’s newly formed army destroyed more than 500 Palestinian villages and towns. About 15,000 Palestinians were killed, and more than 750,000 were forcibly displaced from their land.

Today’s crisis evokes memories of the Nakba for Palestinians in Gaza, many of whom are descendants of those who were uprooted decades ago.

“The BBC has often called the ongoing conflict ‘complex’. It is no more complex than any other conflict,” the letter reads. “It is our job to cut through rhetoric and misinformation; to explain what is happening and what has led to this.”

A BBC spokesperson denied the allegations.

In an email sent to Al Jazeera, the spokesperson said: “Throughout our reporting on the conflict the BBC has made clear the devastating human cost to civilians living in Gaza and Israel.”

They added that the BBC is “one of the only news organisations” to have journalists inside Gaza, who have been able to provide “on the ground reporting”.

“This has included many stories of Palestinian victims and first-hand testimony from civilians, doctors and aid-workers in Gaza, as well as a Panorama documentary, featuring human stories from both sides,” they said.

“When interviewing either the Israeli government, Hamas, Palestinian representatives, or other leaders, we are robust, challenging and aim to hold power to account.”

The spokesperson also sent a list of examples of BBC coverage on the war, which included human stories of Palestinian suffering.

One linked to a documentary on October 23, with the summary: “Panorama reports on the conflict between Israel and Hamas. After 1,400 Israelis, including women and children were murdered by Hamas fighters, Israel promised brutal retaliation to destroy Hamas. More than three thousand Palestinians, many women and children, have already been killed in Gaza. Reporter Jane Corbin hears the human stories on both sides and asks what does the escalating crisis mean for the wider region?”

Israel has since [revised down](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/10/israel-revises-death-toll-from-october-7-hamas-attack-to-1200-people) the death toll from 1,400 to 1,200.

The summary is an example of the kind of language in Western media outlets that many have criticised; Israelis are described as being “murdered by Hamas fighters”, but Palestinians are “killed” by a nameless actor.

BBC beset by controversies amid war

Since the latest Middle East conflict began, the BBC has been beset by controversies and claims of bias.

Last month, UK Defence Secretary Grant Shapps said the broadcaster’s descriptions of Hamas fighters as “militants”, rather than “terrorists”, was “verging on disgraceful”.

Hamas is designated as a “terror” group by the UK, United States and European Union.

At around the same time, the protest group Palestine Action claimed responsibility for vandalising the network’s London headquarters with red paint, accusing it of “spreading the occupation’s lies and manufacturing consent for Israel’s war crimes”.

Last week, the BBC embedded with the Israeli army to be shown around al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza, after Israel took control of the site. Israel has alleged that Hamas operated from the hospital – claims that many observers, including the BBC, have questioned.

Stephen Grey, a Reuters reporter, said on X of the trip facilitated by Israel: “Media should think very carefully about taking part in any one-sided embeds with any party. Today’s BBC report on al Shifa hospital, in which they were unable to speak to doctors or patients, left me feeling deeply uncomfortable.”

On October 24, a BBC correspondent based in Beirut, Rami Ruhayem, wrote to Tim Davie, BBC’s director-general, alleging that there are “indications that the BBC is – implicitly at least – treating Israeli lives as more worthy than Palestinian lives, and reinforcing Israeli war propaganda”.

On October 25, The Times newspaper, citing a BBC source, reported that staff had been “crying in the toilets” over the “distress caused” by coverage that they alleged was too lenient on Israel.

And over the weekend, Danny Cohen, a former director of BBC Television, said the corporation should be independently investigated over “management failures in its reporting of Israel”, as he accused a BBC journalist of pro-Palestine bias on her social media feed.

Fallout across global newsrooms

The war has led to bitter divides across other newsrooms, too.

An unnamed reporter at The Guardian, with family in southern Israel, wrote in the Jewish News that they felt disillusioned by the newspaper’s coverage and working environment after the Hamas attacks, claiming their colleagues were unsupportive.

“I think that Israel must defend itself. Yet when I say this, people will tell me I am justifying the murder of children. They will tell me it is a genocide,” they wrote.

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Anne Boyer, a poetry editor for The New York Times, quit last week, ostensibly over the paper’s editorial stance.

Apparently taking aim at the newspaper’s language on the war, she said: “I can’t write about poetry amidst the ‘reasonable’ tones of those who aim to acclimatize us to this unreasonable suffering. No more ghoulish euphemisms. No more verbally sanitized hellscapes. No more warmongering lies.”

Jazmine Hughes, a writer for The New York Times, resigned after signing a solidarity statement that described “Gaza’s people” as “victims of a genocidal war”.

Journalist and illustrator Mona Chalabi, who works for The Guardian US and freelances for The New York Times, posted on Instagram on October 18 that The New York Times has “consistently mentioned Israeli deaths more often than Palestinian deaths. What’s more, their coverage of Israeli deaths is \*increasing\* as more Palestinians are dying”.

Meanwhile, at the Los Angeles Times, staffers who signed a protest letter in solidarity with journalists in Gaza have been blocked from covering the war for three months, Semafor reported.

According to the BBC’s rules on impartiality, editorial staff “should not participate in public demonstrations or gatherings about controversial issues”.

Israeli forces also launched fresh attacks on the [Indonesian Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/20/israel-targets-gazas-indonesian-hospital-here-is-whats-to-know) in northern Gaza, targeting the main entrance and power generators.

Ashraf al-Qudra, the ministry’s spokesperson, said the hospital had come under “intense bombardment”, and that “large parts of the building” were being targeted.

More than 200 patients, medical staff, and internally displaced people were currently at the hospital in Beit Lahiya, which has been under siege for a week.

Meanwhile, Israeli fighter jets hit the Sheikh Nasser neighbourhood in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, killing at least five people and wounding dozens, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

It also reported that at least 10 people were killed when Israeli forces attacked a residential home in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood in northern Gaza.

In the occupied West Bank, 12-year-old Mohammed Ibrahim Fuad Edely was shot and killed by Israeli forces, according to the Palestinian ministry.

The incident brought the number of Palestinians killed in the occupied West Bank since [October 7](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/11/23/israel-hamas-war-live-israel-pounds-gaza-ahead-of-expected-truce) to 229, 52 of them children.

Israel’s relentless bombardments have killed more than 14,800 people in Gaza since October 7, according to Palestinian officials. In Israel, the official death toll from Hamas’s attacks stands at about 1,200.

Fighting to continue

Mediator Qatar announced that a [four-day truce](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/11/23/israel-hamas-war-live-israel-pounds-gaza-ahead-of-expected-truce) between Israel and Hamas is set to begin at 7am local time (05:00 GMT) on Friday.

But Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant called the upcoming pause a “brief respite … at the end of which the fighting will continue intensely, and we will create pressure to bring back more hostages” during an interview with a navy special operations unit on Thursday.

“At least another two months of fighting is expected,” he said.

Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari said: “The [captive release] outline is not the end of the process but the beginning.”

“In the coming days, we will focus on planning and completing the preparations for the next stages of combat.”

A spokesman for Hamas’s armed wing, Abu Obeida, said that Palestinian fighters remain ready to confront Israeli forces so long as the war continues and called for resistance to Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank

But the United Nations said on Friday that “the 24 hours prior to the pause witnessed an intensification of Israeli strikes from air, land and sea” throughout Gaza.

The temporary truce has allowed the 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza – where no place has proven safe in the past seven weeks – to experience their first night of sleep without the fear of being killed in an Israeli air raid.

It also provided some time for families to try to secure supplies of food and water, which have become scarce amid the unrelenting assault on the besieged enclave.

Some chose to go back to the northern parts of Gaza – which have seen the worst of the fighting between the Israeli army and Hamas – amid a ground invasion of the area by Israeli troops supported by heavy machinery and air strikes. Several Palestinians were killed on their way north as Israel ordered them to stay in the south. some Palestinians had a chance to visit surviving family members.

“It’s also an opportunity for those who lost loved ones and friends or family members to pay them respects and offer them a prayer, as funeral processions and proper burials were not permissible under heavy bombardment and relentless air strikes

More captives to be released

Palestinian journalist Ismail Abu Omar on Saturday shared a video – verified by Al Jazeera – that shows a man searching for his family’s clothes from under the rubble of their Gaza home, which was destroyed in the Israeli onslaught.

Palestinian photojournalist Magdi Fathi has documented the testimonies of several displaced women who say nothing is left of their homes in Khan Younis amid Israel’s bombardment of the enclave.

“I came to my house to take out some things, but I did not find anything. The Israeli army destroyed the place in a way that we did not expect,” said one woman, who was among the thousands who returned to their neighbourhoods after the start of the truce yesterday.

Another woman, a resident of Khuzaa in eastern Khan Younis, said she was “shocked” by what she found. “The destruction is very big,” she said.

Khan Younis is one of the southern cities where residents of northern Gaza were ordered by Israel to evacuate to, but it has been [repeatedly attacked](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/18/israeli-air-strikes-kill-28-palestinians-in-southern-gaza) by Israeli forces.

As part of the truce, [24 hostages held by Hamas in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/24/hamas-releases-25-captives-amid-israel-truce-heres-whats-to-know) were released on Friday, 13 of whom are Israelis. More are expected to be let go, as the Israeli prime minister’s office said it had received a list of captives to be released on Saturday. Reports indicate 42 Palestinians are expected to be released in exchange for 14 captives in Gaza.

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Friday also saw the release of [39 Palestinian women and children](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/24/photos-palestinians-released-from-prison-reunite-with-loved-ones) who had been detained by Israel, some of them for years. They returned to their homes in the occupied West Bank.

During the four days of the pause, at least 50 people are expected to be freed by Hamas, leaving an estimated 190 captives in Gaza. In exchange, 150 Palestinians are expected to be released by Israel.

The truce, which could potentially be extended, allowed the first aid deliveries since the start of the war to arrive in northern Gaza

To everyone’s relief, both sides stopped shooting right on cue. Not a shot was heard as the fighters took a much-needed respite.

All hopes now are that the pause will hold as intended and the ambitious plans for the 96 hours of uneasy truce will be carried out.

A column of Israeli armoured vehicles headed towards Israel, taking soldiers home for short chance to recover. They were not being fired at, so crews stood in open hatches or allowed themselves the luxury of sitting on the vehicles’ steel bodies, basking in the morning sun, obviously trusting the pause and not showing signs of anxiety or fear. Many smiled, demonstrating clear relief, as the plan looked like it was working. Palestinian fighters also headed outdoors. Many changed into civilian clothes and rushed south to see family members and check who survived the intense bombardment and indiscriminate shelling. Reporters saw aid agencies not waste a second, the first trucks carrying much-needed supplies crossing the Rafah checkpoint from Egypt minutes after Zero Hour. One hundred crossed into the Gaza Strip on day one, and more are scheduled.

Intricate exchange

The first real test, the late afternoon exchange of 13 Israeli captives held by Hamas for 39 Palestinians imprisoned in Israel, 24 women and 15 teenage boys, also passed smoothly.

Proving how sensitive the affair is, and fully aware of the possibility that a minor glitch could delay or even stop the planned exchanges, the two sides opted not to handle the logistics directly. Instead, they chose the safest approach, using intermediaries and, in the case of Israeli captives, going through an indirect route.

Hamas first handed 13 Israeli captives to the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (ICRC), who took them across the border into Egypt in a convoy of vehicles, handing them over to Egyptian authorities.

Egyptian “possession” was very brief, as all Israelis were quickly transferred to their country’s secret service, Shin Bet, who flew them by helicopter first to a military base in the Naqab Desert (also called Negev), and then to civilian hospitals where they were reunited with their families.

But this captive release procedure with all its intricacies was not Friday’s first. About half an hour before the liberation of Israeli captives, another group unexpectedly served as proof-of-concept: 10 citizens of Thailand and one Filipino were released, under the same procedures that would be used for the most anticipated group.

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The Thai captive deal was apparently negotiated separately, with Egypt as an intermediary. The suddenness with which it surfaced out of complete secrecy proves the nature of the complex negotiations for the release of the captives.

Israel released 39 Palestinian prisoners in a much simpler procedure – no go-betweens or roundabouts: the women and teenagers had first been transferred to Israel’s Ofer prison in the occupied West Bank. At the agreed time, the gates opened, and they were released to their waiting families and then on to East Jerusalem where thousands of Palestinians joined in an impromptu emotional celebration of their return to freedom.

Seeing with different eyes

At the same time, most Israelis were anxiously watching live coverage of the return of the first batch of their compatriots.

An Israeli colleague told me on Saturday that it was only when his family realised how stressed and worried they had been during the seven weeks of collective concern for the captives that they thought of the Palestinians’ anxiety for their own, held for many years. “After this, we may see them with different eyes”, he said.

There was no doubt that both sides were overwhelmed by emotions and some observers hoped that the realisation of how much pain both societies are in might somehow bring them together after the war ends.

But the good news of civilians being set free was marred by less-publicised news of others being killed in spite of the fighting being on pause.

While the two militaries refrained from shooting at each other as agreed, the Israelis demonstrated that, in their mind, the truce extends only to the two armed sides.

Israeli forces confronted hundreds of Palestinian civilians trying to return to their homes in north Gaza during the pause. They were defying Israeli orders to remain in the south, distributed in the media and air-dropped leaflets, and Israeli soldiers fired at them.

Two people killed and 11 wounded by direct, aimed, assault-rifle fire is a sad reminder that, as welcome as it is now, the agreed pause has its definite limits, in duration and in scope and a warning against getting euphoric and too hopeful too soon.

These were our daily experiences for seven weeks before the truce, and we had become adept at distinguishing between them, including the distinctive sounds of rockets from Gaza and Israeli bombings.

This morning, at 7:00 sharp, the [violent sounds](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/1/fighting-resumes-in-israel-gaza-war) resumed from land, air and sea, evoking new memories of sadness on my family’s faces.

My brother, opening the window to see what was happening, remarked, “Bombing is from everywhere.”

The toughest question came from my eight-year-old daughter, Banias, asking if this was war again. My husband explained that the past “calm” days were just a temporary truce, and the war had not ended

Blinken said Washington remains committed to supporting Israel’s right to self-defence, but also stepped up calls for Israel to comply with international law and protect civilians if it starts major military operations in southern Gaza.

His message was in keeping with the administration of US President Joe Biden’s shifting rhetoric on the war, which began as a full-throated embrace of Israel’s response to the Hamas attacks but gradually tempered as the number of Palestinian civilian casualties began to rise dramatically.

More than 15,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since October 7, including more than 6,000 children. The death toll and scale of destruction have prompted widespread international criticism.

As Israel bombarded [hospitals](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/29/save-what-remains-of-gaza-hospital-director-says-amid-bombing), schools and homes, the Gaza Ministry of Health said at least 7,000 people are still missing or feared buried under the rubble, and more than 36,000 Palestinians have been wounded, many with life-altering injuries. With 26 of Gaza’s 35 hospitals out of service, their chances of getting treatment are slim.

According to Ibrahim Abusharif of Northwestern University in Qatar, Blinken’s continued trips to Israel and meetings with Israeli leaders “doesn’t seem like it’s moving the needle in any direction”.

“What set the tone was the early rhetoric from the Biden administration that gave unconditional support for what turned out to be a genocidal war,” he told Al Jazeera. “Blinken can try to soften his rhetoric and apply pressure, but in the end, it won’t bring back the dead in Gaza.”

During a meeting in Jerusalem, Blinken assured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he could count on US support.

But, he said that such support requires Israel’s “compliance with international humanitarian law,” and “urged Israel to take every possible measure to avoid civilian harm,” the US Department of State said.

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To prevent a further significant increase in civilian casualties, Blinken “stressed the imperative of accounting for humanitarian and civilian protection needs in southern Gaza before any military operations there,” the department said.

Later on Thursday, US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said Washington supports the resumption of fighting in Gaza after the end of the truce, which Netanyahu has affirmed would happen.

“We continue to believe that Israel has the right and responsibility to go after Hamas … and as they make that decision, they’ll continue to find support from the United States,” Kirby told reporters.

Settler violence

Blinken also “urged immediate steps to hold settler extremists accountable for violence against Palestinians in the West Bank” and said the US places great importance on the resumption of a peace process that would eventually lead to the creation of a Palestinian state.

Israeli officials have pledged to the US on multiple occasions that [Israeli settler](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/6/who-are-israeli-settlers-and-why-do-they-live-on-palestinian-lands) violence will be punished, but Netanyahu’s office released a statement about the meeting with Blinken that contained no mention of either settler violence or a two-state solution.

Netanyahu said he told Blinken, “We will continue this war until we achieve the three goals – to release all our abductees, to eliminate Hamas completely and to ensure that Gaza will never again face such a threat.”

Blinken also met Israel’s war cabinet in Jerusalem before travelling to the occupied West Bank for talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and then back to Tel Aviv where he held talks with Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and opposition leader Yair Lapid.

Humanitarian aid, Palestinian state

In his meeting with Abbas, Blinken focused on efforts to increase the delivery of [humanitarian aid](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/30/epic-humanitarian-catastrophe-in-gaza-strip) to Gaza and condemned Jewish settler attacks against Palestinians in the occupied [West Bank](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/29/israel-kills-two-children-in-latest-raid-on-jenin-refugee-camp).

Blinken told Abbas “he would continue to insist on full accountability for those responsible,” and that Washington “remains committed to advancing tangible steps for a Palestinian state,” the State Department said.

Abbas presented Blinken with “a comprehensive file documenting Israeli occupation crime in Gaza, and the West Bank, including Jerusalem”, Palestinian state news agency Wafa reported.

Israeli army raids have taken place on a daily basis across the West Bank since the war began. The total number of people arrested since October 7 is now more than 3,325, according to the Palestinian Prisoner’s Society (PPS).

At least 248 Palestinians, including more than 50 children, have been killed in the occupied West Bank since October 7. More than 2,750 have been injured.

Abbas also raised the topic of the forced displacement of Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, particularly in light of increased attackers from settlers.

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The top US diplomat will close out his latest Middle East tour in the United Arab Emirates on Friday, where he will discuss the Gaza situation with Arab leaders gathered in Dubai for the COP28 United Nations climate change conference.

Another truce extension?

Blinken’s meetings came as Israel and Hamas agreed at the last minute to a [third extension of a truce](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/30/israel-and-hamas-agree-to-extend-truce-for-seventh-day) under which Israel has paused most military activity in return for the release of captives held by Hamas.

Qatar, which has been mediating between the two sides, said the agreement was being extended under the same terms as in the past, under which Hamas has released 10 Israeli captives per day in exchange for 30 Palestinian prisoners.

Late on Thursday, the Israeli military said two released captives have been handed over to its soldiers by the Red Cross and the Palestinian Prisoners’ Club released a list containing the names of 30 Palestinian prisoners – eight women and 22 children – who are expected to be released later in the day.

But as the number of civilians held in Gaza dwindles, Daniel Levy, a former Israeli negotiator, said the current iteration of the truce deal will have to be renegotiated.

“Can one do that in time to extend this cessation without getting back to the intention of the Israeli political and military leadership, which is to resume its all-out assault on Gaza? They are being clear that that’s where they want to go,” Levy told Al Jazeera.

“The Americans are apparently saying, ‘Hey, we’re with you on you continuing your military mission, but can you do it differently’ – that sounds like a disingenuous position to me. Why would anyone have faith that Israel will do this differently.”

Three days into the four-day truce between Israel and Hamas, the agreement appears to hold and there is even talk of extending it. By Monday, 50 Israeli women and children are supposed to have been exchanged for 150 Palestinian women and children, with mediators hinting that the deal could continue for a few more days through the same formula.

Although the conditions of the truce resemble similar ones put forward by Qatari mediators in recent weeks, Israel’s war cabinet has insisted it was the result of military pressure it had exerted on Hamas. But only a few weeks ago, the government was vowing to free its hostages by force. By assenting to the terms of the release, Israel has shown that it can, in fact, negotiate with Hamas, tacitly conceding that it is no closer to eradicating a group that has gone, quite literally, underground. If anything, by laying waste to much of Gaza City and, with it, the institutions of Hamas governance, Israel’s actions have only made the group more elusive.

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That much was made clear by the Israeli army’s siege and raid of Gaza’s al-Shifa Hospital, which failed to produce conclusive evidence that there was a Hamas-operated command centre there, as it had claimed. Instead, the operation against al-Shifa, which was anticlimactic at best, added to growing scepticism that Israel, with American backing, can uproot Hamas from Gaza.

It is time this reality is recognised in the halls of power in Washington. The Biden administration must abandon unrealistic Israeli rhetoric about “ending Hamas” and embrace a more attainable political solution that factors in the movement’s survival.

Mounting deaths, shifting public opinion

Proof of Israel’s faltering mission can be found in the war’s bloody dividends. Its air and ground assault, which Defence Minister Yoav Gallant vowed would wipe Hamas “off the face of the earth”, has so far failed to halt Palestinian fighters’ ambushes of Israeli positions or the near-daily volley of rockets lobbed at Israeli cities. Now in its seventh week, the war has instead [killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/11/25/israel-hamas-war-live-israeli-officials-say-39-palestinians) more than 14,800 Palestinians, including some 6,100 children, levelled residential neighbourhoods and refugee camps, and displaced more than a million people across the besieged strip.

Military analysts had claimed that the massive bombing campaign would “soften” Hamas positions ahead of Israel’s ground invasion, limiting the group’s ability to wage urban warfare in the densely built enclave. But in recent weeks, some US officials, echoing reports in the Israeli media, have started to concede that Israel’s unrelenting bombing has failed to neutralise Hamas’s battle capabilities.

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Tolerance for Israel’s actions also appears to be declining. On November 10, French President Emmanuel Macron became the first G-7 leader to call for a ceasefire. On November 24, the prime ministers of Spain and Belgium criticised Israel’s “indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians” and the destruction of “the society of Gaza”. Pedro Sánchez, the Spanish premier, even vowed to unilaterally recognise Palestinian statehood.

In the US, the Biden administration may be standing by their Israeli ally, but public opinion is swiftly shifting in favour of a permanent ceasefire. Mass demonstrations calling for a ceasefire have been held across the country and several large US cities, including Atlanta, Detroit and Seattle, have passed resolutions echoing this call.

A recent poll showed that only 32 percent of Americans believe their country “should support Israel” in its war on Gaza. Having left little daylight between his stance on the war and Israel’s prosecution of it, US President Joe Biden has already seen his poll numbers slip.

Public pressure may have encouraged not only Washington to push for the hostage exchange, but also the Israeli government to accept it. In addition to the backlash he has faced from families of the Hamas-held hostages, reports indicate that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was pressed on the exchange by Israel’s security services and military.

Although Netanyahu, Gallant, and former Defence Minister Benny Gantz, who sits in the current war cabinet, have all declared that the war on Hamas would continue, public pressure could make them walk back on this intention, too.

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The conflict is already taking a heavy toll on the Israeli economy, which is losing over a quarter billion dollars a day. It is expected to contract by 1.5 percent in 2024, as the fighting has disrupted air travel and cargo and the recent hijacking of an Israeli-linked ship may even threaten sea transportation.

Then there are the tens of thousands of Israelis displaced from areas along the Gaza and Lebanon borders as well as all the families of the hostages calling for all to be released. The ongoing truce has demonstrated that Israelis held captive can be easily freed without firing a shot. This could help sway Israeli public opinion – which so far has been overwhelmingly in favour of the war – towards a ceasefire.

Some Israeli analysts are already noting a shift favouring a truce extension. Indeed, continuing on the path of negotiations would limit the country’s mounting economic losses and safeguard the lives of both its captives and soldiers. The Israeli military has admitted to the deaths of 70 soldiers since the start of the ground invasion.

The path to a ceasefire

Another problem with the Israeli government’s insistence on continuing the war is that it has not actually laid out an endgame that is acceptable to its allies, including the US.

Apart from the declared goal of “eradicating” Hamas from Gaza, Israeli officials have also indicated that they wish to expel the Palestinian population into Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula.

Pressure from Arab allies quickly quashed US support for this idea as well as for Israeli plans to claim indefinite “security responsibility” in Gaza. The Biden administration’s alternative – for the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority to assume control of the enclave – has been roundly rejected by both Israel and Hamas, which, in the absence of Israeli reoccupation, would remain the only power broker in Gaza.

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Instead of recognising this, the US has stubbornly refused to float any policy proposals that factor in Hamas’s survival. In that wilful blindness, Washington is joined by a chorus of pundits who continue to put forth “solutions” that presuppose Hamas’s destruction. But given the still-fresh memory of Afghanistan, US policymakers should know all too well that eradicating a homegrown resistance movement is, ultimately, impossible.

More possible would be to build on the example of the current hostage deal, which showed that both Israel and Hamas have the political will to negotiate. By working with mediators Qatar and Egypt, the US can help move the conversation around Gaza beyond the disastrous “with us or against us” rhetoric that characterised America’s war on terror and into discussions about a long-term ceasefire, one that would need to be brokered through Hamas’s political leadership-in-exile.

There is precedent for this. Recall that, in December 2012, Israel allowed Hamas’s then-leader Khaled Meshaal to return to Gaza as part of a negotiated truce after that year’s eight-day war. Whether current exiled leader Ismail Haniyeh can moderate the position of his Gaza counterpart, Yahya Sinwar, who is widely believed to have masterminded the October 7 attacks, will depend on Haniyeh’s ability to secure international relief and reconstruction funds.

Just as important will be a US commitment to rein in Israel’s extremist policies, including its siege of Gaza and backing for settler violence in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. Once such a de-escalation happens, it will become critical for the international community to uphold its commitment to Gaza’s reconstruction and development, easing the desperate conditions that helped give rise to the October 7 attacks.

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To be sure, no vision for a peaceful future can abide the murder of civilians. But finding a way out of the current crisis means reckoning with the reality laid bare by this war’s first seven weeks: There is no way to wipe Hamas “off the face of the earth” that does not take untold numbers of Palestinian – and Israeli – lives with it.

If Hamas’s long-term survival strains the imagination, the risks of simply avoiding the thought are even more unimaginable. Although this is clearly not a widely held sentiment in Israel right now, some Israelis, like former government advisor and Bar-Ilan University professor Menachem Klein, are coming around to the idea. Speaking to Al Jazeera after the first Israeli hostages were released, Klein conceded that it is “impossible to totally destroy Hamas by force”. The path forward, he argued, should include the group in renewed negotiations around a Palestinian state.

Given the horrific suffering endured by the people of Gaza, growing international and domestic pressure to end it, and the still-looming prospect of a broader regional conflict, the US can no longer insist that eliminating Hamas is the only path to ending this war.

Israeli forces have killed eight Palestinians, including a child, in the occupied West Bank, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, taking the total number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank to 239 since October 7.

Israeli forces shot dead five Palestinians in the city of Jenin late on Saturday and early Sunday, and killed three others elsewhere in the West Bank, the ministry said on Sunday. Six other Palestinians were injured in the Israeli raid in Jenin.

Palestinian news agency Wafa said Israeli forces stormed Jenin “from several directions, firing bullets and surrounding government hospitals and the headquarters of the Red Crescent Society”.

The Israeli military spokesperson’s office said it was looking into the reports.

The raids come despite an ongoing four-day truce between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas in the war-torn Gaza Strip, where nearly 15,000 Palestinians, including more than 6,000 children, have been killed in Israeli strikes.

Israeli officials said 1,200 people were killed in the surprise Hamas attack on October 7, when the Palestinian group took about 240 people captive

On Saturday, Hamas released 13 Israeli and four Thai captives, while Israel released a first batch of 39 Palestinian prisoners in exchange. More Israeli captives and Palestinian prisoners are expected to be freed on Sunday.Since October 7, Israeli forces have killed at least 237 Palestinians, including 52 children, in the occupied West Bank, while arresting more than 3,000 people, as it intensified raids in the West Bank since launching its military offensive on Gaza.

Last year was the “deadliest” for the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem since 2006, according to the United Nations. Israeli forces had killed 170 Palestinians in those areas in 2022. This year, Israeli forces and settlers have killed at least 371 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

“For every Palestinian prisoner [the Israelis] release, there seems to be a continued disregard for the freedoms of Palestinians they continue to detain, a continuous disregard for Palestinian life as they continue to kill people in very violent and endless raids in the occupied West Bank,” said Al Jazeera correspondent Zein Basravi, reporting from Ramallah in the West Bank.

Seven weeks of relentless Israeli attacks in Gaza killed at least 14,854 Palestinians, more than a third of them children, and displaced at least 1.5 million, according to Gaza officials.

Israel’s attacks on Gaza have stretched into a second day after a seven-day truce with Hamas ended as Qatar and Egypt mediate talks to renew a pause in hostilities.

The United Nations said on Saturday that the fighting would worsen the extreme humanitarian emergency in Gaza.

“Hell on Earth has returned to Gaza,” said Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN humanitarian office in Geneva.

“Today, in a matter of hours, scores were reportedly killed and injured. Families were told to evacuate, again. Hopes were dashed,” UN aid chief Martin Griffiths said, adding that children, women and men of Gaza had “nowhere safe to go and very little to survive on”.

Al Jazeera’s Hind Khoudary in Deir el-Balah in central Gaza said Israeli tanks have not stopped shelling the enclave and gunboats are attacking its coastline.

“Houses have been targeted. At least three mosques were hit. Areas across the Gaza Strip – the north, south and centre – have all been targeted.”

The Israeli army said on Saturday that it hit more than 400 targets overnight, including in the Khan Younis area in the south, to which tens of thousands of civilians evacuated over the past month. I spent most of my life on a strip of land not much bigger than Manhattan, surrounded by a massive razor-wire fence. Most of the time, it felt like we, the residents of Gaza, were the only people who noticed we were living in an open-air prison.

I pursued a career as a photojournalist to document life in Gaza and try to make the rest of the world understand its plight and its resilient people. In times of relative quiet, I focused on inspiring and uplifting stories. And, in times of violence and death, I tried to document the aftermath – the pain and the scars that would remain after the bombs stopped falling and the world lost interest yet again.

I am no longer in Gaza, and yet, as a Palestinian hailing from this tiny, fenced-off strip, I was not spared a deluge of accusatory messages over the past few weeks. My inbox has been inundated with messages asking about Hamas. They are not aimed at understanding Hamas or why they did what they did on October 7. Rather, they want me to answer for their actions.

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It does not matter that I have lost 50 colleagues in six weeks or that my neighbours and their families had been killed in an Israeli air strike after fleeing to the south as they were directed to do by Israel.

It does not matter that every day, I fear for the lives of my family who remain in Gaza, and every time I try calling them, I would have a small panic attack when there is no answer.

The first question has always been whether I condemn Hamas. It has felt like I am being asked to audition for sympathy.

Every day, I hear the words “tunnels” and “hostages” uttered in media reports or conversations condemning a “terrorist organisation”.

But these words have a very different connotation for me.

For me and the Palestinians of Gaza, tunnels have become something of an essential infrastructure. In 2007, Israel imposed a debilitating siege on Gaza, and as an occupying power, it has been able to fully control what can come through border crossings, including the one with Egypt at Rafah.

Throughout the past 16 years, the Israeli authorities have decided arbitrarily to ban certain goods from entering the strip as yet another form of collective punishment of its population. For example, in 2009, they decided that no pasta could enter Gaza. Yes, pasta.

So, the Palestinians dug tunnels to try to smuggle in pasta and any other essential items that Israel would randomly ban.

Food, medicine and fuel started to trickle in from what came to be known as “the Metro” – which probably had more stops than Washington, DC’s metro system and, I dare say, was a little bit safer.

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When my first daughter was born in 2011, I was in need of colic baby formula for her age 0-3 months, which was not available in local shops. I was relieved to be able to get hold of some boxes – courtesy of “the Metro”.

The tunnels became such a constant feature of our lives that we would sometimes joke about ordering Kentucky Fried Chicken through them, as this was seen as a “luxury” we didn’t have in Gaza. But there were things that the siege deprived us of that the tunnels could not provide.

A proper supply of potable water was one. We often couldn’t shower whenever we wanted because water was rationed. As a result, we would try to keep the bathtub full so we wouldn’t be forced to use seawater when it was cut.

Electricity was another luxury we were often deprived of. On average, we only had access to electricity for 4-6 hours a day.

Freedom of movement was another “privilege” the tunnels would not help with. Travelling to and out of Gaza was not a possibility for most people, even long before Hamas existed.

When I was 17, we planned to visit my mother’s family in Egypt. We waited for three days at the Rafah border crossing before we were permitted to leave. As our taxi driver drove through the gates, the Israeli soldiers suddenly opened fire. The driver turned around in horror, shouting at them to stop.

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We found out later that it was their lunch break, and they didn’t want to be interrupted even though we should have been allowed to pass. So, our summer plans were cancelled, just like that.

“Hostages” is another word that rings with a different meaning in my mind.

Many are now demanding the release of all Israeli hostages before a ceasefire can even be considered. Indeed, I wholeheartedly agree: All civilian hostages should be repatriated without condition. But this must also include Palestinian hostages.

There are more than 2,000 Palestinians currently held indefinitely in “administrative detention” in Israeli jails without any charges. Many of them are children, some as young as 12.

Those who have actually been charged are tried by a military court where the conviction rate often exceeds 95 percent, indicating that the prisoners likely lack even basic access to due process or the ability to examine “secret evidence” against them.

Israel is the only nation in the world that regularly prosecutes children in a military tribunal. The most common offence? Throwing stones. These “prisoners” are children held captives by an occupying army that has abruptly and brutally taken them from their families.

Unfortunately, no one is putting their names and faces on posters across New York City or London. When people are imprisoned without charges and have no access to due process that is precisely what they are: hostages.

I became a photojournalist in Gaza because I believed it was important to document the reality of life there, the reality that most don’t see.

And, while I no longer live there, I would not be fulfilling my duty as a journalist, much less as a Palestinian, if I did not try and tell you what has been our reality long before Palestinians broke through the razor-wire fence on October 7. More than 1.5 million people have been displaced, most of them from northern Gaza, since Israel launched a military offensive on October 7 in the wake of a deadly Hamas attack.

Overnight and into Sunday, intense bombing was reported in Khan Younis, Rafah, and some northern parts targeted by Israel’s air and ground attacks.

“Everywhere you turn to, there are children with third-degree burns, shrapnel wounds, brain injuries and broken bones,” James Elder, UNICEF’s global spokesperson, told Al Jazeera from Gaza.

“Mothers crying over children who look like they are hours away from death. It seems like a death zone right now.”

The main hospital in Khan Younis received at least three dead and dozens wounded on Sunday morning from an Israeli air raid that hit a residential building in the eastern part of the city, according to an Associated Press journalist at the hospital. Hopes of any future cessation in the fighting were dashed on Saturday when Israel announced it was pulling out negotiators from the Qatari capital, Doha, saying talks had reached an “impasse”.

Israel has said it is working to eliminate the armed Palestinian group Hamas, which launched deadly attacks on southern Israel on October 7, killing about 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and taking more than 240 captives, according to Israeli authorities.

Israel has killed more than 15,200 Palestinians [in Gaza attacks](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/3/israel-hamas-war-list-of-key-events-day-58) since October 7, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza.

Evacuation orders

The Israeli military on Sunday expanded evacuation directives in Khan Younis and the vicinity, urging residents from at least five additional areas to relocate for safety purposes.

Leaflets distributed by the military instructed residents to move south to Rafah, or a coastal area in the southwest, emphasising that Khan Younis was a “dangerous” combat zone. Rights groups have raised concerns against Israel’s stepped-up attacks in the southern part of the besieged enclave, which was earlier declared a “safe zone”.

Following an Israeli air raid on an eastern residential building, the main hospital in Khan Younis reported at least three deaths and dozens of injuries on Sunday morning, according to an AP journalist.

A significant portion of the 2.3 million inhabitants in the territory now resides in the southern areas due to the war.

Meanwhile, in the occupied West Bank, a 21-year-old Palestinian was shot dead on Sunday by Israeli forces in a raid in Qalqilya.

According to the Palestinian Prisoner’s Society, Israel arrested at least 60 Palestinians in overnight raids in the occupied territory.

The latest arrests add to more than 3,000 Palestinians arrested in the West Bank since October 7, according to the UN Human Rights Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Fighting in Gaza resumed almost on cue on Friday when the [last extension](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/1/the-israel-hamas-truce-has-ended-what-we-know-so-far) of the truce expired and hopes in attempts to renew it again faded.

Back in action first were Israeli F-16 bombers, pounding more than 400 targets in Gaza, including some in the very south near the Rafah border crossing with Egypt. However, the focus appeared to be in the north and there is little doubt that the Israeli army will try to advance deeper towards the centre of Gaza City just as Defence Minister Yoav Gallant announced: tanks, artillery, armoured bulldozers, then infantry.

Meanwhile, contradictory news from Qatar, where intermediaries from the host country, Egypt and the United States were still trying to convince the warring sides to reach another pause. The first announcement on Saturday said the talks were continuing.

Then at mid-afternoon, the Israeli prime minister’s office issued a statement: “Following the impasse … David Barnea, head of the Mossad, ordered his team in Doha to return to Israel.”

Writing official statements is an art: One should never lie but there is no need to tell the whole truth. While the “official” Israeli secret service delegation may indeed be [on its way home](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/2/israel-pulls-mossad-negotiators-from-qatar-after-impasse-over-captives), I have no doubt that at least a small team remains in Doha. They may not be Mossad, but it would be foolish not to leave qualified liaison officers who can keep talking

Another reason for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to maintain at least a core team of officials in Qatar would be to avoid straining relations with traditional ally the United States, which has supported Israel greatly in the post-October 7 crisis. US President Joe Biden visited Israel offering Bibi a photo op the cunning veteran of Israeli politics jumped on, splattering the media with their embraces and carefully selected soundbites. Washington followed with massive supplies of military goods, some commercial sales, and others loans. The biggest may be the $14.3bn aid package “for Israel’s defence”.

Weapons and armaments have been pouring into Israel by US C-17 aircraft and commercial airlifters practically from October 8. The Washington Post reported that 15,000 bombs and 57,000 artillery shells (155mm) came by air, a figure consistent with the estimated amount of ordnance expended in the eight-week campaign and the carrying capacity of the aircraft.

Less urgent supplies will be arriving on less glamourous, higher-capacity ships.

As the bombing campaign resumed, the media revealed the types of bombs shipped to Israel, focusing mostly on the specialised heavy “bunker busters”. The report claims that 100 BLU-109 bombs were shipped. Some media speculated that this delivery may signify a change in tactics against the Hamas, but there is nothing to be excited about

The 900kg (2,000lb) BLU-109 is nothing more than a “dumb bomb” with thicker outer walls than general-purpose bombs, that help it penetrate deeper into the earth or through thicker layers of reinforcing concrete before exploding. The corresponding weight class general-purpose MK84 bomb carries 430kg (950lb) of explosives to the “bunker-busters” 240kg (530lb).

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But the BLU-109, which costs US taxpayers $65,000 apiece versus $16,000 for the MK84, is of little use to Israel as a dumb bomb. To be effective and able to hit targets with precision, it needs to be upgraded with a far costlier laser guidance head unit and a control tail unit. According to the same reports, the US delivered 3,000 such JDAM kits that convert dumb bombs into smart weapons.

Apart from 100 bunker busters, US deliveries reportedly included two sizes of general-purpose dumb bombs: 5,400 MK84s – 900kg (2,000lb) – and 5,000 MK82s – 450kg (1,000lb) – and 1,000 precision-guided GBU-39 “small diameter bombs” – 150kg (300lb).

Worried about the indiscriminate aerial bombardment of Palestinian targets that could be compared to carpet bombing, the US warned Israel on several occasions to reduce the number of civilian casualties.

After the resumption of bombing on Friday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned Israel that “the massive levels of loss of civilian life and displacement scale we saw in the north must not be repeated in the south”.

He allegedly received Israeli assurances that they would try to kill fewer civilians, but the casualty toll in the first 24 hours of renewed fighting, with nearly 200 reportedly killed in the bombardment, leaves little room for optimism.

Can anything about the intentions of the next stage of aerial bombardment be determined from the numbers and types of bombs delivered to the Israeli army?

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First, there is no reason to put too much importance on the delivery of 100 bunker busters. Israel already had those in its arsenal and used some, so this may be a simple replenishment or a modest build-up. While long and sometimes deep, Hamas tunnels are mostly not covered in thick layers of concrete, so Israel would need just a handful of bunker busters.

Second, one could compare the number of conventional bombs delivered, 10,400 of two different weight classes, with the number of JDAM kits, 3,000. Along with the transfer of 1,000 small but precise “small-diameter bombs”, these figures may suggest that one in every three or four bombs dClouds of grey smoke from the strikes hung over Gaza, where the Hamas-run Ministry of Health said more than 190 people had been killed and hundreds were wounded in renewed Israeli bombardment.

Israel said its ground, air and naval forces struck more than 400 targets in Gaza in its latest attacks. It also called on people to evacuate from Khan Younis as it expands its military operations, urging them to move southwards towards Rafah, close to the border with Egypt.

Each of the warring sides blamed the other for the truce collapse by rejecting terms to extend the daily release of hostages held by Hamas fighters in exchange for Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

‘Hell on Earth’

The United Nations said the fighting would worsen the extreme humanitarian emergency in Gaza.

“Hell on Earth has returned to Gaza,” said Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN humanitarian office in Geneva.

“Today, in a matter of hours, scores were reportedly killed and injured. Families were told to evacuate, again. Hopes were dashed,” said UN aid chief Martin Griffiths, adding that children, women and men of Gaza had “nowhere safe to go and very little to survive on”.

A pause that started on November 24 had been extended twice and Israel had said it could continue as long as Hamas released 10 hostages each day. But after seven days – during which women, children and foreign hostages were freed – mediators failed to find a formula to release more.

Israel accused Hamas of refusing to release all the women it held. A Palestinian official said the breakdown occurred over female Israeli soldiers.

Israeli tanks have not stopped shelling the enclave and the gunboats are attacking the coastline of the Strip.

“It was very tough last night with people in Gaza describing it as one of the toughest, as there has been non-stop bombardment in the last 24 hours,” she said.

“Houses have been targeted. At least three mosques were hit. Areas across the Gaza Strip – the north, south and centre, have all been targeted.”

Israel has sworn to annihilate Hamas after an October 7 rampage in which it says the group killed about 1,200 people and took 240 hostage.

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Israeli assaults since have laid waste to much of Gaza, ruled by Hamas since 2007. Palestinian health authorities deemed reliable by the United Nations say more than 15,000 Gazans, including 6,150 children, have been killed and thousands are missing.

Qatar, which has played a central mediating role, said negotiations were continuing with Israelis and Palestinians to restore the truce, but Israel’s renewed bombardment of Gaza had complicated matters.

Israel says its priority is to get as many hostages released as possible as it puts military pressure on Hamas.

Officials say Hamas released 110 hostages during the truce – 86 Israelis and 24 foreigners – in exchange for a total of 240 Palestinian prisoners. At the same time, Israel detained almost as many Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank

‘Israel wants buffer zone’

US officials told The Wall Street Journal newspaper that Washington provided Israel with large “[bunker buster” bombs](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/2/us-gives-bunker-buster-bombs-to-israel-for-war-on-gaza-report#:~:text=Apart%20from%20ground%2Dpenetrating%20munitions,of%20bombs%20and%20artillery%20shells.&text=The%20United%20States%20has%20given,by%20The%20Wall%20Street%20Journal.), among tens of thousands of other weapons and artillery shells, to help dislodge Hamas from Gaza.

Meanwhile, Israel has informed several Arab states that it wants to carve out a buffer zone on the Palestinian side of Gaza’s border to prevent future attacks, Egyptian and regional sources, quoted by the Reuters news agency, said.

The report said that Israel related its plans to its neighbours Egypt and Jordan, along with the United Arab Emirates, which normalised ties with Israel in 2020.

There has also been a renewed escalation of hostilities on Israel’s Syrian and Lebanese borders after the truce in Gaza ended.

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Syrian air defences repelled an Israeli rocket attack against targets in the vicinity of Damascus early on Saturday, according to Syrian state media, which added that most of the missiles were shot down.

Separately, casualties were reported in southern Lebanon, with Lebanon state media reporting that Israeli shelling killed three people on Friday.

The Iran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah, a Hamas ally, said two of those killed were its fighters. It added it had carried out several attacks on Israeli military positions at the border.

From polluted water supplies to toxic smoke-filled air from burning buildings and bodies, every aspect of life in Gaza is now filled with some form of pollution.

“On the ground, this war has destroyed every aspect of Gaza’s environment,” Nada Majdalani, the Ramallah-based Palestine director for EcoPeace Middle East, told Al Jazeera.

Here’s a look at how the unstoppable bombardment of the enclave could further affect climate change in a region that has already seen [temperatures increase](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/5/interwoven-struggles-the-green-paradox-meets-the-palestine-paradox), with projections of a 4 degrees Celsius (7.2 degrees Fahrenheit) rise by the end of the century.

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How has the Israeli bombing affected Gaza’s climate change measures?

Gaza has been under an Israeli siege for 16 years, with Israeli authorities holding the switch to — among other things — dependable access to fuel and power in the enclave.

As a result, the people of Gaza turned significantly to solar energy to power their homes.

“Gazans have been climate adaptive, and some 60 percent of their energy would come from solar power,” Majdalani said.

But Israeli bombing has damaged or destroyed thousands of buildings, many of which were roofed with solar panels.

“Destroying the solar panels is not only targeting the wellbeing of people, it’s diminishing the efforts of the Gazans in taking climate adaptation and measures to secure clean energy,” she said.

“These solar installations now lay in the rubble with the buildings destroyed, setting back Gaza’s climate change efforts.”

What are the main environmental concerns on the ground?

Amid the war, “getting figures and measurements of the extent of the damage” to Gaza’s environment is difficult, said Majdalani.

But some things are clear. Decaying bodies and contaminated water supplies are a “ticking time bomb” that will lead to the spread of diseases, she said.

“Right now this is the greatest concern, and everyone should be worried, including Israel. Having military might on the ground cannot protect them against the spread of cholera which is predicted.”

Impending rains are another concern. Majdalani’s team estimates 44 percent of gas, water and sanitation facilities have either been completely or partially damaged in Gaza since the war began. This includes water wells and wastewater treatment. Sewage water has already flooded Gaza streets, but if rain mixes with the filth, the risks of cholera and other gastrointestinal diseases increase further.

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“The war damage to Gaza’s water sanitation and hygiene infrastructure makes flooding more likely with the winter rains,” Doug Weir, director of the Conflict and Environment Observatory, an independent research body based in the United Kingdom, said.

Even before the current war, [inadequate sanitation infrastructure](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/8/no-running-water-war-displaced-gaza-families-bathe-wash-in-polluted-sea) and electricity shortages meant that untreated sewage water was dumped into the sea and was [responsible](https://www.ochaopt.org/content/seawater-pollution-raises-concerns-waterborne-diseases-and-environmental-hazards-gaza-strip) for more than one-quarter of illnesses. It was the primary cause of child morbidity in the Gaza Strip.

According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, the total shutdown of wastewater treatment plants in October, after Israel imposed a complete blockade on any fuel entering the strip, led to the release of more than 130,000 cubic metres of untreated sewage into the Mediterranean Sea daily, posing a grave environmental hazard.

With the destruction amid the current war, huge volumes of debris and waste are blocking sewers, warned Weir. This, he said, “will allow more standing water, with associated risks to human health from transmissible diseases from wastewater mixing with rainwater.”

Could there also be a rise in carbon emissions adding to global warming?

This war, like others before it, requires vast quantities of fossil fuel, leading to excessive carbon emissions and pollutants in the environment.

[Earlier reports](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/11/9/israel-attacks-on-gaza-weapons-and-scale-of-destruction) suggest 25,000 tonnes of munitions were dropped on Gaza in the first few weeks of the war. The carbon emissions from this would equate with the annual energy use of approximately 2,300 homes, or the annual greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from approximately 4,600 passenger vehicles.

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The world’s military forces also use fossil fuels to operate aircraft, tanks and weapons, accounting for approximately 5.5 percent of global emissions. The figure could be higher as defence forces are not bound to report their carbon emissions as it may undermine national security.

“Methodologies to count emissions from conflicts are in their infancy,” Weir told Al Jazeera.

But things are slowly changing.

Last week, the UN Environment Programme’s flagship Emissions Gap report, which is released before each COP meeting, made mention of conflict and military emissions for the first time, calling for more research into the topic.

What effects do the weapons used in Gaza have on the environment?

Groups like Human Rights Watch have also accused Israel of using [white phosphorous munitions in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/israel-using-white-phosphorus-in-gaza-lebanon-endangering-civilians-hrw), which added further to the pollution in the atmosphere, said Majdalani. “As Gaza enters the rainy season, we expect the rain to fall as acid rain, contaminated with white phosphorus.”

People who use plastic sheets to collect rainwater to drink directly, amid a shortage of drinking water, could be particularly at risk, she said.

In the first weeks of the war, the United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA reported Israel dropped [42 bombs every hour](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) on Gaza.

In addition to the emissions from weapons, their manufacture also contributes to pollution, Weir explained. “Far more emissions come from them during production, for example in creating the metal for their casings.”

Reports from Ukraine suggested the fighting there released some 100 million tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere in the first seven months of the war.

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So what about Gaza?

“We anticipate that the bulk of the emissions in this war will be from military fuel use – Israeli jet fuel and diesel, from urban and landscape fires caused either by the destruction of buildings or targeted attacks, and from the carbon costs of reconstructing Gaza.”

How will destroyed buildings and reconstruction add to climate change?

Other risks include fires, pulverised building materials that can include harmful substances like asbestos, and pollutants released from facilities containing hazardous materials.

Even rebuilding war-torn areas that have turned to rubble causes significant emissions. “Producing concrete and cement to rebuild generates a large quantity of carbon dioxide, which contributes to the climate crisis,” said Weir.

Lennard de Klerk, from the Initiative in GHG Accounting of War, did a rough calculation on how much GHG emission would result from rebuilding just residential and non-residential buildings that were destroyed or damaged after the first six weeks of the war.

He told Al Jazeera, “5.8 million tonnes of carbon emissions would be released to produce construction materials and the emissions of the construction activities itself”.

That is already a fifth of the projected emissions for the reconstruction of Ukraine from its war, which has been going on for 21 months as opposed to two months in Gaza

The Israeli army has widened its attacks in southern and central Gaza, with some of the heaviest fighting in the [war](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/) seeing homes sheltering displaced Palestinians bombed, refugee camps hit and no safe place left to evacuate thousands of people already on the move for weeks.

From early Wednesday morning, “under heavy aerial bombardment, Israeli tanks started pushing deeper and deeper to the centre of [Khan Younis](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/12/5/israel-intensified-strikes-on-gazas-second-largest-city) city, coming from the eastern side,” reported Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Rafah, in southern Gaza, forcing hundreds of people to flee the area.

“Everybody thought the eastern areas of Khan Younis were the main target, as the leaflets that were dropped on the residents stated, but it seems like the entire city of Khan Younis is under heavy bombardment right now,” Mahmoud said, of the leaflets dropped by Israeli forces ordering residents to evacuate.

Al Jazeera’s Alan Fisher said that Israel’s military was gearing up for days of intense battle in Khan Younis, which it views as a key Hamas stronghold where many leaders could be stationed.

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However, Israel’s military must move cautiously as it believes numerous captives could also be there, said Fisher, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem.

“It’s all part of a plan to move the operation further south,” he said. “We’re likely to see [the Israeli military’s] intense operation extend four or five weeks until the middle of January.”

“after this point, there are no options for Palestinians to go anywhere. The only option that might be feasible or even possible for Palestinians is crossing into Egypt, but with the current situation, it seems very, very difficult”.

“Under heavy bombardment, people were being pushed first into the central part [of Gaza], then Khan Younis, and now Rafah,” he reported, adding that “more than 1.5 million people have been squeezed into this pocket of land that’s really populated with people”.

There were also relentless assaults on Deir el-Balah in central Gaza through the night, reported Al Jazeera’s Hind Khoudary from the area. She said there were “non-stop explosions, non-stop artillery shelling and non-stop clashes. Multiple homes were bombed”.

“The number of wounded being brought to the hospital is massive. Doctors and paramedics have not been able to save them all,” Khoudary said, describing the intensity of the attacks and noting that “it is very dangerous for people to leave for either the north or the south. At the same time, conditions here are very harsh. There is no food in the markets. Even the little food that was once available is not any more since the centre has been split off from the south.”

At least six people were killed and 14 wounded in an Israeli air strike on the [Nuseirat refugee camp](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/23/where-are-gazas-neighbourhoods-destroyed-by-israel) in central Gaza. An Al Jazeera team at the site of the strike reported on Wednesday that people were trapped under the rubble of a building that was hit.

As the injured are rushed to the few remaining functional hospitals in the area, relief organizations sounded the alarm that supplies were perilously low.

The international medical charity Doctors Without Borders, known by its French initials MSF, warned that [Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/19/giving-up-is-not-an-option-volunteer-doctors-at-al-aqsa-martyrs-hospital) in Deir el-Balah was running out of options.

“There are 700 patients admitted in the hospital now, with new patients arriving all the time,” MSF emergency coordinator Marie-Aure Perreaut Revial said. “We are running out of essential supplies to treat them.”

At least 16,248 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since October 7. In Israel, the official death toll stands at about 1,200.

More than two years after his death, the odious spirit of Donald Rumsfeld has been resurrected.

It is not surprising. Every US administration has its share of banal bureaucrats who, in exchange for an important job with an impressive title, are willing to forfeit their integrity and jettison the truth in the “service” of country. And so, since early October, the world has seen and heard a lot from Rumsfeld’s hideous heir, National Security Council spokesperson, John Kirby.

Like Rumsfeld, the former career naval officer speaks in a high-pitched monotone befitting his dour, monochromatic character.

Like Rumsfeld, Kirby is obliged to spout state-sanctioned bromides in defence of the wholesale destruction of innocent civilians – casualties all of America’s familiar kill-first, think-later foreign policy.

Like Rumsfeld, Kirby is the darling of Beltway pundits who, as a rule, defer to authority and genuflect before power.

On cue, the Washington Post described Kirby earlier this week as a “star” whose skill and experience have translated into “a commanding presence” during press briefings where he keeps the White House’s “messaging” on Gaza “clear”.Kirby, the Post wrote, is “direct, plain-spoken and unmistakably supportive of the administration’s pro-Israeli policies”.

Oh, that he is.

But just as the establishment media’s cleansing of Rumsfeld’s wretched record could not save the late defence secretary from history’s harsh and lasting judgement, Kirby will be remembered – if this pedestrian apparatchik is remembered at all – for his obscene apologia of the obscenities Palestinians have had to endure at the culpable hands of America’s proxy, Israel.

I thought it impossible that Kirby could outdo his doddering boss, US President Joe Biden who, memorably, trafficked in fabrications about beheaded babies, and questioned the number of killed Palestinian children, women and men.

Silly me.

Looking ever so commanding in a crisp, black suit, with a white handkerchief jutting fashionably out of his breast pocket, Kirby insisted that Palestinians – among many myopic others – should, at the least, pause to acknowledge America’s generosity in the midst of a genocide.

“Look, we certainly share the concerns that so many others have … about the humanitarian situation in Gaza,” Kirby [said](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yqXPSGg9mQ) last week from a rostrum at the White House flanked by the Stars and Stripes. “Tell me, name me, one more nation, any other nation, that is doing as much as the United States to alleviate the pain and suffering of the people of Gaza. You can’t. You just can’t.”

I should let that astonishing paragraph stand as Kirby’s sorry epitaph since it demonstrates how prepared the Biden administration and its smug surrogates are to disfigure reality to promote a revolting lie.

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But Kirby’s deplorable admonition requires a reply. Decency demands it.

Much of Gaza and 18,600 Palestinians – the bulk of them children and women – have been erased and [buried](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/22/more-than-100-people-buried-in-mass-grave-in-khan-younis) in mass graves with the help of America’s lethal largesse.

Thousands more have been maimed, traumatised or remain entombed beneath the pancake-like rubble – the shattered remnants of once-vibrant homes, businesses, schools, mosques and hospitals.

Bit by inevitable bit, the occupied West Bank is also being invaded and [erased](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/12/12/know-their-names-palestinians-killed-by-israel-in-the-occupied-west-bank-2). Hundreds of Palestinians have been arrested or worse, summarily executed, for being Palestinian or expressing solidarity with their besieged brothers and sisters in Gaza.

Millions of Palestinians have had to make [forced marches](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/8/thousands-of-palestinians-flee-northern-gaza-in-desperate) in a futile quest for refuge from Israel’s incessant attacks. Denied food, water and fuel, countless Palestinians are [starving](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/9/people-are-starving-wfp-says-humanitarian-operation-in-gaza-collapsing). Disease and sickness are [spreading](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/28/disease-could-kill-more-in-gaza-than-bombs-who-says-amid-israeli-siege) in makeshift, [mud-soaked](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/13/heavy-rains-in-gaza-worsen-misery-of-palestinians-amid-israeli-bombardment) refugee camps where flimsy tents dot the apocalyptic landscape.

Young and old Palestinian men have been rounded up like cattle, blindfolded, [stripped](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/12/8/video-shows-palestinian-detainees-stripped-by-israeli-forces) near-naked and ordered to kneel in streets or barren fields. The sinister aim: to humiliate and degrade.

All of it – every cruel, inhumane and ruthless ounce of it – is being perpetrated with the explicit approval and consent of Biden and complicit company.

Kirby’s revisionism cannot obscure the plain facts that the rest of us can see. Nor can it mask Biden’s cynical strategy to circumvent a largely prostrate Congress in order to continue to feed Israel with weapons and ammunition to kill and maim Palestinians wherever it wants to, for as long as it wants to, by whatever means it wants to.

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The nauseating corollary of Kirby’s rebuke is that Palestinians have been, in effect, ungrateful in the face of America’s phantom efforts to “alleviate the pain and suffering of the people of Gaza”.

Rather than condemning America’s collusion with a genocidal campaign, Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and beyond should instead be thankful for America’s benevolence.

America is a friend, not a foe.

This is, of course, the definition of double-speak that performative hacks like Kirby are trained and expected to peddle. War is peace. Harm is healing. Bombs are bouquets.

Still, Kirby, the human weathervane, will do as he is told.

I suspect that, soon enough, he will be instructed to change tack and parrot the new lines offered up by a rattled president.

Speaking recently at a political fundraiser, Biden [complained](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/biden-warns-israel-losing-support-over-indiscriminate-gaza-bombing) that Israel’s retributive pursuit of Hamas may have gone too far by killing too many Palestinians, too quickly and, as a result, was draining “support” among the international community.

“They’re [Israel] starting to lose that support by the indiscriminate bombing that takes place,” Biden said.

Then, remarkably, Biden suggested that a mild form of regime change ought to be in the offing in Israel.

“This is the most conservative government in Israel’s history,” the president said. “He [Netanyahu] has to change this government. This government in Israel is making it very difficult.”

Biden’s calculated volte-face is motivated by parochial, not principled, considerations and interests.

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Having incensed and alienated crucial domestic [constituencies](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/11/27/happily-joe-biden-is-finished) that he needs to remain commander-in-chief next November, Biden is now trying to distance himself from a reactionary Israeli cabinet that he has enabled rhetorically, diplomatically and militarily.

Kirby will spin like a Ferris wheel to square that hypocritical circle.

He will fail.

The grotesque damage that the US has done to Palestinians yesterday, today and tomorrow cannot be undone by malleable “messaging”.

That malicious legacy will be forever fixed in our memory.

Two months after [Hamas attacked](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/palestinian-group-hamas-launches-surprise-attack-on-israel-what-to-know) southern Israel on October 7, death and destruction have devastated the region between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Hamas fighters killed about 1,200 people and took 240 captive during their attack.

Israel has responded with deadly bombardment and artillery assaults, including on the ground in Gaza, killing more than 16,000 people, at least 7,000 of them children. Attacks by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the occupied West Bank have killed more than 200 other Palestinians and forced entire villages to decamp. Hospitals, schools and refugee camps have been targeted, with United Nations personnel and facilities also attacked by Israel at unprecedented rates.

Against this backdrop, diplomatic clashes have also deepened. UN votes, public comments and major diplomatic steps over the past two months have underscored just how divisive the war has been for the world.

Ceasefire, occupier, blockade: What language are countries using?

Language has been a constant bone of contention between countries while talking about the war.

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The world has not agreed on whether to use the word [“ceasefire” or “humanitarian pause”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/27/ceasefire-or-pause-words-un-members-cant-agree-on-to-stop-israels-bombs) to describe the ending of violence and hostilities. While many countries advocate for a ceasefire, Israel’s allies call for a pause.

According to the UN, a ceasefire is a “cessation of all acts of violence against the civilian population” while a humanitarian pause is a “temporary cessation of hostilities purely for humanitarian purposes”. A pause or truce is a temporary halt to fighting for a decided time frame.  [analysed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/11/30/israel-palestine-war-ceasefire-or-pause-what-have-world-leaders-said) speeches from world leaders at the UN and found that 55 percent of countries called for a “ceasefire” in Gaza. Some of these include Argentina, Belgium, China, Guayana, Turkey and Venezuela, among others.

Another 23 percent of countries called for a “humanitarian pause”. These include Australia, Canada, Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom, among others. Other countries used terms alternative to pause such as “cessation”, “halt” or “respite”. The remaining 22 nations did not speak on this issue at the UN.

Countries have also been indecisive on whether or not to call Israel an occupier, and on whether to talk about Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip and settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Of the countries analysed, 46 percent used the term “occupier” in reference to Israel or called the Palestinian territory “occupied”, whereas 54 percent did not.

Only 23 percent of nations have referred to [Israel’s blockade of Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/14/a-guide-to-the-gaza-strip), using terms like “siege” or [“open-air prison”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/11/what-is-gaza-strip-the-besieged-palestinian-enclave-under-israeli-assault) and only 30 percent have talked about [Israeli settlements](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/6/who-are-israeli-settlers-and-why-do-they-live-on-palestinian-lands).

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How have countries voted in UN resolutions?

The UN Security Council has voted on five resolutions throughout [the war](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/11/can-the-next-un-vote-stop-israels-war-on-gaza) and failed to pass four due to the nations’ indecision and disagreement.

Out of the 15 members, four voted against (France, Japan, the UK and the US) the first Russia-led draft on October 16. The main criticism it faced was that the draft did [not name](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/14/russias-un-ambassador-calls-for-ceasefire-in-israel-hamas-conflict) or condemn Hamas. This draft called for an immediate ceasefire.

Brazil led the second draft on October 18. While it condemned Hamas and called for humanitarian pauses, garnering overwhelming votes in favour, the US vetoed the resolution. This was because the resolution did not mention Israel’s right of self-defence, [said](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/25/what-to-know-about-un-draft-resolutions-on-the-israel-hamas-war-so-far) US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

Russia proposed another draft on October 25, calling for a humanitarian ceasefire and the release of captives held by Hamas. However, the resolution did not condemn Hamas. Only four members voted in favour. The UK said it wants the UNSC to work towards a “balanced text” and that the Russian draft failed to support Israel’s right to self-defence.

The US also led a draft resolution on October 25, calling for a humanitarian pause instead of a ceasefire. Ten members voted in favour but permanent members Russia and China [vetoed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/two-more-resolutions-to-end-gaza-violence-fail-at-un-security-council) the resolution.

The UNSC finally adopted a [Malta-led resolution](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/15/unsc-adopts-resolution-calling-for-extended-humanitarian-pauses) calling for humanitarian pauses and aid delivery to Gaza on November 15. The US, UK and Russia abstained, with 12 nations voting in favour.

Jordan led a [non-binding resolution](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/27/unga-calls-for-humanitarian-truce-in-israel-hamas-war-how-countries-voted) at the UN General Assembly on October 27, calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza alongside unhindered access to humanitarian aid in the besieged enclave, as well as for Israel to revoke its call for northern Gaza’s evacuation. As many as 120 countries, including France, voted in favour. Only 14 nations, including the US and Israel, voted against it, while 45 countries abstained. This resolution passed.

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Do countries believe in the two-state solution?

The nations are not so divided on the [two-state solution](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2023/11/25/is-a-two-state-solution-for-israel-and-palestine-still-possible) as the means to attain peace in the region. A total of 95 percent of the countries have called for a two-state solution or an independent Palestinian state parallel to Israel. Only six countries have not called for it.

Which countries have cut ties with Israel?

During the war, several countries have completely [cut ties with Israel](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2023/11/7/countries-cut-off-diplomatic-ties-with-israel-in-response-to-gaza-war). Belize, [Bolivia](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/1/bolivia-cuts-ties-with-israel-other-latin-american-countries-recall-envoys) and [South Africa](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/21/south-african-parliament-votes-for-motion-calling-to-close-israeli-embassy) have suspended relations with Israel. Meanwhile, Bahrain, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Jordan, and Turkey have withdrawn their ambassadors.

Some cities, such as [Barcelona](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/9/barcelona-mayor-cuts-ties-with-israel-citing-palestinian-rights) in Spain, have also suspended ties with Israel.

Which countries have strongly backed Israel?

The US has maintained its [strong traditional support](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/18/short-answer-why-is-the-united-states-so-pro-israel) for Israel.

Besides the US President Joe Biden’s firm diplomatic backing of Israel, the US also provides Israel with annual military support worth [$3.8bn](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/14/us-president-biden-sued-for-complicity-in-israels-genocide-in-gaza). The US House of Representatives [passed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/3/us-house-passes-14-5bn-military-aid-package-for-israel) a Republican plan providing $14.5bn in military aid for Israel on November 3. A [congressional resolution](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/6/anti-zionism-is-antisemitism-us-house-asserts-in-dangerous-resolution) on December 6 effectively dubbed anti-Zionism the same as [anti-Semitism](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/7/adoption-of-anti-semitism-definition-curbs-free-speech-report).

Leaders of France, Germany, Italy and the UK have also joined the US in backing Israel.

Sixty Palestinians were arrested during that time, he said.

The four killed included one 16-year-old in Jenin in the north of the West Bank, two brothers in Tubas, and one in Balata in Nablus, our correspondent said.

Meanwhile, overnight in Tulkarem, a city in the north, an improvised explosive device went off while a convoy of armoured vehicles drove by.

“We’re getting reports about a raid on the refugee camp in Tulkarem … It’s often described as a centre for the Palestinian armed resistance,” Stratford said.

Several Palestinian workers from Gaza were detained overnight following an Israeli raid in the town of Faroun, near Tulkarem, Palestinian news agency Wafa reported.

Sources from Tulkarem told Wafa that Israeli forces raided the city’s Kamal Salama building and took the workers from their residential apartments.

Israeli forces also raided other areas including the Aida refugee camp south of Bethlehem; the villages and towns of Silat al-Dhahr, Atara, Arana, al-Jalama, Faqoua, al-Arqa, and Zububa in the Jenin governorate, and the village of Beit Dajan, east of Nablus.

Settler attacks

Since October 7, the number of Palestinians killed in Israeli raids on the West Bank has risen to 266, with more than 3,640 people arrested.

The West Bank has seen surging violence and arrests in parallel to Israel’s eight-week-old war on the Gaza Strip that has killed more than 16,248 Palestinians – including 7,112 children – there.

Israel says it is targeting Hamas in Gaza, but the vast majority of casualties are civilians. Escalating violence in the West Bank is also taking place despite Hamas having no presence in that section of the occupied territories.

Meanwhile, attacks by Israeli settlers are also on the rise in the West Bank.

“Settler attacks in tandem with these raids means that millions of Palestinians across the occupied territories are facing terrifying pressures on a daily basis,” Stratford said. “The UN says these attacks have doubled since October 7, with at least 308 attacks recorded until about three days ago, and at least eight Palestinians killed in these settler attacks.”

The United States on Tuesday [announced](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/5/us-announces-visa-bans-after-warning-israel-on-west-bank-settler-violence) a move to impose visa restrictions on “extremist” Israeli settlers involved in undermining peace, security or stability in the occupied West Bank.

However, rights groups, Palestinians, and some in the international community are accusing Israel of not doing enough to stop settler violence. Over the past few days, photos and videos of Palestinian [men and boys stripped](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJ3qJOGcnjk), lined up and taken away in trucks by the Israeli army have been circulating on social media.

Israel has claimed that these are suspected Hamas fighters that it has rounded up in northern Gaza. It has even published photos and a video of a Palestinian man in his underwear walking past a row of stripped men and boys holding their ID cards, and laying a gun by the side of the road as “evidence” that these are indeed “militants

But a closer look at this video reveals that [it was staged](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TolTWCeyjf8). It makes no sense that the Israeli soldiers, upon discovering an armed fighter, would wait to strip and line up everyone, prepare to take a video and then order that person to surrender his weapon through a loudspeaker, calling him “habibi” (my dear in Arabic).

Media reports later revealed that the Israeli army had forcibly taken the Palestinian men and boys after separating them from their families in United Nations-run schools which serve as shelters for the displaced in northern Gaza. Some of the men have been identified as UN workers, aid workers and at least one journalist. The man who was made to hold the gun is believed to be a shopkeeper.

While the video stunt with the gun may be another desperate attempt by the Israeli army to cover up its crimes before Western audiences, the release of the images and footage showing the humiliation of Palestinian men and boys serves another purpose.

It aims to demoralise Palestinians while boosting the morale of the Israeli public. It is a clear reflection of the ideology of occupation, where Palestinians are seen as a people to be subdued and dominated, if not mercilessly killed.

Abusing Palestinians to ‘boost Israeli morale’

The release of these images and footage comes amid a growing number of reports that the Israeli army is systematically separating Palestinian boys and men from their families in areas they control in Gaza and dragging them away to unknown locations.

Those who have been released have described torture and beatings at the hands of Israeli soldiers. The fate of many remains unknown, but given the deaths of at least six Palestinian prisoners and reports of widespread torture and other ill-treatment, there is a high chance they will face abuse as well.

The videos and images circulating on social media have helped journalists and activists identify some of the detained, disproving Israeli claims that these are Hamas fighters.

Hani Almadhoun, an employee at a US-based charity that fundraises for UNRWA, has said he saw his brother Mahmoud, a shopkeeper, among the detained as well as his 27-year-old nephew Abood. He told the Guardian that his father and 13-year-old nephew Omar were also detained.

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Diaa al-Kahlout, a correspondent for Al-Araby Al-Jadeed (The New Arab) who was also taken away along with his brothers, was recognised by colleagues in one of the videos. The outlet reported that Israeli soldiers detained them in their homes and expelled their wives and children before setting the homes on fire.

The act of publishing these humiliating images is a violation of the Geneva Convention, which prohibits “cruel treatment and torture” and “outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment”.

The images and videos have caused global outrage and comparisons of Israeli actions to the US “rendition” programme and torture at black sites, Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and Guantanamo detention centre, as well as to the genocidal practices of Serb militias in the Bosnian war.

Even Israeli insiders have baulked at this behaviour. Retired Israeli Brigadier-General Shlomo Brom told [NPR](https://www.npr.org/2023/12/09/1218386048/images-showing-israeli-soldiers-stripping-and-humiliating-palestinians-spark-out) that the images shouldn’t have been published on account that they were humiliating.

So if these images and footage reveal yet another crime the Israeli army is committing in Gaza, why did it release them?

According to Brom, this was aimed at boosting morale in Israel and waging a “psychological war against Hamas”.

Embracing viral humiliation

This systematic humiliation is not new in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As Palestinian scholar Ramzy Baroud has [argued](https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/abuse-of-palestinian-women-hebron), “humiliating Palestinians is actual Israeli policy”. Haaretz correspondent Amira Hass has described the humiliation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails as a “routine tactic”.

While the daily humiliation of Palestinians has perhaps remained unnoticed by the rest of the world, the degrading treatment of rounded-up Palestinian men and boys has been seen across the world. Digital technology has helped these acts of humiliation go viral.

Other videos that have gone viral since October 7 as well show Israeli soldiers defecating in the Palestinian homes they have invaded, smashing up toys in a Palestinian shop and laughing, and abusing Palestinian detainees.

Publicising the abuse of Palestinian men and boys amplifies their humiliation. The act of arrest is distinct from the publication of images showing degrading treatment. By broadcasting these images, the humiliation is not confined to the moment or to the individuals directly involved. Instead, it becomes a public display, viewed by potentially millions of people.

American scholar Susan Sontag’s insight into the role of photography in objectifying human suffering is particularly relevant here. She notes, “Photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed.”

In the context of these events, the photographs serve to objectify the victims, reducing them to mere images that can be shared and viewed detached from their humanity. This objectification strips the victims of their individuality and dignity, reducing them to symbols of humiliation.

It also serves as an attempt to further dehumanise and “other” Palestinians in front of the Israeli public and the rest of the world. It is part and parcel of the global Israeli campaign to present the Palestinian people as “subhuman” and justify their mass killing.

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The publication of these photos and videos is not just a documentation of an act of humiliation; it is an act of humiliation in itself. It magnifies the impact of the initial abuse, transforming a moment of suffering into a public spectacle of degradation, thereby deepening the psychological and emotional wounds inflicted on the victims and their community.

In the end, this is not about humiliating Hamas, but about humiliating all Palestinians and dehumanising them in front of the largest audience possible.

World leaders, international rights groups and United Nations officials have criticised the United States for vetoing a UN resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza and failing to halt the war that has killed more than 17,400 Palestinians and about 1,100 people in Israel since October 7.

A UN resolution on the pause in hostilities [failed to pass](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/antonio-guterres-urges-un-security-council-to-push-for-gaza-ceasefire) on Friday at the UN Security Council after the United States vetoed the proposal and Britain abstained.

The remaining 13 of the 15 current members of the UNSC voted in favour of the resolution put forward by the United Arab Emirates and co-sponsored by 100 other countries.

Here are some of the reactions:

Palestine

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said the US’s veto made it “complicit” in war crimes in Gaza. “The president has described the American position as aggressive and immoral, a flagrant violation of all humanitarian principles and values, and holds the United States responsible for the bloodshed of Palestinian children, women and elderly people in the Gaza Strip,” a statement from his office said.

Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said the veto was “a disgrace and another blank cheque given to the occupying state to massacre, destroy and displace”. Palestine’s UN envoy Riyad Mansour told the UNSC that the result of the vote was “disastrous”. “If you are against the destruction and displacement of the Palestinian people you must stand against this war. And if you support it then you are enabling this destruction and displacement regardless of your intentions … Millions of Palestinian lives hang in the balance. Every single one of them is sacred, worth saving.”

Hamas strongly condemned the US veto, saying it considers Washington’s move “unethical and inhumane”. “The US obstruction of the issuance of a ceasefire resolution is a direct participation with the occupation in killing our people and committing more massacres and ethnic cleansing,” Izzat al-Risheq, a member of Hamas’s political bureau, said in a statement.

Israel

Israel’s UN ambassador Gilad Erdan did not address the UNSC after the vote, but in a statement said: “A ceasefire will be possible only with the return of all the hostages and the destruction of Hamas.”

United States

Deputy US ambassador to the UN Robert Wood told the council that the draft resolution was a rushed, imbalanced text “that was divorced from reality, that would not move the needle forward on the ground in any concrete way”.

“We do not support this resolution’s call for an unsustainable ceasefire that will only plant the seeds for the next war,”

Amnesty International

Agnes Callamard, [Amnesty’s](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/12/israel-opt-us-veto-of-ceasefire-resolution-displays-callous-disregard-for-civilian-suffering-in-face-of-staggering-death-toll/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CBy%20vetoing%20this%20resolution%2C%20the,in%20the%20occupied%20Gaza%20Strip.) secretary general, said on X that the US veto “displays a callous disregard for civilian suffering in the face of a staggering death toll”. The statement also said that Washington “has brazenly wielded and weaponized its veto to strongarm the UN Security Council, further undermining its credibility and ability to live up to its mandate to maintain international peace and security” Doctors Without Borders

Avril Benoit, executive director of Doctors Without Borders [(Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF) USA](https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/msf-calls-us-veto-gaza-ceasefire-resolution-vote-against-humanity): “By vetoing this resolution, the US stands alone in casting its vote against humanity. The US veto stands in sharp contrast to the values it professes to uphold. By continuing to provide diplomatic cover for the ongoing atrocities in Gaza, the US is signaling that international humanitarian law can be applied selectively — and that the lives of some people matter less than the lives of others …. The US veto makes it complicit in the carnage in Gaza.”

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Human Rights Watch

The international rights groups released a statement saying: “By continuing to provide Israel with weapons [and] diplomatic cover as it commits atrocities, including collectively punishing the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, the US risks complicity in war crimes.”

Posting on X, HRW’s former executive director, Kenneth Roth, said: “The US government vetoes a UN Security Council call for a Gaza ceasefire. The US cites Israel’s right to defend itself from Hamas, but does Biden really think that pummeling Palestinian civilians in Gaza is accomplishing that? Or building the next Hamas?”

United Kingdom

Britain’s UN ambassador Barbara Woodward said her country abstained because the resolution had no condemnation of Hamas. “Israel needs to be able to address the threat posed by Hamas and it needs to do so in a manner that abides by international humanitarian law so that such an attack can never be carried out again,” she told the UNSC.

United Arab Emirates

The UAE’s deputy UN ambassador Mohamed Abushahab asked the UNSC: “What is the message we are sending Palestinians if we cannot unite behind a call to halt the relentless bombardment of Gaza? Indeed, what is the message we are sending civilians across the world who may find themselves in similar situations?”

Iran

Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian warned of the threat of an “uncontrollable explosion” of the situation in the Middle East, after the US veto, the AFP news agency reported. “As long as America supports the crimes of the Zionist regime (Israel) and the continuation of the war … there is a possibility of an uncontrollable explosion in the situation of the region,” Amirabdollahian told UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a phone call, according to a ministry statement.

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China

Permanent representative to the UN, Zhang Jun, told the council: “Condoning the continuation of fighting while claiming to care about the lives and safety of people in Gaza is self-contradictory.  Condoning the continuation of fighting while advocating for the prevention of the spillover effects of the conflict is self-deceiving. Condoning the continuation of fighting while making references to the protection of women and children and human rights is hypocritical. All these once again show us what double standards are.”

Russia

Ambassador to the UN, Dmitry Polyanskiy, said: “Our colleagues from the USA have literally before our eyes issued a death sentence to thousands if not tens of thousands more civilians in Palestine and Israel.”

France

Ambassador to the UN, Nicolas de Riviere, said at the UNSC: “Unfortunately once again this council has failed with a lack of unity, and by refusing to commit to negotiations the crisis in Gaza is getting worse and the council is not completing its mandate under the charter.”

Turkey

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan questioned whether justice can be achieved after calls for a ceasefire were rejected. “The Israeli administration, which has the unwavering support of Western countries, is committing murderous atrocities and massacres in Gaza that will make all humans blush … A fair world is possible, but not with America, because America sides with Israel,” he said speaking at World Human Rights Day Event. “Reforming the United Nations Security Council is a must,” he added, saying the world is bigger than just the five permanent members.

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Earlier the minister of foreign affairs, Hakan Fidan, told Turkish media: “America is now alone on this issue [of the war on Gaza], especially in the voting held at the United Nations today … American political system is now helpless on issues related to Israel.”

Oman

Foreign minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi said in a post on X: “The use of the veto at the Security Council is a shameful insult to humanitarian norms. I deeply regret that the United States should sacrifice the lives of innocent civilians for the cause of Zionism,”

Malaysia

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim expressed his “strong objection” to the US vetoing the resolution. “It is strange and beyond human sanity when there are parties who support and remain silent regarding the massacre of innocent children and women as well as civilians,”

The United States has vetoed a United Nations Security Council demand for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the war between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas in Gaza.

Thirteen Security Council members voted in favour of a brief draft resolution, put forward by the United Arab Emirates on Friday, while the United Kingdom abstained.

The vote came after UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres made a rare move on Wednesday to formally warn the 15-member council of a global threat from the two-month-long war.

“While the US strongly supports a durable peace in which both Israel and Palestine can live in peace and security, we do not support calls for an immediate ceasefire. This would only plant the seeds for the next war, because Hamas has no desire to see a durable peace, to see a two-state solution,” said Robert Wood, deputy US ambassador to the UN.

The US and Israel oppose a ceasefire because they believe it would only benefit Hamas. Washington instead supports pauses in fighting to protect civilians and allow the release of hostages taken by Hamas in a deadly October 7 attack on Israel.A seven-day pause – that saw Hamas release some hostages and an increase in humanitarian aid to Gaza – ended on December 1.

“There is no effective protection of civilians,” Guterres told the council earlier on Friday. “The people of Gaza are being told to move like human pinballs – ricocheting between ever-smaller slivers of the south, without any of the basics for survival. But nowhere in Gaza is safe.”

In Washington, Jordan’s Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi told reporters earlier on Friday that if the Security Council failed to adopt the resolution, “it is giving Israel a license to continue with its massacre of Palestinians in Gaza”.

In Gaza, the Health Ministry reported on Friday that 40 people were killed in Israeli attacks near Gaza City, and “dozens” of others were killed in Jabalia and Khan Younis.

The Israeli military told residents of the Jabalia, Shujayea and Zeitoun districts of Gaza City to move west.

Israel’s military continues to bombard southern Gaza, and its ground forces and tanks focused fire on refugee camps in the centre of the enclave, after Tel Aviv warned that the war on Hamas may drag on for some time.

Israeli air strikes hammered the southern cities of Khan Younis and Rafah on Monday morning, offering Palestinians no respite from violence that has killed 18,000 civilians and displaced 1.9 million since the October 7 assault by Palestinian group Hamas on southern Israel that killed around 1,200.

Their plight is unlikely to improve in the near future, as Israel’s national security adviser, Tzachi Hanegbi, said on Sunday that the war may have to be “measured in months”.

In central Gaza, Israeli tank shelling resumed on the Bureij and Maghazi refugee camps following overnight strikes that produced numerous casualties.

“We’re seeing civilians being killed at a historic pace,” said Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Rafah.

“Maghazi is a densely populated refugee camp in central Gaza … in a very densely populated neighbourhood. Homes were targeted overnight and 23 people were reported killed. Many were injured around those houses that were targeted,”

The latest strikes come as those fleeing violence cram into a tiny pocket of southern Gaza near the Egyptian border with scarce food, water or medicine – and the World Health Organization warns Gaza’s healthcare system is “on its knees and collapsing”.

‘Still a long way away’

Despite mounting global calls for a ceasefire, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press on with the offensive [however long it takes](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/10/netanyahu-says-not-seeking-to-occupy-gaza-but-strip-must-be-deradicalised) to root out Hamas.

He has been bolstered by fresh military support from the White House, which on Saturday said it had skipped congressional review to approve an emergency $106m sale to Israel of 14,000 rounds of tank ammunition.

“People are talking about this war stretching on for another two months,” said Al Jazeera’s Alan Fisher, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem.

“Benjamin Netanyahu says that [Israel] will continue to fight until it achieves all its goals… which include the release of all those held captive, the destruction of Hamas and the deradicalisation of Gaza, as he calls it,” he said.

“It seems that Israel is still a long way away from that, which means the end of the war is still a long way away too.”

The US also continued to shield Israel diplomatically at the United Nations, [vetoing](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/antonio-guterres-urges-un-security-council-to-push-for-gaza-ceasefire) a Friday resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire.

“If America is putting any pressure on Israel, it is very much behind the scenes because as we saw at the United Nations… they are very much in line with what Israel is doing, and Benjamin Netanyahu knows that,”

Hanegbi told Israel’s Channel 12 TV that the US has set no deadline for Israel to achieve its goals.

“The evaluation that this can’t be measured in weeks is correct, and I’m not sure it can be measured in months,” he said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told CNN that as far as the duration and the conduct of the fighting go, “these are decisions for Israel to make”

With fresh US firepower on the way, Netanyahu on Sunday called on Hamas fighters to lay down their weapons, promising the armed group was nearing defeat.

Hamas, however, remained defiant, with a senior member of its political bureau saying the group was having success in its fight with Israeli forces and that the “end of the occupation has begun”.

Nowhere safe

For displaced Palestinians, every day of the drawn-out offensive comes with a fresh wave of danger and suffering. Food is scarce and the healthcare system collapsing.

Israel continues to pound all areas of the enclave, including the south of Gaza, to which it has directed Palestinians to head to escape the violence.

“No place is safe in Gaza,” said Juliette Touma, communications director for the UN’s agency for Palestinian refugees, to Al Jazeera. “The only way out of this is a humanitarian ceasefire. This is what needs to happen.

Six weeks after the ground invasion of the Gaza Strip started, Israeli forces and Hamas may have changed how they fight, using a weeklong truce to reassess performance and adapt their approach to battlefield conditions and the enemy’s actions.

A notable prediction by all experts that we appear to have got wrong – or has not come about yet – was the expected underground carnage. There has not (yet) been much fighting in the tunnels, and we have to wonder whether the foes will want to go into them at all.

A cautious Israel

Wary of the length, spread and sophistication of Hamas’s tunnels, the Israeli army was treading carefully. Urban areas were bombed heavily from the air from the start of the war on October 7, stopping only when Israeli ground forces were about to go in.

Before the truce at the end of November, Israel managed to encircle Gaza City. Many Palestinians escaped to the south, heeding Israeli evacuation orders or simply fleeing for their lives.

After the perimeter of Gaza City was taken, Israeli sources leaked that some field commanders felt the price in soldiers and equipment was lower than expected with 104 combat casualties so far. But the high command opted for a cautious approach, staying out of the densest, built-up areas: parts of the old centre and Jabalia refugee camp.

Seemingly satisfied with what it did in Gaza City, the Israeli command decided to repeat the strategy in the south, where it has now almost fully encircled Khan Younis.It is impossible to determine whether the heavy civilian casualties and destruction of Palestinian infrastructure were collateral damage or part of the battle plan. This is likely to be debated for years, and there may never be one answer.

Hamas preserving its tunnels?

On the ground, Hamas fought as expected: surprise attacks on Israeli forces using mainly shoulder-launched anti-tank weapons. Israeli casualty updates give insight into the fighting by comparing numbers of soldiers killed with the type, duration and reach of their advances.

But it is difficult to track incapacitated armoured vehicles, and we cannot rely on Hamas’s claims of destroyed Israeli tanks and armoured personnel carriers, which are exaggerated to boost morale.

Hamas does not allow much information to leak, but by careful observation, a pattern appears: The leadership of the Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, seems to be trying to keep the tunnels hidden and intact as long as possible.

Rather than using them for daily tactical and operational purposes, it seems to prefer to keep them as shelters during bombardments, weapons storage and cover for its troops on the move.

So Hamas fighters do not seem to be popping out of tunnel shafts and immediately targeting Israeli soldiers. They use tunnels to reach intended zones of operation but surface farther away and move through buildings and rubble for some distance to keep the locations of the shafts secret.

What has changed? Has anything changed?

Assessing why neither side initiated the tunnel war is a bit of a chicken and egg situation: impossible to say who did what first.

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The Israeli side was always wary of tunnel warfare, knowing it would be casualty-heavy. But after two incidents early in the fighting in which four special forces soldiers in one instance and two engineering troops in another were killed by booby traps as they tried to enter tunnels,  the initial reluctance may have turned into a staunch unwillingness to commit soldiers to underground combat.

Caution in handling the tunnels means the Israeli army now just identifies and marks tunnel entrances, blocking or destroying them without entering – except in cases when it needs to go in the tunnels for public relations like at al-Shifa Hospital.

But there are thousands of tunnel openings, and, aware of the difficulties of finding them all, the Israeli army is reportedly considering pumping them full of seawater, drowning those hiding underground or forcing them to come up and fight above ground.

There may be a psychological reason for Israel to consider water as a weapon: Could it be a revenge of sorts on the Arab world?

In 1973, the Egyptian army used fire hoses to breach Israeli sand berms on the Sinai shores of the Suez Canal. While high earthen walls were effective in protecting Israeli positions against shelling, canal water shot from fire hoses cut through the berms like a hot knife through butter, allowing Egyptians to push the Israeli army back.

Fifty years later, the idea of using seawater as a weapon is being mulled although it is doubtful that it would be as decisive in Gaza in 2023 as it was in Sinai in 1973.

Nobody except Hamas knows with certainty how the Hamas tunnels are structured, but multiple videos show that the network has watertight lock doors so it is probable that Hamas could protect parts of the network by closing sections off and bypassing any flooded ones.

Over and above come the practical issues with this purported Israeli plan. Two million litres (roughly 530,000 gallons) of seawater would be needed to flood about a kilometre (0.6 miles) of tunnel, assuming the shafts are 2 metres (6.6ft) high and 1 metre (3.3ft) wide. Multiply that over the estimated 400km (250 miles) the network stretches, and the logistics become staggeringly complex.

The pumps and pipes needed for this strategy would have to stretch from the seashore to where the tunnels begin, which is not a short distance, given that the tunnels are in the clay soil that starts away from the sandy shore. Having so much exposed equipment would open it up to attacks and sabotage.

If Israel does choose to do this and somehow the technical part is successful, there remains the intractable problem of figuring out which section of tunnel it is pumping water into and what that means in the grand scheme of things.

But in reality, the main reason for Israel to refrain from acting offensively inside the Hamas tunnel network is the remaining captives. According to an official Israeli count, 138 people taken from southern Israel on October 7 are still being held in the tunnels by Hamas.

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With nearly all hostages now Israelis, some with dual US citizenship, it is hard to envisage that any Israeli politician or military commander would be willing to risk his reputation at home by issuing orders to destroy parts of a tunnel network in which their own could be killed.

Palestinian activists and grassroots organisations [have called for a global strike](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/11/what-is-the-global-strike-demanding-an-end-to-israeli-war-on-gaza) on Monday to demand an immediate ceasefire as Israel continues its aggression on Gaza.

The call for the strike has been given by the National and Islamic Forces, a coalition of major Palestinian factions, to Palestinians across the occupied West Bank and supporters across the world to participate in a strike that would include “all aspects of public life” in a show of solidarity amid [relentless Israeli attacks](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/12/10/israel-hamas-war-live-no-safe-place-in-gaza-as-severe-hunger-spreads).

“We expect the entire globe to join the strike, which comes in the context of a broad international movement involving influential figures. This movement stands against the open genocide in Gaza, the ethnic cleansing and the colonial settlement in the West Bank,” said a statement released by the coalition.

“The strike also opposes attempts to undermine the just national cause of the Palestinian people, The coalition called on people across the globe to unite in sending a message of solidarity with the women, children and elderly who have come under Israel’s brutal bombardment of Gaza, which has killed nearly 18,000 people so far – including [297 in the past 24 hours alone](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/10/nearly-300-killed-in-gaza-in-24-hours-as-hamas-netanyahu-trade-threats) – and wounded more than 49,500 others in just over two months.

In response to the call, Lebanon on Sunday said all public offices, primary and secondary schools, as well as official and private higher education institutes, will hold a general strike in support of “the global call for Gaza

Rejection of US veto

Muwafaq Sahwil, political party Fatah’s secretary in Ramallah and el-Bireh, said the strike, called by the Palestinians, trade union activists and international influencers, is a rejection of Friday’s veto by the United States against a United Nations Security Council resolution to stop the war on Gaza.

“This is a message to the US administration that stands against the aspirations of our people. It is also a message from people around the world to their politicians and the international community to stand up for the Palestinian people who have been suffering from occupation for 75 years,

“We hope the strike will push the international community to help stop the war and to respond to Palestinians’ aspirations to achieve self-determination.”

The 193-member UN General Assembly is likely to vote on Tuesday on a draft resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, media reports said on Sunday.

The General Assembly in October adopted a resolution – 121 votes in favour, 14 against and 44 abstentions – calling for “an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities”.

The calls for the global strike also came as the World Health Organization director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, on Sunday said it will be all but impossible to improve the “catastrophic” health situation in Gaza even as the board passed an emergency WHO motion to secure more medical access.

“Given the urgency of Israel’s defensive needs, the secretary notified Congress that he had exercised his delegated authority to determine an emergency existed necessitating the immediate approval of the transfer,” it said.

“The United States is committed to the security of Israel, and it is vital to US national interests to ensure Israel is able to defend itself against the threats it faces.”

The package includes ancillary items, including fuses, charges and primers that Israel would require to make the 155mm shells that it had previously purchased, function. Friday’s emergency determination, which is rare but has been used by at least four previous US administrations, means that a requirement for a potentially lengthy congressional review for foreign military sales will be bypassed

Reporting from Washington, DC, Al Jazeera’s Patty Culhane said it was important to point out the broader context of the messaging.

“We’ve been hearing from all the top Biden administration officials for weeks that it is time for Israel to move to a lower-intensity conflict. In essence, stop the mass bombing. Stop the mass deaths of civilians,” she said.

“So, in that context – knowing that is what they say they want – they are now selling to Israel the exaction munitions they need to continue a high-intensity campaign.”

‘Morally scandalous’

Israel will also be purchasing 155mm M107 projectiles, which are artillery shells that will cause widespread destruction in a densely populated area such as Gaza, Culhane reported.

“They didn’t say exactly how many [shells] were going to be in this $147.5m package. But, in previous packages, it really does mean that thousands and thousands of bombs will be going to Israel.”

Ensuring Israel gets weapons to continue its intense phase of the war, while also urging it to lower the intensity of fighting, is “strategically self-defeating” for Washington, according to Al Jazeera’s senior political analyst Marwan Bishara, who called Friday’s decision “astounding”.

“One really has to look deep to see if there is any meaningful explanation for why the Biden administration wants to bypass Congress in order to expedite weapons to a country that is involved in war crimes,” he said on Saturday.

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The move was “morally scandalous” given that the war has caused record damage and killed tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians, Bishara said, but it is also “politically suspect in the sense that why would you want to bypass Congress twice in the same month? What is the urgency to bypass your own guidelines?”

On December 9, the Biden administration [made another emergency determination](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/9/us-skips-congressional-review-for-emergency-sale-of-tank-shells-to-israel) to approve the sale to Israel of nearly 14,000 rounds of tank ammunition worth more than $106m.

Basem Naim, a senior Hamas official, criticised the US’s role in the war, saying: “While these crimes have been committed with Israeli hands, they were sponsored and backed up by the US administration.”

In a televised statement on Saturday, he added that the group holds the Biden administration “accountable for their direct role in sponsoring and orchestrating this ongoing genocide against our people”.

‘Record’ devastation

The move to expedite more weapons comes as Biden’s request for an enormous $106bn package that includes aid for Ukraine, Israel and other perceived national security needs has yet to pass Congress, as it is entangled in a debate over US immigration and border security policies.

The Biden administration has tried to counter criticism over the mounting death toll in Gaza and continued US arms sales to Israel by saying it constantly maintains contact with Israel to stress the importance of minimising civilian casualties.

However, Luciana Zaccara, an associate professor in Gulf politics at Qatar University, told Al Jazeera it was pursuing a “dual-track” approach when it comes to the war.

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“On the one hand they are trying to convince the public opinion that the US is really concerned about civilian casualties but also they keep sustaining Israel (militarily),” he said. “It is totally contradicting … it is hard to understand how this is in the national interest.”

The policy was especially perplexing in light of “mounting pressure” in the US, including among Democrats, against the war as civilian casualties in Gaza continue to rise, Zaccara said.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Saturday that the war “is generating destruction comparable in scale to the most devastating warfare in the modern record”.

By mid-December, Israel had dropped 29,000 bombs, munitions and shells on Gaza, destroying or damaging nearly 70 percent of homes, the report said.

Some Democratic lawmakers have suggested further significant aid to Israel should be contingent on concrete promises by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government to curb civilian casualties in Gaza.

More than 21,000 Palestinians have now been killed in the besieged enclave since October 7, most of them children and women, in what has been widely described as collective punishment. Thousands more are missing.

Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), said on Saturday that Israeli authorities continue to [impose “severe restrictions” on humanitarian access](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/29/un-says-impossible-getting-aid-to-gaza-as-israeli-strikes-intensify) despite deliveries of aid from Egypt and through the Rafah crossing.

He also said they are “creating a stream of baseless misinformation” to accuse aid agencies over gaps in deliveries.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned again that the [conflict could spread to the wider region](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2023/11/19/could-israels-war-on-gaza-provoke-regional-instability) if not halted immediately.

What is happening in Khan Younis?

Two people were killed in Khan Younis in [Israeli artillery shelling](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/12/12/israel-hamas-war-live-palestinians-going-hungry-as-israel-pounds-gaza) on Tuesday.

A bicycle was reportedly hit on Sunday in the centre of Khan Younis, killing two Palestinian children who were riding it, according to the UN humanitarian agency OCHA

The city has been hit by air strikes and fire belts, causing casualties and injuries. Injured Palestinians were largely taken to the Nasser and European hospitals in the city, the Palestinian news agency Wafa reported.

Israel’s Defence Minister Yoav Gallant pushed back against international calls on Monday to wrap up the country’s military offensive in the Gaza Strip, saying the current phase of the operation against the Hamas group will “take time”.

How many people fled to Khan Younis?

Over one million Palestinians have been displaced from northern Gaza since October 13, when the Israeli military ordered people to evacuate to the south on a 24-hour notice.

More than 215,000 displaced Palestinians took shelter in dozens of UNRWA shelters in Khan Younis.

However, on December 3, Israel [ordered an immediate evacuation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/4/israel-asks-palestinians-to-evacuate-but-is-any-place-safe-in-gaza) of about 20 percent of the city, which was home to more than 400,000 people before the war erupted on October 7. The area marked for evacuation included 21 shelters and 50,000 internally displaced people, mostly from the north of Gaza, according to OCHA.

Several of those who were displaced to Khan Younis had to further move to Rafah city near the Egyptian border, some even moving for the fourth time since the outbreak of violence.

Now, thousands of displaced people from Khan Younis itself, as well as the north of Gaza are squeezed in the dangerously overcrowded [al-Fukhari](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/12/11/gazas-al-fukhari-is-dangerously-overcrowded-as-israel-pushes-people-south?traffic_source=rss), south of Khan Younis. Hospitals and schools in the area are filled beyond capacity, as the Israeli army continues to order Palestinians to move further south.

Shrinking space and the rising danger of health issues and infections due to the lack of water have been an increasing cause for concern.

Thousands of Palestinians have been forced to flee further to the south towards the city of Rafah. Twenty Palestinians, including seven children and at least five women, were killed in [Israeli attacks on Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/israeli-forces-launch-deadly-west-bank-raids-continue-pounding-gaza) on Tuesday. There are reports of more air attacks.

Martin Griffiths, the UN humanitarian affairs coordinator, says his organisation was hopeful and has been informed that once the war moved to southern Gaza, there would be a different, more precise approach to the fighting.

“[But] what’s happened is the assault on southern Gaza has been no less than the north. It’s raging through Khan Younis at the moment, and it is threatening Rafah. The compression of the population is greater. We cannot be sure of any of our points of operation to be safe,” he told Al Jazeera.

Central Gaza has not been spared either as an Israeli air strike overnight flattened a residential building where some 80 people were staying in the Maghazi refugee camp, killing at least 22 on Monday.

Israeli air strikes and the brutal ground invasion have killed at least 18,205 Palestinians and wounded 49,645 others. More than 80 percent of the casualty figures are civilians.

Do southern Gaza residents have access to food?

UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food Michael Fakhri says “every single Palestinian in Gaza is going hungry” and warns world is witnessing a “genocide”.

UN officials and rights groups have been urging Israel to speed up the deployment of humanitarian aid to Gaza by opening the southern Karem Abu Salem (Karem Shalom) border with Israel.

Israel announced that it would conduct security screenings of the aid at Karem Abu Salem beginning on Tuesday. The first batch of humanitarian trucks were inspected and on their way to the Rafah border.

Palestinians who are staying in the north are going hungry as hardly any aid delivery has made its way to the area devastated by Israel’s relentless bombardments. “We thank all those who supported the draft resolution that was just adopted by a huge majority,” Saudi Arabia’s UN ambassador Abdulaziz Alwasil said in remarks following the vote. “This reflects the international position to call for the enforcement of this resolution.”

The vote comes as international pressure builds on Israel to end its months-long assault on Gaza, where more than 18,000 Palestinians have been killed, the majority of them women and children. More than 80 percent of Gaza’s 2.3 million residents have also been displaced.

Relentless air strikes and an Israeli siege have created humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian territory that UN officials [have called](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/12/12/israel-hamas-war-live-palestinians-going-hungry-as-israel-pounds-gaza) “hell on earth”. The Israeli military offensive has severely restricted [access to food](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/7/more-displacement-as-israeli-forces-press-deeper-into-south-gaza), fuel, water and electricity to the Gaza Strip.

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Tuesday’s vote comes on the heels of a failed resolution in the UN Security Council (UNSC) on Friday, which likewise called for a humanitarian ceasefire.

The US [vetoed the proposal](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/antonio-guterres-urges-un-security-council-to-push-for-gaza-ceasefire), casting the sole dissenting vote and thereby dooming its passage. The United Kingdom, meanwhile, abstained. Unlike UNGA votes, UNSC resolutions have the power to be binding.

After Friday’s scuttled UNSC resolution, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres took the [extraordinary step](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/7/more-displacement-as-israeli-forces-press-deeper-into-south-gaza) of invoking Article 99 of the UN Charter, which allows him to issue warnings about serious threats to international peace. The last time it was used was in 1971.

But the passage of the non-binding UNGA resolution on Tuesday likewise faced US opposition.

Both the US and Austria introduced amendments to the resolution to condemn the deadly Hamas attack on October 7, which marked the start of the current conflict.

Al Jazeera correspondent Kristen Saloomey said Arab countries saw these amendments as an effort to politicise the vote. They both failed to pass.

“What we’re hearing from many countries is that the credibility of the United Nations is on the line here, that respect for international law requires respect for humanitarian efforts,” Saloomey said.

Egyptian UN Ambassador Osama Abdelkhalek called the draft resolution “balanced and neutral”, noting that it called for the protection of civilians on both sides and the [release of all captives](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/6/israeli-captives-families-angry-after-meeting-with-netanyahu).

Israel’s envoy Gilad Erdan railed against calls for a ceasefire, calling the UN a “moral stain” on humanity.

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“Why don’t you hold the rapists and child murderers accountable?” he asked in a speech before the vote. “The time has come to put the blame where it belongs: on the shoulders of the Hamas monsters.”

The administration of US President Joe Biden has firmly supported Israel’s military campaign, arguing that it must be allowed to dismantle Hamas.

But as Israeli forces level entire neighbourhoods, [including schools](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/12/11/un-run-school-shelters-in-gaza-are-under-attack-by-israeli-forces) and hospitals, the US has found itself increasingly at odds with international opinion.

In remarks on Tuesday, however, Biden [sharpened his criticism](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/biden-warns-israel-losing-support-over-indiscriminate-gaza-bombing) of the US ally, saying that Israel was losing international support due to “indiscriminate bombing” in Gaza.

The US, which has strongly criticised Russia for similar actions in Ukraine, has been accused of employing a [double standard](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/9/double-standards-world-reacts-to-us-vetoing-unsc-gaza-resolution) on human rights.

“With each step, the US looks more isolated from the mainstream of UN opinion,” Richard Gowan, the UN director at the International Crisis Group, an NGO, told Reuters.

The grave humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the conditions in the West Bank are circumstances that the Department would generally respond to in various ways,” the letter, dated November 22, said.

“Yet DHS leadership has seemingly turned a blind eye to the bombing of refugee camps, hospitals, ambulances, and civilians.”

The letter’s signatories include 139 staff members from DHS and the agencies it manages, like Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

But some staff members “elected to sign this letter anonymously” for fear of backlash, the document explained. It called for DHS to “provide a fair and balanced representation of the situation, and allow for respectful expression without the fear of professional repercussions”.The letter is the latest indication of fractures within the administration of [President Joe Biden](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/3/us-muslims-pledge-to-ditch-biden-in-2024-over-his-stance-on-israel-gaza-war), who [has faced](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/19/state-department-official-resigns-over-bidens-handling-of-israel-gaza-war) internal criticism for his government’s stance on the Gaza war.

Last month, more than 500 officials from 40 government agencies issued an anonymous letter pushing Biden to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. [Another letter](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/8/more-than-1000-usaid-employees-sign-letter-backing-gaza-ceasefire), signed by 1,000 employees from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), expressed a similar appeal.

But Biden has been [reluctant to criticise](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/biden-warns-israel-losing-support-over-indiscriminate-gaza-bombing) Israel’s ongoing military offensive in Gaza, instead pledging his “rock solid and unwavering” support for the longtime US ally.

In an internal message on November 2, Mayorkas echoed Biden’s stance. He denounced the “horrific terrorist attacks in Israel on October 7”, perpetrated by the Palestinian group Hamas, but made no mention of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

“The impacts [of October 7] continue to sweep through Jewish, Arab American, Muslim and other communities everywhere,” Mayorkas wrote.

“I am heartened knowing that our Department is on the front lines of protecting our communities from antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of bigotry and hate.

But two DHS staff members who spoke to Al Jazeera on the condition of anonymity felt that department leadership should be going further to address the mounting death toll in Gaza, where civilians remain under Israeli siege.

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[United Nations experts](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/un-experts-demand-ceasefire-warn-gaza-is-running-out-of) have already warned of a “grave risk of genocide” in the territory, as supplies run low and bombs continue to fall.

“I’ve been very dedicated to the federal government,” one anonymous DHS official said. “I’ve served in different capacities. I very much believed in our mission.

“And then, after October 7, I feel like there has just been a drastic shift in this expectation of what we’re supposed to do when there’s a humanitarian crisis and what we’re actually doing when there’s politics involved, and that has a very, very scary, chilling impact.”

The staff’s open letter calls for DHS to take actions in Gaza “commensurate with past responses to humanitarian tragedies”, including through the creation of a [humanitarian parole programme](https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian_parole) for Palestinians in the territory.

That would allow them to temporarily enter the US “based on urgent humanitarian or significant public benefit reasons”.

The letter also pushed DHS to designate residents of the Palestinian territories eligible for “[temporary protected status](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/11/us-advocates-welcome-tps-extension-for-citizens-of-six-countries)” or TPS. That would permit Palestinians already in the US to remain in the country and qualify for employment authorisation.

Such programmes have been put in place for other conflicts, [including for Ukrainians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/18/biden-administration-extends-protected-status-for-ukrainians-in-us) facing full-scale invasion from Russia.

Last month, [106 members](https://www.durbin.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/durbin-jayapal-schakowsky-colleagues-urge-biden-administration-to-designate-palestinian-territories-for-temporary-protected-status-or-authorize-deferred-enforcement-departure-for-palestinians-in-us) of Congress — including Senator Dick Durbin and Representatives Pramila Jayapal and Jerry Nadler — even sent a letter to Biden, urging a TPS designation for the Palestinian territories.

But one of the anonymous DHS officials who spoke with Al Jazeera said that, although there has been discussion about a possible TPS designation, action seems unlikely.

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“There have been a lot of serious systemic and programmatic obstacles driven purely by politics,” she said.

Part of the challenge is that the US does not recognise Palestine as a foreign state, putting its eligibility for TPS in doubt.

“We don’t recognise Palestine as a state. We don’t code them with that,” the DHS official explained. “And that’s something across Customs and Border Protection, ICE and USCIS. There have just been obstacles raised at the highest levels of those agencies.”

The official suspects she knows why. “They’re worried about their own operations in terms of removing or deporting people to Gaza and the West Bank, if they were to change these codes.”

But that inaction has levied a steep toll on employees’ mental health, according to the DHS officials Al Jazeera spoke to.

One described how colleagues with family in Gaza had received no support from DHS leadership as they tried to bring their relatives to safety.

The other, a senior staff member who has spent more than a decade working for the federal government, described having nightmares of losing his own children.

He said he wakes up “with the knowledge that we’re not actually doing all that we can to provide programmes and relief for the Palestinians”.

“It’s definitely distressing and dispiriting to feel like, for political considerations, we’re not addressing [the conflict] in the same way that we would other previous, recent humanitarian crises, for instance, like Ukraine.”

The senior official voiced dismay that Biden’s [immigration policies](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/14/bidens-approach-to-migration-more-carrots-and-fewer) have [remained similar](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/6/biden-administration-to-extend-us-border-wall-begin-venezuela-deportations) to that of his predecessor, former President [Donald Trump](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/2/biden-furthers-move-to-end-trump-migration-policies).Biden has faced pressure to limit the number of arrivals in the US, particularly as migration across the US-Mexico border spikes.

“The issue is, honestly, that the Biden administration has been really tepid about moving too far in front on immigration and is focused almost entirely on the southern border and how that impacts the administration politically. That has informed a lot of the decision-making with respect to new programmes,” the official said.

That tepidness has left many of the anonymous DHS officials feeling demoralised, questioning their sense of mission.

“We have the ability to do anything, something, and we’re just not,”

Gay, Magill and Sally Kornbluth, the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), have all faced a backlash since their joint appearance before Congress on December 6, where they were asked how they would address anti-Semitism at their universities.

Republican Representative Elise Stefanik grilled the academic leaders for offering evasive answers about whether calls for the “genocide of Jews” violated their schools’ codes of conduct.

“Calling for the genocide of Jews is dependent on the context?” Stefanik said incredulously in response to their answers. “That is not bullying or harassment? This is the easiest question to answer yes.”

Fears over anti-Semitism and other forms of hate have spiked since the start of the Israeli war in Gaza on October 7, which sparked widespread campus protests in the US. As pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian protesters clashed, university leaders faced scrutiny over what speech is protected on school grounds – and what, if anything, should be limited.

Let’s take a look at the congressional hearing and why the presidents’ testimonies have drawn bipartisan backlash, including from the White House:

Why was the hearing held?

Jewish advocacy group Anti-Defamation League and some other similar groups have warned that anti-Semitism is on the rise on US campuses, particularly since the start of the Gaza war. The staunchly pro-Israel group, however, has been accused of conflating the criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism.

And the Department of Education has opened investigations into more than a dozen universities since the war began, citing possible “discrimination involving shared ancestry” – an umbrella term that covers both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Politicians, particularly on the right, have pointed to those reports as evidence that the liberal atmosphere on college campuses has gone too far.

Pro-Israel groups have deemed student chanting of the slogan, [“from the river to the sea”,](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/from-the-river-to-the-sea-what-does-the-palestinian-slogan-really-mean) to be pro-Hamas, but analysts say the term has more complex roots. They say the phrase is an expression of the Palestinian desire for freedom from oppression across the historical land of Palestine.

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On December 6, the House Committee on Education and Labor held a hearing to address concerns about campus anti-Semitism, calling on Gay, Magill and Kornbluth to speak.

“Today, each of you will have a chance to answer to and atone for the many specific instances of vitriolic, hate-filled anti-Semitism on your respective campuses,” Republican Representative Virginia Foxx told the university presidents.

She added that the tense atmosphere denies students “the safe learning environment that they are due”.

What happened at the hearing?

The three university presidents testified at the five-hour-long hearing, addressing how they balanced free speech with concerns for campus safety.

But it was their interaction with Stefanik towards the end of the hearing that fuelled viral outrage.

Stefanik pressed the three leaders about whether calling for the genocide of Jews would be considered harassment, insisting on direct answers. In one such exchange, she posed a hypothetical question to Magill: “Does calling for the genocide of Jews violate Penn’s rules or code of conduct, yes or no?”

Magill said it would depend on the context. “If the speech turns into conduct, it can be harassment, yes.”

“I am asking, specifically, calling for the genocide of Jews, does that constitute bullying or harassment?” Stefanik said.

“If it is directed and severe, pervasive, it is harassment,” Magill answered.

“So the answer is yes,” Stefanik said, appearing exasperated.

All three presidents [refused to issue blanket statements](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/7/how-are-harvard-penn-presidents-responding-to-campus-anti-semitism-row) that calling for genocide would constitute conduct violations. At one point, Gay said terms like “intifada” – the Arabic word for “uprising” – were “personally abhorrent”, but she underscored her support for “free expression, even of views that are objectionable”.

Why did the testimonies spark controversy?

Much of the outrage stemmed from the fact that the university presidents did not unequivocally condemn calls for genocide, thereby appearing tolerant of hate speech.

Tom Ginsburg, a professor of law at the University of Chicago, said the presidents came across as “lawyered”, “defensive” and perhaps “out of touch”.

However, he said, “in substance, it’s not clear that anything any of them said was wrong or inaccurate”. The presidents were simply reflecting the broad protections for free speech afforded under the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

“We live in a country where you can call for the genocide of groups and, if you’re not imminently going to cause them harm, that’s legal,” he explained.

“Go on to Twitter. It happens all the time. So [the presidents] were trying to talk about their policies, obviously, in a way which preserved their ability to say that they were applying the First Amendment.”

What kind of speech is limited on US campuses?

Zach Greenberg, a First Amendment lawyer with the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) advocacy group, explained that the university presidents had to navigate a fine legal distinction in their testimonies.

The US Constitution [includes sweeping protections for “political speech”](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-stream/2023/11/30/war-on-words-freedom-of-speech), which can comprise, in extreme cases, discussions or even the advocacy of violence. But it does not protect speech that veers into threats and harassment.

The distinction is that unprotected speech represents a “serious intent to commit unlawful violence and becomes a pattern of severe, pervasive, offensive conduct that detracts a student from having an education”,

But private universities, like Harvard and MIT, have the power to go further in restricting speech, he added. They have the right “to set their own policies and determine what standard of free speech they’re going to give to their students”.

Still, free speech is the norm on most US campuses, which have traditionally been hotbeds for political activism, Greenberg said.

“The vast majority of private schools, especially liberal arts universities and Ivy League schools like your Harvard, Yale or MIT, they promise students robust free speech rights, consistent with the First Amendment.”

“The University of Pennsylvania, for example, and its policies, basically say, ‘We are guided by the US Constitution. This is a standard we’re going to apply when determining what right students have on campus.’ So students at these universities are led to believe that the limits of their rights would be those of the First Amendment.”

What has been the public reaction?

All three presidents have faced intense criticism, with some students, alumni and activists calling for their resignations.

Dozens of US politicians, including high-level Democrats, have also condemned the presidents’ words.

“It’s unbelievable that this needs to be said: Calls for genocide are monstrous and antithetical to everything we represent as a country. Any statements that advocate for the systematic murder of Jews are dangerous and revolting – and we should all stand firmly against them,” White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said in a statement last week.

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Donors have also threatened to stop funding the universities. Billionaire hedge fund manager Bill Ackman denounced Gay in particular, saying in an open letter that she has done more damage to Harvard’s reputation than anyone in the university’s history. He also suggested she was hired to fulfil diversity criteria.

Still, some observers have leapt to Gay’s defence. More than 700 Harvard faculty members have signed a petition urging the school’s board to resist calls for her removal, a call that was ultimately successful.

What have the school presidents said since the hearing?

Gay has apologised for her remarks in the hearings.

She told the Harvard Crimson newspaper on Thursday: “What I should have had the presence of mind to do in that moment was return to my guiding truth, which is that calls for violence against our Jewish community – threats to our Jewish students – have no place at Harvard and will never go unchallenged.”

Magill, meanwhile, followed her testimony up with a video statement on the University of Pennsylvania’s website.

“I want to be clear, a call for genocide of Jewish people is threatening – deeply so,” she said. “In my view, it would be harassment or intimidation.”

Did the presidents keep their jobs?

Harvard’s board announced on Tuesday that Gay would remain in her role despite the backlash. MIT’s board also said last week that it stood by Kornbluth. Magill, meanwhile, stepped down from her post amid pressure.

What does the situation spell for the future of free speech at US universities?

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Before her resignation as head of the University of Pennsylvania, Magill called on school administrators to “initiate a serious and careful look at our policies”.

Ginsburg, the law professor at the University of Chicago, called her words “maybe the scariest” part of the whole imbroglio. To him, it signalled a possible backslide from the school’s commitment to freedom of speech.

“We have to get rid of ideological constraints on universities, whether those come from inside the university, by politicised departments, or from outside the university – from politicians who want to make hay and get votes out of them,” he said.

Ginsburg added that revising campus rules on free speech could end up silencing “actual discussion of Israel and Palestine policy”.

“It’s a major issue of public policy. We can’t take that off the table just because of some pressure from donors and such,” he said.

Greenberg, the First Amendment lawyer, echoed those concerns, though he hoped the public discussion would prompt schools instead to shore up their free speech protections.

“We are worried that this will create a pushback against free speech and open the door toward more censorship,” he explained.

“If universities are going to water down their free speech policies to punish students for saying, [‘From the river to the sea’](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/from-the-river-to-the-sea-what-does-the-palestinian-slogan-really-mean), for protesting Israel, for talking about this conflict, that would be a backward step.”

In November, Israel’s public broadcaster, Kan, uploaded on its official X page a [video](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/21/israeli-state-tv-video-shows-children-singing-about-gaza) of Israeli children singing a song celebrating their country’s ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. The broadcaster deleted the video clip after a huge online backlash.

Even after the video was silently erased from social media, however, the song remained a subject of discussion and controversy. Many across the world were shocked to see children sing happily about “eliminating” an entire people “within one year”. Yet a closer look at Israeli literature and curricula shows this open celebration of genocide was the only natural outcome of Israel’s persistent indoctrination – or brainwashing to be more blunt – of its children to ensure that they do not view Palestinians as human and fully embrace apartheid and occupation.

There is myriad evidence of Israel’s brainwashing of its citizens to erase the humanity of Palestinians spanning many decades.

Israeli scholar Adir Cohen, for example, analysed for his book titled “An Ugly Face in the Mirror – National Stereotypes in Hebrew Children’s Literature” some 1700 Hebrew-language children’s books published in Israel between 1967 and 1985, and found that a whopping 520 of them contained humiliating, negative descriptions of the Palestinians.

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He revealed that 66 percent of these 520 books refer to Arabs as violent; 52 percent as evil; 37 percent as liars; 31 percent as greedy; 28 percent as two-faced and 27 percent as traitors.

Such persistent negative descriptions dehumanised Palestinians in the eyes of generations of Israelis, established them as dangerous “others”, and paved the way for children to celebrate their genocide in a video produced by the state broadcaster in 2023.

Towering Palestinian academic and literary critic, Edward Said, also elaborated on the issue in his 1979 book The Question of Palestine, noting that Israeli children’s literature “is made up of valiant Jews who always end up by killing low, treacherous Arabs, with names like Mastoul (crazy), Bandura (tomato), or Bukra (tomorrow). As a writer for Haaretz said on September 20, 1974, “children’s books ‘deal with our topic: the Arab who murders Jews out of pleasure, and the pure Jewish boy who defeats ‘the coward swine!’”

Israel has also used the painful memory of the Holocaust to desensitise Israeli children to the suffering of Palestinians and support without question Israel’s treatment of them.

In his 1999 book, One Nation Under Israel, historian Andrew Hurley explained how Israel weaponises the Holocaust education it provides to Israeli children against the Palestinians.

“The mind of a child (or of anyone else for that matter) cannot absorb the horrors of the Holocaust without finding someone to hate,” Hurley argued. “Since there are no Nazis around against whom vengeance can be sought, [Former Israeli Prime Ministers] [Menachem] Begin, [Yitzhak] Shamir and [Ariel] Sharon have solved this problem by calling the Arabs the Nazis of today and a proper target for retribution.”

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Israel’s current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, appears to be eagerly continuing with this tradition and has even claimed that it was a Palestinian who gave Adolf Hitler the idea for the Holocaust.

Israeli professor Meytal Nasie strongly corroborates Hurley’s view above on the ramifications of the way the Holocaust is taught. In her 2016 study, Young Children’s Experiences and Learning in Intractable Conflicts, she found that 68 percent of Israeli children suggested “beating,” “fighting,” “killing,” or “expelling” the Arabs as a solution. Nasie states that imparting these beliefs at such an early age, in a frequent and intense manner, leads to inculcation of these conflict-related narratives deep within the children’s socio-psychological repertoires.

Of course, the Israeli state’s brainwashing of its citizens against the Palestinians is not limited to ridiculous lies about history told by political leaders or to children’s literature. This propaganda effort is highly systemic and at the very core of Israeli education.

Just take a look at Israel’s official textbooks.

For his 1998 research paper, The Rocky Road Toward Peace: Beliefs on Conflict in Israeli Textbooks, Israeli academic Daniel Bar-Tal analysed 124 Israeli textbooks on various subjects and for various age groups approved by the Israeli Ministry of Education to be used in religious and secular schools across the country.

To map out the ideological content transmitted to Israeli children in the education system, he looked at which “societal beliefs (society members’ shared cognitions on topics and issues of special concern for their society)” received the most coverage in state-approved textbooks. He found that overall, the societal beliefs relating to (national) security received the most emphasis, followed by those concerning a positive self-image of Jews, and those that present Jews as the victims of the conflict. A majority of the analysed books were also found to include negative stereotypes about Arabs, portraying them as “cruel, immoral, unfair” and determined “to annihilate the State of Israel”.

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The widespread demonisation of the Palestinian “Other” in textbooks, coupled with the emphasis placed on the positive representations of Jews and the claim that they are the “victims” in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and supported by overarching narratives about the importance of national security and survival, created the perfect conditions for generations of Israelis to leave the education system convinced that any and all aggression against Palestinians – including ethnic cleansing and genocide – are at least justifiable, if not necessary.

This is because when children are thought that they belong to an inherently good “chosen people” and that they are being attacked and victimised by a demonic and inhuman “Other”, they easily accept the oppression, displacement or mass killing of those who belong to this “Other” (ie, the Palestinians) without any moral qualm or hesitation.

Bar-Tal’s study is from over 20 years ago, but more recent studies show that the situation is hardly any different today.

For example, for her 2013 book, Palestine in Israeli School Books: Ideology and Propaganda in Education, Israeli scholar Nurit Peled-Elhanan analysed Israeli history, geography and civic studies textbooks for grades 8-12 and reached a conclusion rather similar to Bar-Tal’s: That in Israeli school books, Palestinians are still represented as evil “Others”, and Israelis as innocent victims of history and circumstance.

But there was another, important dimension to Peled-Elhanan’s study. Since all Israelis are drafted into compulsory military service at 18 years of age, she designed her study around the specific question of “How are Palestine and the Palestinians against whom these young Israelis will potentially be required to use force, portrayed in school books?”

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She found that the books commonly label Palestinians as “terrorists” and also “simplify history” to the benefit of Israelis.

She concluded that Israeli textbooks prioritise “the creation of a usable past over accuracy and often harness the past and manipulate it for the justification of the present”.

“The books – in defiance of actual evidence- still present the Palestinians as the ‘thugs’ and the Israelis as the victims” she wrote, and reflect the Zionist-Israeli opinion that “the Palestinians cannot be viewed but as an obstacle or a threat to be overcome or eliminated. Therefore their stories, their suffering, their truth or their human faces cannot be included in the narrative”.

In his book, One Nation Under Israel, Hurley explained the consequences of such indoctrination through the testimony of Israeli educator Shlomo Ariel, who had met with 10 groups, each made out of 50 Israelis about to enter the army, and discussed with them their perception of and attitudes towards Arabs.

“In each discussion group there were a few who proposed physically liquidating the Arabs, right down to the elderly, women and children,” Hurley quoted Ariel as saying. “They received the comparison between Sabra and Shatila (massacres in Lebanon) and the Nazi destruction favourably and said with full candour that they would carry out such destruction with their own hands with no inhibitions or pangs of conscience. Not one expressed shock or reservations about these declarations…Many supported apartheid on the model of South Africa…In each group, there were not more than two to three holders of humanitarian, antiracist views.”

Several decades have passed since Ariel had these discussions with young Israeli conscripts and learned that very few of them see Palestinians as human. Yet the ongoing brutal war on Gaza, and the many posts we see online by young Israelis – including many young conscripts – celebrating the carnage, applauding the military, and mocking Palestinian suffering, prove that little has changed since then.

So no, no one should be shocked to see Israeli children singing happily about the genocide of the Palestinians. Israel has been brainwashing them to do so for many generations.

The cabinet’s decision determines that only humanitarian aid arriving from Egypt will be transferred into the Gaza Strip this way,” the statement said.

For the last two months, the [Rafah crossing](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/12/2/near-rafah-border-baby-dies-and-aid-held-up-again-as-israels-war-resumes) with Egypt has been the only point of entry into the strip, where a trickle of assistance has done little to address a humanitarian crisis driven by an Israeli assault that has killed more than 18,000 people and displaced 80 percent of all residents.

As Israel’s campaign in Gaza has continued, the United Nations and other world bodies have warned of severe shortages of food, clean water and medicines.

UN agencies say that as the bombardment has continued, it has become impossible to distribute aid outside Rafah, where the population has been swollen to approximately one million with hundreds of thousands of displaced people coming from areas further north.The decision comes one day after White House National Security Adviser [Jake Sullivan](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/15/israel-to-transition-to-more-precise-targeted-warfare-in-gaza-us-adviser) met Israeli officials to discuss the timeframe and style of Israel’s military operations in Gaza, as Israel and its US ally come under growing [international pressure](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/13/allies-pressure-israel-over-indiscriminate-bombings) to bring the fighting to an end.

“It’s a significant concession, the Israelis would say, because right at the outset of this war Israel said there’ll be no further contact, no further links between Gaza and Israel, while they’re now having to open up that Kerem Shalom crossing for goods under US pressure so that Israel can meet its agreement of [letting in] 200 trucks of aid a day,” Al Jazeera’s Bernard Smith reported from Tel Aviv.

“And as an indication, before the war started, there were 500 trucks a day going into Gaza, when there was much less need for emergency aid.”

“President [Joe] Biden raised this issue in recent phone calls with Prime Minister Netanyahu, and it was an important topic of discussion during my visit to Israel over the past two days,” Sullivan said in a statement on Friday, calling the opening a “significant step”.

Sullivan also met on Friday President Mahmoud Abbas, who leads the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank, to discuss the future of the PA and increasing violence against Palestinians by [Israeli settlers](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/12/5/massacres-await-palestinians-in-nablus-warn-of-deadly-settler-attacks).

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that Abbas told Sullivan that the US must “intervene to force Israel to stop its aggression against our people in the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem”.

The US [has suggested](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/17/pipe-dream-why-is-the-us-pushing-the-palestinian-authority-to-lead-gaza) that the PA could take control of the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the Israel-Hamas war, but Abbas and the PA are highly unpopular among the Palestinian population due to the policy of security coordination with Israel.

Many Palestinians see the policy as a form of complicity in [Israel’s occupation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/11/what-is-the-palestinian-authority-and-how-is-it-viewed-by-palestinians).

11:31

Reporting from the city of Jenin in the occupied West Bank, Al Jazeera correspondent Charles Stratford also noted that many Palestinians have little trust in the words of US officials.

“You speak to any Palestinian on the ground here and there is absolutely zero trust in any kind of rhetoric, any kind of statement, that is coming out from the US administration, whether it be Jake Sullivan or Joe Biden. There is deep, deep, distrust,” The bombardment came after US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

“There will be a transition to another phase of this war, one that is focused in more precise ways on targeting the leadership and on intelligence-driven operations,” the US envoy told reporters in Tel Aviv after the meeting.

However, he did not say when the shift would happen.

The US agrees with Israel that the war on Gaza will still last for months, Sullivan added, noting “intensive discussions” about future stages of the conflict and the aftermath.

‘America’s face-saving’

Sullivan will travel to the occupied West Bank later on Friday to meet Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas. Sullivan told Netanyahu that it is not appropriate for Israel to occupy Gaza in the long term.

“We do not believe that it makes sense for Israel or is right for Israel to occupy Gaza, reoccupy Gaza over the long term. … Ultimately, the control of Gaza, the administration of Gaza and the security of Gaza has to transition to the Palestinians.”

Washington has suggested that after the war, the internationally recognised Palestinian Authority, which oversees the West Bank, could play a role in governing Gaza instead of Hamas, something Sullivan may discuss with Abbas.

Al Jazeera’s senior political analyst, Marwan Bishara, asserted that “the world’s foremost superpower of the past 70 years” is being humiliated by Israel.

“America laid few red lines: No reoccupation of Gaza, which is now no reoccupation of Gaza long term; no indiscriminate bombing. And then Sullivan comes to the region and says, ‘No, we understand,’” he said.

“Every time we talk about a spat, it involves Israel spitting and America’s face-saving. It is not exactly an equal relationship. The patron continues to follow the orders of the client,” ‘Immediate protection’

The US is a key military backer of Israel in its war on Hamas in Gaza, which has killed more than 18,700 Palestinians – mostly women and children. Israel launched the offensive after Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, killing about 1,200 people.

The US has repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council resolutions calling for a ceasefire in the war, but it has recently been more critical of Israel’s killing of Palestinian civilians with [President Joe Biden](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/15/us-presses-israel-on-civilian-deaths-move-to-lower-intensity-war-in-gaza) on Thursday urging Israel to “be focused on how to save civilian lives” and to “be more careful”.

Despite mounting international calls for restraint, Israel on Friday continued its offensive in Gaza and wound down its longest raid on the occupied West Bank since the war began.

Hospitals in Deir el-Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah reported rising casualties after strikes early in the morning.

In Khan Younis in southern Gaza, an Israeli attack near a school run by the United Nations killed at least 33 people, health authorities said.

In the eastern part of Rafah, also in the south, there was a heavy exchange of fire, Al Jazeera’s reporters said.

Israel’s military also continued to target the occupied West Bank, where its raids and settler violence have killed 289 Palestinians and wounded 3,365.

In Jenin in the West Bank, the Israeli army ended a raid on a refugee camp that began on Tuesday. At least 12 people were killed and more than 500 arrested, Al Jazeera reporters said, although some have been released.

The United Kingdom and a dozen other countries – including Australia, Canada and France – on Friday called on Israel to take immediate and concrete steps to tackle settler violence in the West Bank.

“This rise in extremist settler violence committed against Palestinians is unacceptable,” the countries said in a joint statement published by the British government.

“Proactive steps must now be taken to ensure the effective and immediate protection of Palestinian communities.

In October, shortly after the start of the Israeli war on Gaza that has now killed nearly 20,000 Palestinians, Israel pledged to wipe Hamas “off the face of the earth” – a project that would require Israel’s military “to flatten the ground” in Gaza, as an Israeli security source told the Reuters news agency.

And flatten they did; one month into the war, the military had already dropped [the equivalent of two nuclear bombs](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/11/9/israel-attacks-on-gaza-weapons-and-scale-of-destruction) on the diminutive and densely populated Palestinian coastal enclave. Now, as Israel continues to pulverise an already thoroughly pulverised territory, it seems the Israelis may be taking the concept of scorched earth policy to a whole new level.

According to the Oxford Reference dictionary, the term “scorched earth policy” was first utilised in English in 1937 in a report describing the Sino-Japanese conflict, in which the Chinese levelled their own cities and burned crops in order to complicate the Japanese invasion. The strategy has since been seen in an array of armed conflicts worldwide, including the 36-year civil war in Guatemala that ended in 1996 after killing and disappearing more than 200,000 people, primarily Indigenous Mayans.

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In 2013, former Guatemalan dictator and United States buddy Efraín Ríos Montt – who oversaw a particularly bloody segment of the war in the early 1980s – was found [guilty of genocide](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2013/5/15/guatemala-rios-montt-genocide-trial-ends-with-historic-verdict) in a Guatemalan court. And while subsequent judicial machinations and Ríos Montt’s own death by heart attack saved the man from earthly atonement for his crimes, you might say the truth is not so easily wiped “off the face of the earth”.

Indeed, scorched earth was a primary component of the Guatemalan army’s genocidal approach to its adversaries, and hundreds of Indigenous villages were destroyed along with water supplies, crops, and anything else that might sustain life. And what do you know: Guatemalan state savagery was boosted by none other than the state of Israel, which after all already had several decades of experience in eradicating Indigenous life in Palestine – pardon, “making the desert bloom”.

As journalist Gabriel Schivone notes in an article for the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), not only did Israeli advisers help ensure the success of the 1982 military coup that brought Ríos Montt to power, but Israel also “assisted every facet of attack on the Guatemalan people” from the late 1970s into the next decade. For successive Guatemalan governments, Schivone writes, Israel had become the “main provider of counterinsurgency training, light and heavy arsenals of weaponry, aircraft, state-of-the-art intelligence technology and infrastructure, and other vital assistance”.In keeping with the “desert-blooming” variety of blasphemy, Israel was also credited with assisting Guatemala in agricultural endeavours during the civil war era – since there’s clearly nothing better for agriculture than, you know, scorched earth.

Meanwhile, in neighbouring El Salvador, the United States’s supposedly existential fight against communism during the Cold War also enabled right-wing regimes to slaughter a whole lot of peasants. And like in Guatemala, Israel was standing by to offer a helping hand – including in the implementation of scorched earth policies.

An [AJ+ video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_qMTzEhPSQ) draws attention to the fact that Israel helped train ANSESAL, the Salvadoran intelligence agency that “would lay the foundation for death squads” during El Salvador’s own 12-year civil war, which killed at least 75,000 people and ended in 1992. According to the video, from 1975 until the start of the civil war in 1979, Israel was the source of a full 83 percent of El Salvador’s military imports. The vast majority of wartime killings were perpetrated by the US-backed right-wing state and associated paramilitary groups.

It goes without saying, of course, that scorched earth campaigns are deadly – and sometimes, that deadliness outlives the conflict itself. Take Vietnam, where the US military’s quite literal scorching of the earth with the toxic defoliant [Agent Orange](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/featured-documentaries/2021/11/5/the-people-vs-agent-orange) continued to cause miscarriages, birth defects, and severe illnesses decades after the official end of the Vietnam War in 1975.

[In Iraq](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2013/3/15/iraq-wars-legacy-of-cancer), the US’s use of depleted uranium munitions might also qualify as a scorched earth policy of sorts, as saturating a territory in radioactive poison doesn’t do much to ensure its long-term habitability.

Speaking of poisons, the Washington Post recently confirmed that the Israeli military fired US-supplied white phosphorus rounds at southern Lebanon in October despite the use of such weapons in civilian areas being “generally prohibited under international humanitarian law”. As per the Post’s writeup, south Lebanese residents affected by the attack “speculated that the phosphorus was meant to displace them from the village and to clear the way for future Israeli military activity in the area”.

It certainly wouldn’t be the first time – in Lebanon or in the Gaza Strip, which has seen its fair share of illegal white phosphorus bombardments by Israel.

As the Israeli military now carries on scorching and re-scorching the earth in Gaza and the humans therein along with it, there is a singularity that distinguishes Israel’s efforts from scorched earth experiments of the past. In El Salvador, for example, the army’s goal was never to eliminate the very concept of El Salvador, whereas Israel appears intent on annihilating Gaza altogether.

But unfortunately for Israel, resistance is one thing that can grow in scorched earth.

“Qatar affirmed its ongoing diplomatic efforts to renew the humanitarian pause and expressed hope for building upon the progress made to accomplish a comprehensive and sustainable agreement that would end the war, stop the bloodshed of our Palestinian brethren, and lead to serious negotiations and the launch of a political process that yields a comprehensive, permanent, and just peace in accordance with international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative,” the ministry said in a statement.

The Israeli ground, air and naval forces launched attacks on the besieged enclave on Saturday, leaving many dozens dead. At least 18,787 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since October 7, after Hamas launched an attack inside Israel killing about 1,200 people. Attacks on Saturday heavily targeted Khan Younis in the south, where thousands have been forced to flee, as Israel has expanded its ground military presence in the north and towards the south.

The Israeli army said on Saturday it raided two schools in Gaza City, in the north of the Strip, claiming it killed 25 fighters and captured 50 more.

Since the war started, the military has repeatedly legitimised attacks on civilian infrastructure, including United Nations-run schools and hospitals, to target Hamas fighters.

However, reports from the ground show that scores of civilians have been killed in most of these strikes. Earlier on Saturday, several [Palestinians were killed and injured](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/16/israel-hamas-war-list-of-key-events-day-71) in an Israeli attack targeting the vicinity of the al-Mazraa School run by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Deir el-Balah, central Gaza Strip.

No significant progress has been made on stopping the war – even temporarily – since last month, when Israel pulled back its Mossad negotiators from Doha after an agreement with Hamas could not be reached through Qatari mediation.

Reports on Saturday suggested Israel may be looking to revive the talks that had earlier led to a week-long truce and the exchange of dozens of captives held by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

This comes after Israel admitted to mistakenly [killing three of its captives held inside Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/15/israeli-army-says-it-mistakenly-killed-three-captives-held-in-gaza) who were initially believed to be fighters. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been under increasing pressure from the families of the people held in Gaza to secure their release.

Another large demonstration was held in Tel Aviv on Friday to demand the release of captives.

From Jakarta to San Francisco, hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets over the past two months to protest Israel’s ongoing assault on Gaza, which has [killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) more than 18,700 people, including more than 7,700 children.

According to the [Armed Conflict Location & Events Data](https://acleddata.com/2023/11/13/mapping-the-conflict-in-israel-and-gaza-protests-sweep-around-the-globe-as-israels-war-in-gaza-grinds-on-reuters/) Project, a nongovernmental organisation specialising in conflict data collection, from October 7 to November 24, there were at least 7,283 pro-Palestine protests that took place in more than 118 countries and territories.

Many more have chosen to express their condemnation using their purchasing power, opting to boycott products and services that support Israel, in turn fueling the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement that was set up in 2005 by a coalition of Palestinian civil society groups.Censoring voices on campus

In the United States, students at several universities, including [Columbia University in New York City](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/17/tensions-surge-at-us-universities-as-students-rally-over-israel-hamas-war), have said their attempts to speak out against Israel’s bombardment of Gaza have met intimidation and censorship.

“I think being at a school at Columbia that has so much global power, I felt the need to act. And also, I just think that this issue is one that connects so many other ones where we see police violence, settler colonialism, these issues that are so important in America as well,” said Daria Mateescu, a law student at Columbia University.

Mateescu, 25, is a first-generation Romanian American who heads the Columbia Law Students for Palestine.

She said she and her peers feel the university is not listening to student voices calling for divestment from Columbia’s Tel Aviv campus, which Palestinians and Arabs cannot attend; reaffirmation of free speech on campus; and reinstatement of two student groups –  Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) – that were suspended by the university in November.

Mateescu said that in addition to protests on and off campus, members of the community are making consumer choices tied to what they believe.

“People are really respecting the targeted boycotts for places like McDonald’s or Starbucks … ‘We don’t buy from these places.’ That’s incredible to hear,”

Mateescu said there’s a Colombia-specific boycott list that’s being shared on social media to make local consumer choices.

Across the Atlantic in the United Kingdom, a group of students at the University of York have also been holding events to raise awareness about the events in Palestine.

The students requested their identities be concealed due to the backlash for publicly supporting Palestine.

“I do find that a lot of people don’t want to take a stance on it and are sort of sitting in the middle and a lot of people that I know don’t really understand what’s going on very much because there’s quite a lot of misinformation. I would say it’s your duty to uplift voices that aren’t necessarily being heard,” one of the society members said.

“I think for me to take the small action of not buying a coffee at a certain chain, it’s very easy to take small actions to make sure that there’s less money being directed towards violence,” she said, explaining the steps she is taking.

Another member said they are focused on educating people who may not be equipped with information to form an opinion on the conflict and the conditions of the Palestinian people.

The United States media, bar just a few exceptions, are refusing to engage seriously with one of the most important questions about Israel’s ongoing war on Gaza: Is Israel committing genocide against the Palestinians in the besieged enclave, and is the US complicit in this worst of all human crimes?

The American media’s avoidance of the growing allegations of genocide directed at Israel is  not surprising. After all, since the beginning of this latest war, mainstream US media have eagerly justified and excused Israel’s atrocities against Palestinians. For example, they usually refer to blatant acts of ethnic cleansing and forced displacement in Gaza as “evacuations”, and claim Israel is “defending itself” against “terror” even as it continues to terrorise millions of civilians living under its occupation with bombs and bullets along with apartheid laws and settler-colonial policies of oppression.

Like its refusal to acknowledge Israel’s other atrocities against Palestinians and violations of international law, the US media’s reluctance to report on and discuss the accusations of genocide has real consequences.

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As Prism, a progressive news outlet based in the US, recently noted, “through journalistic sleight of hand – including the use of passive language, ever-shifting headlines, bothsidesism, and the myth of objectivity – reporters across the US are fuelling the genocide their newsrooms are refusing to acknowledge is taking place”.

Indeed, what constitutes genocide is clearly defined in the 1948 Genocide Convention, and this is exactly what we witness in Palestine today. As leading genocide scholar Raz Segal recently stated, it is clear Israel is carrying out in Gaza “a textbook case of genocide”.

The American media’s hesitance to utter the word genocide in relation to Israel’s assault in Gaza, coupled with their tendency to downplay or outright deny Israeli crimes against Palestinians, signals to Israel that it can continue its killing spree with impunity, and reassures the US administration that it won’t be held to account for its complicity.

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Dozens of Palestinians surrounded the aid trucks after they drove in through the Rafah crossing with Egypt, forcing some to stop before climbing aboard, pulling food and water boxes down, and carrying them off or passing them off to crowds below.

“The humanitarian situation has become very desperate, not only for the residents of Rafah city but also for the one million displaced Palestinians here who are becoming hungry, thirsty and traumatised as the war pounds on,” said Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Rafah.

Mahmoud said the amount of aid being allowed inside the strip is not enough and has forced the Palestinians into a “survival mode”.

“People are without anything – without a home, without access to food, without water and without medical supplies,

“So, the scenes at Rafah crossing are a natural response: When people starve to death, when they are hungry, this is what we will see happening.”

‘Desperate for food’

The United Nations this week warned that people in Gaza are so “desperate for food” that they are stopping aid trucks and immediately eating what they find.

Philippe Lazzarini, the head of UNRWA who visited the strip recently, said the residents, despite their long and difficult history of suffering under Israeli siege, have “never, ever experienced” hunger of this kind.

“I saw it with my eyes that people in Rafah have started to decide to help themselves directly from the truck out of total despair and eat what they have taken out of the truck on the spot,” Lazzarini said on Thursday.

On the same day, Carl Skau, the deputy head of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), confirmed that nearly half of the people in Gaza are [starving](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/9/people-are-starving-wfp-says-humanitarian-operation-in-gaza-collapsing), with no idea where their next meal is coming from.

The WFP said half of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million is starving as the Israeli military’s assault on the southern part of the enclave expands and people are cut off from supplies.

Drone footage from southern Gaza on Sunday showed volunteers from the Gaza Emergency Relief prepare a giant stew.

Aid deliveries crossing into Gaza via Rafah, the sole entry point on the Egyptian border, are only a fraction of pre-conflict levels, despite the surge in needs.

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Aid coming through the border crossing has been slow to deliver what the Gaza Strip population needs because of delays from truck inspections.

Rafah is sheltering more than 12,000 people per square kilometre, housing an estimated 85 percent of people displaced across Gaza since the attacks began on October 7.

That day, Hamas launched a surprise incursion on Israeli territory, killing some 1,140 people and taking another 240 captives.

Israel’s bombardment has since killed 18,787 people and injured another 50,897, while thousands are believed to be [buried under the rubble](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/12/16/israel-hamas-war-live-demands-for-justice-after-israel-kills-aj-journalist).

Despite thousands sheltering at the crossing, Rafah [continues to be the target](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/14/israel-bombards-rafah-as-pressure-mounts-over-civilian-death-toll-in-gaza) of Israeli air strikes.

A massive explosion took place overnight in the Geneina district of Rafah, with two people killed and residential homes targeted and destroyed, said Al Jazeera’s Mahmoud.

“A large number of injured have been brought to the Kuwaiti hospital here,” he said. “We are talking about more than 50 people injured.”Dramatic news reports, claims and videos have emerged from both sides involved in the Gaza fighting throughout the past week.

The week started with the Israeli army releasing several videos of Palestinians stripped to their underwear being marched through urban ruins. Israel’s PR machine disregarded the Palestinian outcry that followed. Israel staunchly asserted that the men were Hamas fighters and that their alleged mass surrenders signified that the end of the Palestinian group was close, even as many Palestinians and independent observers insisted that the men were civilians who had been treated against the laws of war by being publicly humiliated.

For its part, Hamas stuck to its usual practice of pushing its cause through video releases – skilfully edited to enhance the desired effects – purporting to confirm its constant and numerous successes against Israeli invaders, mostly showing hits scored against armoured vehicles.

Then came the news that stunned Israel and put a big question mark on its official line of Hamas being on the verge of collapse. First, nine soldiers were killed in a single operation in the Shujaiya neighbourhood of Gaza City on Tuesday. That shock was followed by another one on Friday, with the Israeli army admitting that it [killed three Israeli captives](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/16/israeli-hostages-mistakenly-killed-in-gaza-were-had-a-white-flag-official), having mistaken them for enemies – even though they held white flags.So what is really happening on the ground in Gaza?

Nothing we did not predict weeks ago: The war has entered a difficult, unpredictable and bloody phase of full-scale urban warfare where gains are small and slow, and losses can be huge. Combat in narrow and cramped streets of old cities is known to be one of the most difficult ways to fight a war. Classic military theory calls for defended cities to be surrounded and blockaded by units just strong enough to prevent the defenders from breaking out, while the main force continues advancing and taking territory.

But the fight in Gaza is not about conquering fields and beaches – Israel’s proclaimed goal is to destroy Hamas. To do that, the first step is to control the ground where the enemy operates: the cities.

Many aspects of warcraft are as ancient as the human urge to fight wars: attack and conquer versus defend and remain free. But the ways of achieving those goals have changed with technology and, at certain times, the means available to soldiers favour one aspect over another.

In the old days, cities needed strong walls to defend themselves, but in the last 100 years, weapons have advanced at a rapid rate, causing a change in tactics. Successful resistance against enemy attacks no longer depends on huge, expensive static bastions. Nowadays, small but potent man-portable weapons whose destructive power is hugely disproportionate to their size, such as anti-tank rocket launchers, grenade throwers, small mortars, assault rifles and many others, allow the defenders to turn each house and every street into a formidable defensive position.

From the 1940s to this day, almost all attempts to conquer cities held by determined defenders have ended in failure. The few victories attackers achieved were so costly that they often ended the offensive capabilities of those armies pushing into cities.

In their own ways, [Stalingrad](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/18/analysis-will-gaza-be-israels-stalingrad), Warsaw, Berlin, Dien Bien Phu, Vukovar, Sarajevo, Grozny and Fallujah – some successfully defended, others eventually succumbing to attacks – all confirmed the military wisdom that urban warfare should be avoided whenever possible.

Israel could not avoid urban warfare in Gaza. To have a chance of destroying Hamas, it has to deny it its operating ground, the three biggest urban agglomerations in the strip: Gaza City, [Khan Younis](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/what-is-the-situation-in-gazas-khan-younis-as-israel-intensifies-attacks) and Rafah.

In the first phase of its ground operation, the Israeli army advanced across open ground, through farmland and villages that do not lend themselves to mounting a major defence, only harassing attacks to slow down and dent the invaders. Hamas acted in classic guerrilla fashion, launching some hit-and-run attacks without wasting any effort to stop the Israelis then and there.

The second phase started with Israeli forces reaching the suburbs, first of Gaza City and then, after the temporary ceasefire expired, of Khan Younis. Treading slowly and carefully in expectation of a concentrated Hamas response, the Israeli military completed the encirclement of those two urban areas.

It would be naive to assume that Israel’s generals hoped that by isolating the two biggest built-up areas in the Gaza Strip, they would seriously impair the ability of the [Qassam Brigades](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/who-are-qassam-armed-resistance-in-gaza), Hamas’s armed wing, to fight back.

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In reality, the encirclement of the two city centres is not a classic one where troops within the blockade cannot be reinforced nor receive any supplies. Hamas still has an unknown but probably major part of its tunnel network intact and can move in and out. They have some difficulties in doing so but Hamas fighters are not locked in.

Aware of the menace that tunnels present but also of the grave hazard of taking the fight into them, Israel has tried several approaches. It has destroyed as many tunnel entrances as it has found, mostly in the areas under its control, but many others that remain keep the danger acute.

After several attempts to send troops underground that ended in disaster, with troops falling casualty to Hamas booby traps, the high command abandoned that approach. It then reportedly mulled the idea of [filling tunnels with seawater](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/will-netanyahu-risk-a-tunnel-conflict-to-eradicate-hamas-stay-in-power), claiming that the test-flooding was successful but it has not yet decided to mount a full-scale deluge operation.

This week’s Israeli actions on the ground strongly suggest that the Israeli army leadership realises that the only way towards achieving its proclaimed goal of annihilating Hamas is by taking, holding and controlling the ground throughout the currently surrounded centres of Gaza City and Khan Younis.

That in itself would not guarantee victory but could create conditions to squeeze Hamas fighters into tunnels, after which Israeli forces could block and destroy all entrances.

Flushing Hamas out would probably take weeks of heavy urban warfare with many more instances of massive losses – on both sides.The more Israeli soldiers get killed in inner cities of Gaza, without still being able to claim the destruction of Hamas, the more the support for the continuation of the military operation would ebb. At some point, calls from Israel to stop the war could become louder than those encouraging it to continue.“We believe the number of dead people under the rubble is huge but there is no way to remove the rubble and recover them because of the intensity of Israeli fire,” he said by phone.

Medics in central Gaza’s Deir el-Balah said at least 12 Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded, while in Rafah in the south, an Israeli air attack on a house left at least four people dead.

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About 19,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since October 7. Israel says 1,147 people were killed on its territory that day.

Meanwhile, Israel has also ramped up its artillery shelling in [southern Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/14/israel-bombards-rafah-as-pressure-mounts-over-civilian-death-toll-in-gaza), hitting the cities of Khan Younis and Rafah, where the majority of displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

The stepping up of bombardments in the south has worsened the humanitarian situation, with starving people scrambling for food and water, [grabbing them from aid trucks](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/17/starving-palestinians-loot-aid-trucks-as-desperation-mounts-in-gazas-rafah) in desperation.

Israel on Sunday said it will reopen the Karem Abu Salem Crossing in the east but it is unclear whether supplies have crossed through there yet.

The United Nations estimates that 1.9 million people – about 80 percent of Gaza’s population – have been displaced by the war.

“I would not be surprised if people start dying of hunger, or a combination of hunger, disease, weak immunity,

The resolution being worked on, the US said, would demand that Israel and Hamas allow aid into Gaza and set up UN monitoring of the humanitarian assistance delivered.

The vote, which had been expected to take place earlier on Tuesday, was already delayed by a day as council members sought to stave off another US veto and as Israel faces growing international pressure to change its tactics in the war against Hamas.

An initial draft text of the new resolution seen on Monday called for “an urgent and lasting cessation of hostilities to allow unimpeded access of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip”.

Diplomatic sources said this language has been watered down to an “urgent suspension of hostilities

“The key sticking point, of course, we believe is the ‘cessation of hostilities’,” Al Jazeera’s Gabriel Elizondo said, reporting from the UN in New York.

“The United States and Israel say that any resolution that has those words in it is akin to a ceasefire, and they say that would only benefit Hamas, and so the US would reserve its veto power as it has done in the past. … We think they are trying to work out some sort of language there.”

On December 8, despite unprecedented pressure from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the US – Israel’s closest ally – [blocked](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/antonio-guterres-urges-un-security-council-to-push-for-gaza-ceasefire) the adoption of a resolution calling for an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire”, the latest in several US vetoes on draft resolutions relating to the war.

Last week, the 193-member UN General Assembly [overwhelmingly approved](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/un-general-assembly-votes-overwhelmingly-in-favour-of-gaza-ceasefire) a similar resolution, but unlike the Security Council’s, its resolutions are nonbinding.

Senior UN official Tor Wennesland said Israel’s steps to allow aid into Gaza until now have been “far short of what is needed”.

“The delivery of humanitarian aid in the [Gaza] Strip continues to face nearly insurmountable challenges,” said Wennesland, special coordinator for the Middle East peace process.

“Limited [humanitarian] steps by Israel … are positive but fall far short of what is needed to address the human catastrophe on the ground.”

Aid distribution

A key issue is how to implement and sustain a desperately needed aid operation. [Human Rights Watch](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/18/hrw-israel-committing-war-crime-by-intentionally-starving-gaza) accused Israel on Monday of deliberately starving Gaza’s population by blocking the delivery of water, food and fuel, a method of warfare that it described as a war crime.

The draft resolution recognises that civilians in Gaza do not have access to sufficient food, water, sanitation, electricity, telecommunications and medical services “essential for their survival”.

It demands the parties to the conflict – Hamas and Israel – fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and enable “the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale directly to the Palestinian civilian population throughout the Gaza Strip”.

Elizondo noted that the draft resolution also “calls for the UN to monitor all of the aid distribution in Gaza”. That is something new, the Al Jazeera correspondent said. “Previous Security Council drafts never had that wording in it.”

The draft also reiterates calls for the protection of civilians and infrastructure critical for their survival, including hospitals, schools, places of worship and UN facilities. It demands the immediate and unconditional release of all captives held by Hamas.

Discussions around a new truce come as the US reiterates its support for Israel in its war.

Speaking alongside Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant in Tel Aviv on Monday, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said US support for Israel was [“unshakeable”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/18/us-says-support-for-israel-unshakeable-as-gaza-ceasefire-calls-grow).But he added: “We will also continue to urge the protection of civilians during conflict and to increase the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza.”

Since the war began on October 7, Israel has killed more than 19,000 people in Gaza, according to Palestinian health authorities. Hamas’s attacks on southern Israel on October 7, which triggered the war, killed about 1,200 people, according to Israeli officials.

The press release cites statements from Israeli officials, interviews with survivors, reports from aid organisations, and evidence from satellite imagery to establish that Israel is engaged in the “deliberate use of policies to deprive Palestinians of the resources necessary for daily existence”.

“For over two months, Israel has been depriving Gaza’s population of food and water, a policy spurred on or endorsed by high-ranking Israeli officials and reflecting an intent to starve civilians as a method of warfare,” said Omar Shakir, Israel and Palestine director at Human Rights Watch.

“World leaders should be speaking out against this abhorrent war crime, which has devastating effects on Gaza’s population,

The statement comes as Israel faces increasing [internal](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/12/17/outrage-after-israeli-forces-kill-israeli-captives-in-gaza) and external pressure regarding mounting civilian casualties resulting from its “[indiscriminate](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/biden-warns-israel-losing-support-over-indiscriminate-gaza-bombing)” bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

Israel has killed 18,787 people and injured another 50,897, according to the latest figures, while thousands are believed to be [buried under the rubble](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/12/16/israel-hamas-war-live-demands-for-justice-after-israel-kills-aj-journalist).

Speeches and statements from Israeli officials promoting a campaign to deliberately block access to necessary resources for the Gaza population as a strategy indicate that Israel has not made these intentions secret, HRW said.

Even from the beginning of the Israeli offensive, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant infamously [stated](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/is-total-gaza-blockade-a-collective-punishment-against-palestinians) that Israel was “putting a complete siege on Gaza. … No electricity, no food, no water, no gas – it’s all closed,” justifying the move by describing Palestinians as “beastly people”.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court provides that intentionally starving civilians by “depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including willfully impeding relief supplies”, is a war crime, HRW said in the statement.

The plight of Gaza’s 2.3 million people has become desperate amid the war, which has now persisted for over two months. Around 80 percent of Palestinians living in the enclave have been displaced by the violence, while efforts to get aid into the enclave have struggled.

Images showing the massive devastation of the Gaza Strip, of desperate Palestinians [raiding food banks,](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/29/palestinians-break-into-gaza-un-aid-warehouses-in-a-sign-of-desperation) humanitarian aid [delivery trucks](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/17/starving-palestinians-loot-aid-trucks-as-desperation-mounts-in-gazas-rafah) and reports of deliberate [destruction of agricultural land](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/17/analysis-why-israel-will-continue-its-deadly-push-into-gaza-city-centres) bolster the allegations.

Alarmed humanitarian organisations have been fruitlessly calling for a ceasefire and [denouncing](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/9/people-are-starving-wfp-says-humanitarian-operation-in-gaza-collapsing) the shocking cost of the [catastrophic](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/13/un-refugee-chief-says-gaza-war-leading-to-catastrophic-displacement) war which amounts to a collective punishment of the civilian population of Gaza.

The Israeli government hit back at HRW, accusing it of being an “anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli” organisation.

“Human Rights Watch … did not condemn the attack on Israeli citizens and the massacre of October 7 and has no moral basis to talk about what’s going on in Gaza if they turn a blind eye to the suffering and the human rights of Israelis,” foreign ministry spokesman Lior Haiat told AFP.

In Jabalia refugee camp, north of Gaza, the cries of an 11-year-old boy named Ahmad pierce the air. “I want my Baba, my Baba, Baba,” [Ahmad sobs](https://www.facebook.com/share/r/srwmT8nTgGLAQuTK/?mibextid=Na33Lf). His plea echoes through the camp, exposing the profound void left by the murder of his father at the hands of the Israeli occupation forces.

“Where are you, Baba? Why did they murder you? What crime did he commit?”

People attempt to console the grief-stricken boy but he is beyond consolation: “He promised me to stay alive and not to go. I’m tired. Leave me alone.”

Meanwhile, a few thousand kilometres away in Belgium, another Palestinian boy, 15-year-old Zain, mourns the loss of his father, Al Jazeera cameraman Samer Abudaqa. Zain recounts the tragedy that unfolded on December 15, revealing the cruelty of his father’s murder by an Israeli drone.

After being struck by shrapnel, Samer bled to death for five hours on the grounds of Farhanah, the high school I went to in Khan Younis. Three members of an ambulance team, including my friend, Rami Budeir, who attempted to rescue Samer, were also targeted and killed.

The enormity of the atrocity is etched into Zain’s tearful eyes and face as he speaks about his father. He pledges to pray for him every day. His voice breaks as [he sings](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Fx_X3fi_1k) a song he had written for his dad. “My heart is missing you. Separation tortures me. My heart, after you, is lost, and bitterness is the taste in my mouth

Zain’s words in Belgium, Ahmad’s cries in Jabaliia reach me here in Edmonton, Canada.

I find myself sobbing, unable to shake the images of their pain or grapple with the questions they evoke. My heart has shattered a thousand times in the past 80 days and it breaks once more. I am unable to escape the thoughts of these children, enduring the lasting trauma of being intentionally made orphans by a genocidal army.

What makes the pain all the more unbearable is that Zain is the same age as my own son, Aziz, and strikingly resembles him in every aspect – facial features, height, body, voice, and even the choices of clothes and hairstyle. These uncanny similarities intensify the deep sorrow I feel towards Zain and the hundreds of thousands of children who have lost parents, relatives and friends in Gaza.

As I think of Zain and his father who was targeted while wearing a press vest, my thoughts wander to another Palestinian orphan, 12-year-old [Donia Abu Muhsen](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbE0z41uytc).

Donia was recovering in Nasser hospital in Khan Younis, when Samer’s body was brought in and prepared for funeral. Israeli bombardment of a house where Donia and her family were taking shelter had killed her parents and two siblings and smashed her leg which necessitated an amputation.

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When Donia looks at the camera in a video shot a few days before her death, there has a faint smile on her face. Her will to live and dream are strong. She says she wants to study and become a doctor. “We are alone now without [my family]. I was very much connected to [them]. But I must continue,” she says.

But the Israeli occupation forces did not allow her to. Two days after they murdered Samer, they killed Donia’s dream. They shelled Nasser hospital, murdering the orphaned girl in her hospital bed.

I wonder about other children who survive but their hearts and bodies are broken, with no one left of their extended families to take care of them. Another [young orphan](https://www.instagram.com/reel/C1DYyVJM-We/?igsh=YTdmYTgyZDdmNQ==), perhaps Donia’s age, shares her harrowing story in another video. She recounts the loss of 70 people, including her parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, while seeking refuge in a chalet on the beach after losing their home.

Only she and her five-year-old brother Kanan survived. Unable to walk and in urgent need of an operation, she prays for the opening of the Rafah crossing, hoping for a chance to leave.

She is one of the 55,000 wounded people who are currently abandoned by the world scattered across Gaza where a man-made medical collapse is taking place. Tearfully, and in a voice and with a  facial expression that could break the hardest rock, the girl says, “If the border doesn’t open within 48 hours, I won’t be able to walk again. I’m in great pain, and I miss walking and my parents deeply.”

In the face of the horror and pain the children of Gaza are experiencing, the cry for justice is not a mere plea, it is a global call to humanity, to its collective conscience, if it still exists.

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This comes at a time, when the powers that be, led by America, openly endorse this genocide and stand in the way of putting an end to it. They are making sure that more children will be orphaned, starved, made homeless, bombarded day and night, and denied access to healthcare, education, and parental love and care.

Yet, there is also a growing chorus of voices of peace and hope as well.

Russian-American activist Masha Gessen, upon receiving the Hannah Arendt Prize, highlighted the critical opportunity the world still possesses to intervene in Gaza. Gessen emphasised, “The biggest difference between Gaza and the Jewish ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe is that many Gazans, most Gazans are still alive, and the world still has an opportunity to do something about it.”

Though we couldn’t save Donia and the parents of Zain, Ahmad and the little orphaned girl, there remains a chance to save those who are still alive in Gaza. We need ceasefire now!

Videos and images obtained by Al Jazeera showed bodies discovered on December 13 piled up inside the school. Since then, survivors of the attack, and family members of the victims who have returned to the school to look for their loved ones, have come forward to recount the horror of those moments.

Witnesses said several people, including women, children and babies, were killed execution-style by Israeli forces while they were sheltering inside the school.

A father of one of the victims said he was asleep with his wife and six children when Israeli soldiers “suddenly stormed” the school.“They entered the classroom we were in and fired directly at those present without uttering a word,” he said.

“They prevented me from speaking, asking questions, or commenting on anything, and every time I tried to talk to them, they silenced me,” he recalled.

The man believes he was ordered to then leave the school because of his “old age”.

“They expelled about 20 people from the school, stripped them of their clothes, and interrogated them,”

‘Shot at directly’

The footage shows traces of blood and remnants of the victims’ belongings that were with them before they were killed, while bullets had pierced the classroom walls where bodies were found.

Saeed Jumaa’s sister was among those killed along with her husband and children.

Jumaa said he was able to return to check on his relatives in the school several days later when Israeli forces left, but was “shocked to find that everyone in it had been executed in a brutal manner”.

“In the room were my sister’s husband and next to him, their sons Maysara and Ahmed. My sister in the corner was hugging her remaining children,” Jumaa said.

Israeli forces killed them by “firing at them point-blank”, he said. Their bodies were “swollen and filled with worms”, he added.

“We did not understand the meaning, and we were in a hurry to bury them days later as their bodies had decomposed,” he said.

Another witness who found the bodies in the classrooms said there were no signs of a missile strike or any shells inside the classrooms, adding that the victims were “shot at directly” by ground troops.

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In total, at least seven bodies were found inside three different classrooms. Four were in one room, two in the second room and one was in the third.

Dozens of displaced Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks on schools in Gaza, including at least three in Jabalia.

At least 50 people were killed in an attack on [Al Fakhoura school](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/18/israeli-forces-strike-al-fakhoora-school-in-northern-gaza) last month. An air attack on Abu Hussein School just days later killed at least 30 people.

Nearly 1.9 million people of Gaza’s total 2.3 million population have been displaced across the Strip since the start of the war, according to the United Nations.

UN-run schools have become overcrowded shelters for thousands of displaced Palestinians. Many had believed that the UN designation of these buildings would keep them safe from the constant Israeli bombardment.

Israel’s relentless attacks have killed [more than 20,000 people](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) in Gaza since October 7, according to Palestinian health officials. Most of those killed are children and women.

“What is happening at the Maghazi camp is a massacre that is being committed on a crowded residential square,” he said.

Bodies have been piling up at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital.

Dozens more are reported to be injured, and several houses have been destroyed in the attack. Families have been digging through the rubble in an attempt to find survivors.

The bombs fell on homes and buildings, reported Hani Mahmoud from Rafah in southern Gaza, destroying neighbourhoods and infrastructure, such as roads leading in and out of the refugee camps.

With the Bureij refugee camp also pounded overnight, some 100 people have been killed in the last 12 hours, he added. The vast majority of the victims are women and children.

“We were all targeted,” said Ahmad Turokmani, who lost several family members, including his daughter and grandson. “There is no safe place in Gaza anyway.”

Maghazi refugee camp is one of the most densely populated areas in the middle of the Gaza Strip.

He said it was one of the places the Israeli military had previously told the Palestinians in Gaza to evacuate to. Now the camp has been “completely flattened”, he said.

“The vast majority of the casualties right now have been among civilians, including [a] two weeks [old] baby that has been killed in cold blood in this genocide,” said Azzoum.

He compared the attack with one on the [Jabalia refugee camp](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/17/at-least-90-killed-in-latest-israeli-attacks-on-gazas-jabalia-refugee-camp) in northern Gaza last week, in which at least 90 people were killed.

The Maghazi camp was [attacked last month](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/6/palestinians-run-for-their-lives-as-israeli-strike-hits-al-maghazi-camp) as well when at least 50 Palestinians were killed.

Azzoum said the camp’s surrounding areas had been subjected to intense Israeli shelling in the last couple of days.

The nearest hospital to the camp is Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital but health facilities have been rendered non-functional across Gaza as Israel continues to bombard the territory for a third month, killing more than 20,400 Palestinians since October 7 and displacing more than 80 percent of the 2.3 million people who live there.

“The entire medical care system in Gaza Strip is deteriorating and [is] on the edge of collapse,” said Azzoum.

Hamas called the air attack on the Maghazi camp “a horrific massacre” and said it was “a new war crime”.

Israel’s military spokesperson’s office said it was looking into reports of the attack.

Since the [UN Security Council resolution](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/23/un-resolution-on-gaza-aid-criticised-as-insufficient-meaningless) passed on Friday, boosting aid to Gaza, the scale of air raids has only increased in magnitude, Mahmoud noted.

“There is a huge gap between the sheer level of destruction being caused by Israeli forces and the promise of more aid,”

srael has ordered Palestinians to evacuate from parts of [central Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/12/5/searching-for-survivors-after-israeli-attack-on-central-gaza-building), its latest such directive as it pushes more of the besieged enclave’s 2.3 million-strong population into a smaller area while widening its bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military on Friday ordered families to flee for their “safety” to shelters in southern Gaza’s Deir el-Balah, from Bureij and areas of Nuseirat in central Gaza.

The announcement has incensed the region’s weary and exhausted residents, many of whom have already been internally displaced several times since October 7.

Scenes of mass displacement once again filled Salah al-Din Street that is linked to the entrance of the Bureij refugee camp.

Salah al-Din, a road stretching across the length of Gaza, has been dubbed the [“death corridor”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/3/death-corridor-the-al-samounis-recall-terror-of-safe-passage-in-gaza) by many in the Strip. In previous evacuations, Palestinians fleeing parts of northern Gaza have been arrested, shot at and even killed – despite it being declared as a safe route by the Israeli army.

On Friday, hundreds of people carrying what is left of their personal belongings poured onto the street on foot. Others loaded pick-up trucks and donkey carts with mattresses, blankets, plastic chairs and whatever else they could grab.Some could barely move after sustaining injuries from previous attacks, yet found themselves with no choice but to escape once again.

This was the case for Walaa al-Nuzeini, who was [fleeing Bureij](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/gaza-authorities-say-15-killed-in-israeli-strike-on-bureij-refugee-camp) in a wheelchair and for the third time since the beginning of the assault.

Al-Nuzeini lived in the Shujayea neighbourhood of Gaza City when an Israeli air strike targeted her home on November 7.

“I lost my daughter, she died in my arms,” al-Nuzeini told Al Jazeera.

“We stayed under the rubble for three hours before they got us out,” she said, adding that the entire area is now “destroyed”.

Al-Nuzeini was badly hurt. She suffers from wounds in her leg, and said the nerve is affected which has been causing her “extreme pain”. She was taken to [al-Shifa Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/26/wounded-patients-left-at-al-shifa-hospital-face-dire-conditions) for treatment, but three days later Israeli soldiers raided the facility, Gaza’s largest hospital that is now no longer operating.

“We left running out of fear and had to walk all the way to Nuseirat,” she recalled.

At the time, Israeli soldiers ordered doctors, patients and displaced people at the hospital to evacuate the medical compound, forcing some to leave at gunpoint, according to testimonies by doctors and Palestinian officials.

More than 7,000 people, including patients in a critical condition and newborn babies, were sheltering inside al-Shifa Hospital.

Humanitarian circumstances have become “very difficult”, al-Nuzeini said. She is now heading to Khan Younis, where her other children have set up a tent.

“This is not a life. We have no water, no food, no freedom of movement.”

‘We’re exhausted’

Two months ago, the Israeli military called on Palestinians in northern Gaza to flee to the south, but has continued to target and bomb civilians even there. [Khan Younis](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/what-is-the-situation-in-gazas-khan-younis-as-israel-intensifies-attacks) is now a focus of Israeli attacks.

“There is no place that’s safe,” Salem al-Sheikh told Al Jazeera.

The elderly man said he was forcibly displaced from his home in Nassr neighbourhood in the west of Gaza City.

“They [the Israeli army] told us to leave, so I fled to al-Shifa Hospital, where I stayed for a month and a half. I then left to Nuseirat,” al-Sheikh said.

He was among the thousands who sought refuge in al-Shifa Hospital before it was attacked by Israeli forces.

Now, for a third time, he is being displaced from Nuseirat.

The latest call for evacuation comes as Israeli ground troops continue to battle Palestinian fighters in southern and central Gaza.

In the last 48 hours alone, at least 390 people have been killed as the enclave plunged into digital darkness for the sixth time amid a communications blackout, Gaza’s health ministry said.

The United Nations says nearly 1.9 million people have now been displaced – more than 80 percent of the Gaza Strip’s pre-war population.

Many are crammed inside the Rafah governorate in southern Gaza, where al-Sheikh is heading.

The health ministry has warned that disease there is flourishing amid a lack of supplies, medicine, clean water and much-needed fuel.

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Meanwhile, UN-run schools have largely become overcrowded shelters for thousands of displaced Palestinians.

“It’s been extremely difficult,” al-Sheikh said. “We walked from al-Shifa on foot … we passed Israeli army tanks until we made it to a school,” he said, referring to the second time he was displaced.

The schools, however, “are full,” he said. “There is no space.”

Many believe that the UN designation of these buildings will keep them safe from the constant Israeli bombardment.

However, several of the schools have been targeted or sustained damage from Israeli air raids in their vicinities. According to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), some 1.4 million Palestinians are trapped in overcrowded and unprotected shelters run by the body that are now uninhabitable. The poor conditions in the makeshift accommodations have already led to an outbreak of scabies and smallpox, among other infections.

Al-Sheikh said he just wants to return home.

“We’re exhausted, moving from one place to the next. They need to let us get back to our homes.”

Some 60 percent of all residential units in the Strip have been damaged, or 254,000 homes. More than 20,000 Palestinians have been killed since the beginning of the latest offensive, including at least 8,000 children.

Rights groups have warned of the consequences of mass displacement, with organisations including Human Rights Watch labelling it a “war crime”.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu needs to “stop committing crimes and killing people’s children,” al-Sheikh said. “He needs to stop destroying homes on top of people’s heads.”

“In Yemen, there is wisdom,” goes the medieval Arab saying.

Remember that, if you’re trying to sort out how the Israel-Palestine confrontation in Gaza rattles the Middle East – because ongoing Yemeni attacks against Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea clarify one of the region’s most important political dynamics of recent times.

The rocket and drone attacks on Israeli-owned or -bound ships in recent weeks are a show of support for besieged Palestinians in Gaza by Ansar Allah (Houthis), who control most of northern Yemen. Ansar Allah say they would stop these attacks only when Israel ends its genocidal siege and bombardment of the Palestinian enclave.

These attacks are part of a coordinated military reaction by the three core Arab members of the Iran-led anti-Israel (and anti-West) “Axis of Resistance”, Hezbollah, Hamas and Ansar Allah, to Israel’s latest assault on the Palestinians.

At one point last week, Israel and the United States simultaneously exchanged direct fire with Axis of Resistance forces in both Gaza and the West Bank in Palestine, in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and also Yemen – which can also be seen as a peculiar low-intensity, indirect military engagement with Iran.

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Any assessment of how the region has evolved since October 7, and what likely lies ahead, must acknowledge three critical points relating to the Axis of Resistance’s regional network, military capabilities and trajectory.

The mainstream US media and political elite tend to ignore all three points, which are:

Groups within the axis can coordinate across the region and face Israel as a united front

The widespread fear in the West that this latest Israel-Hamas confrontation would spark a full-fledged regional war between the US-Israel and half a dozen Arab-Iranian forces has not materialised. However, neither has the confrontation remained confined to Gaza – it has sparked the first serious coordinated battlefield action by the Axis of Resistance across the region. This reflects Hezbollah’s talk all year of the “unity of fronts”, ie, Axis members now coordinate and assist one another in battle, or between battles, in times of preparation.

Ansar Allah can challenge Israel/the US militarily to deter or secure concessions from them, just like Hezbollah and Hamas

For decades, Hezbollah and Hamas were the only two Arab powers that faced down Israel militarily, and forced it into ceasefires, prisoner exchanges and other concessions. Ansar Allah’s ongoing drone and missile attacks on Red Sea shipping routes will likely similarly challenge Israel. These attacks may eventually provide the Yemeni group with important leverage against its Western adversaries, especially if, as expected, the US and Israel do not send ground troops into Yemen, but rely solely on air power in their efforts to protect trade routes.

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All three leading Arab members of the Axis of Resistance have significantly improved their military capabilities in the past two decades

Hezbollah was the first Axis member to prove its military prowess against Israel. The impasse between the Lebanon-based group and Israel in the 2006 war led to an informal truce based on mutual deterrence. Both parties realised that a fully-fledged war would inflict severe damage to national assets and result in unacceptable numbers of civilian casualties on both sides; they have since confined their confrontations to limited tit-for-tat attacks that result in limited casualties. On October 7, by attacking Israel at an unprecedented scale and then managing to defend its assets to date, Hamas has also proved that it has built significant military prowess. Ansar Allah’s capabilities are also improving – after forcing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates into ending their war on Yemen, in the past month it attacked at least 100 vessels in the Red Sea with high efficiency. A senior US military official called this a “very significant breadth of attacks” not seen in at least “two generations.”

We cannot yet predict what this means for the future, but this much is clear: Hamas’s new prowess in attacking Israel and defending its own assets brings it close to Hezbollah’s qualitative capabilities; and Ansar Allah’s proven competence in drone and missile attacks against Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Red Sea shipping heightens its military proficiency.

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The emerging reality is that the Axis of Resistance that unites Iran with half a dozen big and small Arab non-state, armed actors is growing stronger, and will likely continue to do so if the issues that drive the partnership remain unresolved  – especially the Palestine conflict, and Israeli-American aggression, threats or sanctions against Arab parties. Former American diplomat in Yemen Dr Nabeel Khoury, now a senior fellow at the Arab Center Washington, also explained to me in an interview that after the end of the war in Yemen, Ansar Allah now seem ready to act on a regional level.

Yet you would be ignorant of this if your knowledge about the region comes from the mainstream US media. For the American media largely follow the American political elite, and both tend to ignore Middle East realities that do not comply with Western preconceptions of “weak” Arabs who only respond to the use of force by “righteous” Israeli-American armies” – despite the recent events in Palestine, Lebanon, and Yemen that have shattered such racist visions for good.

The increasing power, integration, and influence of the Axis of Resistance rank among the most significant geo-strategic developments in the Middle East in the last half century.

The combination of state-anchored Arab militancy by Hezbollah (Lebanon), Hamas (Palestine) and Ansar Allah (Yemen) alongside Iran’s resistance to American and Israeli provocations are best understood through their common underlying values of “resistance” and “defiance”. The American media and political class, and most of the West, still refuse to see or acknowledge this, because Israel, the US and their Arab allies are the ones being resisted and defied. They prefer to assess developments in the region through their imagined prism of Islamist extremism that is blindly anti-American and anti-Israeli. And they assume they can handle any Middle Eastern challenge through Israeli-American military attacks, sanctions or threats.

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Not surprisingly, scholars routinely confirm, the US and Western media mostly report on Gaza through distorted frames, usually reflecting Israeli and US policies. So we should expect them also to report on Yemen and the expanding Axis of Resistance mainly through Western and Israeli fears of growing Iranian influence. This includes the recently taken steps of sending an American armada to the region and creating a 10-country task force to conduct joint patrols in the Red Sea, the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, and the Gulf of Aden, and to provide intelligence. This aims to keep maritime traffic flowing, though top global shippers like Denmark’s AP Moller-Maersk and Germany’s Hapag-Lloyd already diverted their ships to other routes.

Washington is also actively considering military strikes against Ansar Allah, though Axis of Resistance and Yemeni history – in line with their defiance attitude – suggest this would not deter future attacks against ships.

The grim milestone was passed as the United Nations Security Council postponed a key vote on a bid to boost humanitarian aid for Gaza for the third time to avoid a veto from the United States, which traditionally shields its ally Israel from UN action.

Since a seven-day truce collapsed on December 1, the war has entered a more intensive phase with ground combat previously confined to the northern half of the territory now spread across its length.

When asked about the ever-growing casualty count, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said it is “clear that the conflict will move and needs to move to a lower intensity phase”.

“We expect to see and want to see a shift to more targeted [Israeli] operations with a smaller number of forces that’s really focused in on dealing with the leadership of Hamas, the tunnel network and a few other critical things,” he said. “And as that happens, I think you’ll see as well the harm done to civilians also decrease significantly.”

Air strikes continued across Gaza on Wednesday with at least 46 people killed and dozens wounded in Israeli attacks on the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza, according to the enclave’s Ministry of Health.

In Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, where hundreds of thousand of people have been pushed since early December by Israel’s continued onslaught, air strikes hit a building near a hospital close to an Al Jazeera crew reporting live on air, killing at least 10 people.

“More air strikes are conducted, more victims fall due to the expansion of the Israeli military operations in the areas that are supposed to be safe zones where the majority of Gazans have been urged to flee,”

The air strike took place in an area considered to be very densely populated, and it’s a miracle that no more than this number of people were killed,” he added.

Key Security Council vote postponed

The UN Security Council vote on a bid to boost aid to the Gaza Strip and ask the UN to monitor humanitarian aid deliveries there has been delayed at the request of the US, diplomats said.

According to the United Arab Emirates envoy to the UN, Lana Nusseibeh, the vote will take place on Thursday.

“Everyone wants to see a resolution that has impact and is implementable on the ground, and there are some discussions going on on how to make that possible,” Nusseibeh, whose country drafted the resolution, told reporters in New York.

The text aims to dilute Israel’s control over all humanitarian aid deliveries to the 2.3 million people of Gaza. The initial text has been reportedly modified to soften calls to end the fighting in Gaza to avoid yet another veto from the US.

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“We want to make sure that the resolution … doesn’t do anything that could actually hurt the delivery of humanitarian assistance, make it more complicated. That’s what we’re focused on,” Blinken told reporters on Wednesday. “I hope we can get to a good place.”

Currently, Israel monitors the limited humanitarian aid and fuel deliveries to Gaza via the Rafah crossing from Egypt and the Israel-controlled Karem Abu Salem crossing, known as Kerem Shalom in Hebrew.

On Wednesday, the first aid convoy entered Gaza directly from Jordan with 750 metric tonnes of food. The World Food Programme said half of Gaza’s population is starving and only 10 percent of the food required has entered Gaza since the war began on October 7.

The US and Israel oppose a ceasefire, believing it would benefit only Hamas. Washington instead supports pauses in fighting to protect civilians and allow the release of captives taken by Hamas.

Hamas leader in rare visit to Egypt

Separately on Wednesday, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh [paid his first visit to Egypt](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/20/hamass-haniyeh-in-cairo-amid-new-ceasefire-push) for more than a month in a rare personal intervention in diplomacy amid hopes that the Palestinian group and Israel could agree terms for another truce.

Haniyeh arrived in the Egyptian capital to meet with Cairo’s spy chief and other Egyptian officials who are acting as key mediators. Meanwhile, Israeli officials have indicated in talks with US and Qatari representatives that they could be open to a truce.

The Hamas leader last travelled to Egypt in early November before the announcement of the only pause in the fighting so far, a weeklong truce that saw the release of about 110 of 240 captives taken by Hamas into Gaza on October 7.

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The Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a smaller armed group that is also holding captives in Gaza, said its leader would also visit Egypt in the coming days to discuss a possible end to the war.

A source briefed on the negotiations said envoys were discussing which of the captives still held by Palestinian groups could be freed in a new truce and what prisoners Israel might release in return, the Reuters news agency reported.

But there remains a huge gulf between the two sides’ publicly stated positions on any halt to the fighting. Hamas rejects any further temporary pause and says it will discuss only a permanent ceasefire. Israel has ruled that out and says it will agree only limited humanitarian pauses until Hamas is defeated.

US President Joe Biden said he did not expect an Israel-Hamas deal for the release of captives held in Gaza to be struck soon.

“We’re pushing,” Biden told reporters during a trip to Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

It’s the end of the year, and you know what that means: lots of hubbub about Time magazine’s annual “[Person of the Year](https://time.com/5047813/person-of-the-year-history/),” a tradition that began in 1928 as “Man of the Year” but that now honours a “man, woman, group or concept.”

Given the ghastly course of 2023, it seems one obvious choice for “Person of the Year” would be the Palestinian doctors and medical personnel currently [risking their lives](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/11/we-are-minutes-away-from-death-gazas-al-shifa-hospital-under-attack) to save others from Israel’s genocidal endeavours in the Gaza Strip.

Since October 7, the Israeli military has slaughtered more than 21,000 Palestinians in Gaza, among them [at least 8,663 children](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/12/28/photos-gaza-children). According to [Healthcare Workers Watch – Palestine](https://twitter.com/HCWWatch/status/1737447341798432903/photo/1), an independent monitoring initiative co-launched by [Texas doctor Osaid Alser](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/19/we-have-a-duty-us-based-doctor-says-ceasefire-an-ethical-imperative-in-gaza), no fewer than 340 healthcare workers were killed by the Israelis between October 7 and December 19, including 118 doctors and 104 nurses.

Take, for example, the case of 36-year-old nephrologist [Dr Hammam Alloh](https://twitter.com/AJEnglish/status/1724389451835609144?s=20), a father of two young children, who was killed along with his own father in a November Israeli airstrike on their home. In an October [interview](https://www.democracynow.org/2023/11/13/remembering_hammam_alloh) with Democracy Now!, Alloh had responded as follows to the question of why he refused to abandon Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City and to move south in accordance with Israeli evacuation orders: “You think I went to medical school and for my postgraduate degrees for a total of 14 years so [as to] think only about my life and not my patients?”

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And it is this sort of relentless altruism that has been continuously on display by Palestinian medics as Israel undertakes to eradicate the very concept of humanity by carpet-bombing civilians and [targeting hospitals and ambulances](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/war-crime-gaza-medics-say-israel-targeting-ambulances-health-facilities). The assault on medical infrastructure and personnel has been actively abetted by a cohort of Israeli doctors who have leapt onto the military bandwagon in order to [cheerlead the bombing of Palestinian hospitals](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/11/11/israel-is-bombing-hospitals-in-gaza-with-israeli-doctors-approval).

Not only have Palestinian medics been converted into military targets, they have also had to contend with [crippling shortages](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/21/hospitals-in-northern-gaza-completely-out-of-service-health-official) of fuel, medicines, and basic supplies – shortages that were already bad enough in so-called “peacetime.” [Watching family members and colleagues die](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/17/palestinian-doctor-breaks-down-when-he-sees-family-at-hospital-2) has effectively become part of the job, and the Israeli army has additionally busied itself [abducting and torturing](https://twitter.com/ajplus/status/1737657892281737405) Palestinian healthcare workers.

In a recent [interview](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/12/15/gaza-ghassan-abu-sitta-recollections/) with the Washington Post, British-Palestinian surgeon [Dr Ghassan Abu Sittah](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/20/a-genocidal-war-surgeon-says-israel-strategically-destroying-gaza-health) – who has volunteered with medical teams in Gaza during numerous Israeli assaults over the years and who spent 43 days in the besieged enclave this time around – described having to make “peace with the idea” that he was not going to survive. Among his patients was a young girl, the sole surviving daughter of a [female obstetrician](https://www.npr.org/2023/11/16/1213307710/gaza-doctors-al-shifa-hospital) at Al-Shifa hospital who was killed along with her other offspring in an Israeli missile strike. Abu Sittah recalled the girl: “Half of her face was missing. Half her nose, her eyelids had been ripped from the bone.”Despite the all-consuming horror, Abu Sittah reported witnessing great “acts of love” and resistance, as well, like with a three-year-old boy who had lost his family and whose arm and leg Abu Sittah was forced to amputate: “When I went to check up on him, the woman whose son was wounded in the bed next to him had him on her lap and was feeding him and her son.”

In sum, it’s not just the doctors in Gaza who are heroes.

Speaking of heroes, Palestinian journalists have also come under increasingly lethal Israeli fire for bearing witness to the increasingly lethal savagery being carried out in the Gaza Strip. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) [notes](https://cpj.org/2023/12/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/) that this war has constituted the “deadliest period for journalists since CPJ began gathering data in 1992”; between October 7 and December 23, sixty-nine journalists and media workers had been confirmed dead. Of these casualties, 62 were Palestinian, four were Israeli, and three were Lebanese.

On November 20, Palestinian journalist [Ayat Khadura](https://twitter.com/AJEnglish/status/1726770716857585824) was killed in an Israeli airstrike on her home in northern Gaza – just two weeks after she had shared a “[last message to the world](https://cpj.org/data/people/ayat-khadoura/)” in which she stated: “We had big dreams but our dream now is to be killed in one piece so they know who we are.”

In another deadly episode [documented](https://cpj.org/data/people/mohamed-abu-hassira/) by CPJ, Palestinian journalist Mohamed Abu Hassira was “killed in a strike on his home in Gaza along with 42 family members” on November 7. And yet in the view of the Western corporate media, the slaughter of journalists and their extended families in Gaza has evidently been deemed less than newsworthy.

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On December 15, Al Jazeera Arabic cameraman Samer Abudaqa was [killed in an Israeli attack](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/15/two-al-jazeera-journalists-wounded-in-israeli-attack-in-southern-gaza) in southern Gaza, where he bled to death after Israeli forces kept ambulances from reaching him for more than five hours. Also injured was Abudaqa’s colleague, Al Jazeera bureau chief Wael Dahdouh, who in a [previous Israeli attack in October](https://www.aljazeera.com/podcasts/2023/10/27/the-take-wael-al-dahdouhs-family-was-killed-in-gaza-he-kept-reporting) lost his wife, his son, his daughter, his grandson, and various other family members.

In spite of unspeakable trauma, Dahdouh has kept reporting.

The abundance of real-world heroism notwithstanding, Time magazine has selected American billionaire singer-songwriter and pop culture opiate of the masses Taylor Swift as its “Person of the Year” for 2023. As per the Time [writeup](https://time.com/6342806/person-of-the-year-2023-taylor-swift/), Swift is in fact the “main character of the world.” (Prior recipients of the honour have included Adolf Hitler, Donald Trump, the Joe Biden-Kamala Harris duo, and [Elon Musk](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/12/27/elon-musk-and-all-that-was-wrong-with-2021) – the “richest private citizen in history” who apparently charmed the Time team by “live-tweet[ing] his poops.”)

But while Swift may indeed be the current protagonist of a superficial world rapidly combusting in self-absorbed banality, one wishes more credit were given to real-world heroes. And as 2023 comes to a close with no end to genocide in sight, give me the people of Gaza as “Person of the Year” any day.

air and ground attacks continued, including in southern Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of displaced people have been directed to seek safety. And an attack on a Hamas office in [Lebanon](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/2/top-hamas-official-saleh-al-arouri-killed-in-beirut-suburb) killed a senior leader of the group the governs the Gaza Strip.

Some two-thirds of those killed in Israel’s bombardment of Gaza are women and children, according to the health ministry. Israel launched its campaign following Hamas’s raid into southern Israel, which killed around 1,140 and saw around 240 taken hostage.

Overall, 207 Palestinians have been killed in 15 Israeli attacks over the past 24 hours, the health ministry said. It also reported that 338 people were wounded.

Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Khan Younis in the south, said there was “intense bombardment” in the central and southern regions last night and in the early hours of Tuesday morning

“There were reports of massive explosions in these two areas, in Khan Younis and refugee camps in the central part,” he said. The intensity of the bombing and the fact that many roads and much infrastructure were destroyed prevented ambulances from going to the targeted sites and taking people to hospitals.The headquarters of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) in Khan Younis was also attacked on Tuesday, the group said, resulting in the deaths of at least five people.

“This is the second attack carried out against this institution,” Al Jazeera’s Tareq Abu Azzoum said, speaking from Rafah.

In the central Gaza city of Deir el-Balah, Israeli forces hit a home, killing mostly women and children, local Palestinian outlet Wafa News Agency said.

In the Nuseirat refugee camp, also in central Gaza, at least one girl was killed and several others injured after an Israeli drone opened fire on the market.

“The Israeli military offensive is directed towards the middle governorates, which have been witnessing systematic destruction of residential neighbourhoods,” Abu Azzoum said. “They have destroyed dozens of houses today, forcing people to flee towards the southern parts of Gaza.”

More than one million Palestinians have been displaced from northern Gaza since October 13, when the Israeli military ordered people to [evacuate](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/israel-orders-1-1-million-people-in-gaza-to-move-south-what-to-know) to the south with 24 hours of notice.

Attack on Israeli forces

In central Gaza’s Bureij refugee camp, Hamas’s armed wing, the Qassam Brigades, said it had clashed with Israeli forces in the eastern part of the camp, while also targeting an Israeli Merkava tank.

The [al-Quds Brigades](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/who-are-qassam-armed-resistance-in-gaza), the armed wing of the Islamic Jihad, says that its fighters fought an armed battle with Israeli soldiers in the Bureij refugee camp that resulted in injuries among the soldiers.

The armed wing also announced that it targeted the Israeli military with mortar shells in the al-Mahatta area in Khan Younis.

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The Israeli army said that 31 soldiers have been injured in the Gaza Strip during the past 24 hours. So far, 507 of its soldiers have been killed since the war began.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military said it killed Hamas members who were planting mines along Gaza’s coastline and in nearby buildings.

The Israeli army said it also killed three Hamas members in an air attack after seeing them enter a building south of Gaza City in the north.

Lost ‘carte blanche’

On Tuesday evening, an apparent Israeli attack on a suburb in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, [killed senior Hamas official](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/2/top-hamas-official-saleh-al-arouri-killed-in-beirut-suburb) Saleh al-Arouri and at least five other people.

Hamas has vowed that the killing will not “undermine the continued brave resistance” in Gaza.

With at least 22,000 Palestinians massacred in Gaza, Israel has lost its “carte blanche” from Western allies, said Adel Abdel Ghafar, a senior fellow at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs.

“As scenes of carnage, displaced populations, dead children and starvation fill our screens, the tide is really shifting,” he told Al Jazeera, adding that [massive pro-Palestinian rallies](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/30/photos-people-around-the-world-rally-in-solidarity-with-palestinians) across Europe and the United States have exerted pressure on politicians, with some European countries like Belgium changing their tone on Gaza and calling for a ceasefire, something Israel has firmly rejected.

“It’s also very interesting to keep an eye on US politics given that this is an election year and [US President Joe] Biden’s ratings are down,” said Abdel Ghafar. “This will factor into his calculus in this New Year.”

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued Israel with six orders in relation to its bombardment of Gaza on Friday, but stopped short of calling for a full ceasefire.

The emergency measures were announced as the court begins its deliberations on South Africa’s genocide case against Israel, for which it heard evidence earlier this month. South Africa has described Israel’s actions in Gaza as genocide but Israel has rejected the allegation, claiming that its activities in Gaza stem from “self-defence”, and are necessary to root out Hamas. It has added that the war cannot end until that goal has been achieved.

In a 45-minute judgement at the court in the Hague on Friday, presiding judge Joan Donoghue rejected Israel’s claim that the court lacks jurisdiction to hear South Africa’s case against it.

Israel said that South Africa failed to adequately communicate with Tel Aviv about the case before filing the application, as is required by the court’s own rules. However, the court rejected this argument, stating that South Africa had made a complaint to the Israeli embassy in Pretoria, to which Israel had clearly responded. Therefore a “dispute” over the interpretation of the law relating to genocide exists. South Africa has clear standing to submit its case, the court ruled.

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South Africa had also requested nine emergency measures be taken against Israel by the court. The ICJ directed Israel to implement six.

Israel’s war on Gaza has already killed more than 26,000 Palestinians in the besieged enclave. Israel’s blockade on the strip has also severely restricted access to food, water, fuel and medical support.

What is in the ICJ’s ruling?

The ICJ confirmed that it does have jurisdiction to hear the case submitted by South Africa and issued six emergency orders to Israel, as follows:

* Israel must take all possible measures to prevent acts as outlined in Article 2 of the 1948 Genocide Convention. This entails not killing members of a particular group (in this case, Palestinians), not causing physical or psychological harm to members of that group, not inflicting living conditions which are calculated to bring about the end of the existence of a people, and not carrying out actions designed to prevent births within that group of people.

Measure approved by a vote of 15-2. Dissenting judges: Judge Julia Sebutinde of Uganda and the Israeli representative, Judge Aharon Barak.

* Israel must ensure its military does not carry out any of the above actions.

Measure approved by a vote of 15-2. Dissenting judges: Judge Sebutinde of Uganda and the Israeli representative, Judge Barak.

* Israel must prevent and punish the “direct and public incitement to commit genocide in relation to members of the Palestinian group in the Gaza Strip”.

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Measure approved by a vote of 16-1. Dissenting judge: Judge Sebutinde of Uganda.

* Israel must ensure the delivery of basic services and essential humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza.

Measure approved by a vote of 16-1. Dissenting judge: Judge Sebutinde of Uganda.

* Israel must prevent the destruction of evidence of war crimes in Gaza and allow fact-finding missions access.

Measure approved by a vote of 15-2. Dissenting judges: Judge Sebutinde of Uganda and the Israeli representative, Judge Barak.

* Israel must submit a report on all steps it has taken to abide by the measures imposed by the court within one month of the judgement. South South Africa will have the chance to respond to this report.

Measure approved by a vote of 15-2. Dissenting judges: Judge Sebutinde of Uganda and the Israeli representative, Judge Barak.

What emergency measures did South Africa request?

South Africa’s 84-page lawsuit, filed on December 29, 2023, accused Israel of violating the 1948 Genocide Convention in the war on Gaza that began on October 7, 2023.

South Africa asked the court to order Israel to:

* Suspend military operations in and against Gaza (not addressed in the court’s provisional measures)
* Not escalate military operations any further (not addressed in the court’s provisional measures)
* Allow access to adequate food, water, fuel, shelter, hygiene and sanitation.
* Prevent the destruction of Palestinian life in Gaza, including psychological damage
* Not destroy evidence that would support genocide allegations, nor deny international organisations such as fact-finding missions, access to Gaza to help preserve this evidence.
* Abide by the rules of the Genocide Convention.
* Take steps to punish those who have been involved in genocide (not included in the court’s provisional measures).
* Avoid actions that would complicate or prolong the case (not included in the court’s provisional measures).
* Regularly report to the council on their progress toward implementing the measures.

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Is the interim ruling binding and who will enforce it?

As members of the United Nations, both South Africa and Israel are bound by the court’s rulings and cannot appeal a decision. However, the ICJ itself does not have any mechanism to enforce its orders.

South Africa or other nations could also go to the UN Security Council (UNSC), where member states would be asked to vote to require Israel to abide by the emergency measures ordered by the ICJ.

On previous occasions since the war on Gaza began, the US has used its power of veto to block resolutions calling for a ceasefire and for accountability of its close ally, Israel. However, experts say that Washington’s veto of an ICJ-approved decision [could damage](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/25/what-will-the-icj-announce-on-israel-gaza-war) and undermine US President Joe Biden’s calls for others – including rivals like China and Russia – to uphold the international rules-based order.

“This could make a real difference for the US administration and certainly a pose real dilemma for it,” James Bays, Al Jazeera English’s diplomatic editor said, reporting from The Hague.

If the UNSC passes a resolution requiring Israel to abide by the orders of the ICJ, it would have the power to take [punitive action](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/11/can-the-next-un-vote-stop-israels-war-on-gaza) against Israel. Past examples of this have included economic or trade sanctions, arms embargoes and travel bans.

The UN charter also allows the Council to go a step further and intervene with force. An [example of this](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/11/can-the-next-un-vote-stop-israels-war-on-gaza) was the 1991 US-led military alliance that was created to counter the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein. Experts believe it is highly unlikely that the US will allow the Security Council to take any such step against Israel.

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Neve Gordon, professor of international law at Queen Mary University of London, added that countries, such as the US, would now have to seriously rethink using a veto or even normalisation of diplomatic ties with Israel.

“It’s a new ballgame now, where the highest court in the world is saying, prima facie [on first impression], Israel is committing genocide”, he said.

What happens next at the ICJ?

Friday’s ruling was just an interim ruling to address the emergency measures requested by South Africa.

Israel is required to submit its report on the actions it is taking to fulfil the above emergency orders by February 26 – one month from Friday’s ruling. South Africa will then be given the chance to respond to this report.

The court will then assess the report and additional information on Gaza’s on-ground realities. It could conclude that Israel is not abiding by the first provisions and impose new ones.

The court will then also move forward with additional hearings and deliberations on the evidence presented to the court earlier this month by South Africa supporting its accusations against Israel, and of Israel’s defence.

The judges will individually evaluate South Africa’s key claims in relation to genocide in Gaza, and the court’s eventual ruling will be determined by a majority.

The court said its decision to move forward with the case was based on its conclusion that South Africa’s evidence alleging genocide by Israel could not be ruled out “prima facie”.

Gordon said that this is “major”.

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Experts have it [could be](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/25/what-will-the-icj-announce-on-israel-gaza-war) three or four years before a judgement is passed.

Who are the judges and who voted against the orders?

Also called the World Court, the ICJ is a UN civil court that adjudicates disputes between countries. It is distinct from the International Criminal Court (ICC), which prosecutes individuals for war crimes.

The ICJ comprises 15 judges who are appointed for terms of nine years through elections at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the Security Council (UNSC). For this case, they are joined by two special representative judges – Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke from South Africa and Supreme Court President Aharon Barak from Israel.

Judges are supposed to be impartial but in the past, [some have voted](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/11/a-quick-guide-to-south-africas-icj-case-against-israel) in line with their countries’ politics. For instance, when Ukraine approached the ICJ seeking provisional measures against Russia, including an order that the Kremlin halt its war, 13 out of 15 judges voted in favour of Kyiv’s request. The only two who did not were the judges from Russia and China.

On Friday, the only two judges who dissented from all or some of the measures imposed by the court were Judge Julia Sebutinde of Uganda, who voted against all of the orders, and Judge Aharon Barak, who voted against four of the six orders.

Judge Sebutinde released her dissenting opinion, in which she argued that she did not agree that Israel had shown “intent” to commit genocide and, therefore, the case did not fall within the remit of the ICJ.

What’s next for Israel and Gaza?

Although the ICJ stipulated that Israel must abide by the 1948 Genocide Convention, it stopped short of calling for a ceasefire or suspension of hostilities.

“I see no way that Israel can abide by the other provisional measures without stopping its hostilities,” said Gordon, noting that steps like increased humanitarian aid would require a ceasefire.

Previous reports have shown that broken roads and continued Israeli bombardment have obstructed aid from being effectively disbursed in the enclave.

Additionally, the provisional measure calling to punish those who incite genocide in Gaza would likely not apply to members of Israel’s Knesset, as they have parliamentary immunity.

The Knesset would have to vote to revoke a member’s immunity before punishing them, which Gordon says is unlikely considering the majority of them support Israel’s war on Gaza.

Nonetheless, Israel would have to try and punish non-parliamentarians, including troops and commentators, for statements that call for the mass killing of Palestinians.

Furthermore, the court made special reference to comments made by three senior Israeli officials which it deemed to show genocidal intent. Gordon said that the court’s reference to these statements made by officials, including Israeli President Izaac Herzog, was “extremely important”. It showed that the court “clearly” disagrees with Israeli interpretations that such comments are sporadic and have no causal relation with the country’s military operations, he said.

Neil Sammonds, senior campaigner on Palestine at the human rights group, War on Want, said it would be difficult to enforce the measures ordered by the court, however. “This leaves everything in Israel’s hands. There are no specifics about how Israel should bring in more aid and Netanyahu has already said Israel will not abide by the court’s ruling.”

Israel and its Western allies have long dismissed the Gaza-based Palestinian armed group and political movement, Hamas, as illegitimate and have refused to engage with it, labelling it as a “terrorist organisation”.

This narrative has become ever more apparent since October 7, when Hamas launched an attack just outside the besieged Gaza Strip on Israeli territory, killing some 1,140 people, Israeli officials said.

Israel launched a brutal military campaign on the Gaza Strip as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has equated Hamas with ISIL (ISIS) and Nazis, pledged to “eradicate” the Palestinian group in the wake of the October 7 attacks.

More than 25,000 Palestinians have been killed and 90 percent of Gaza’s 2.3 million population has been displaced in one of the most violent military assaults in modern history, which many have labelled as “genocide”. South Africa has taken Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on charges of genocide.

Since October 7, Israel has described Hamas as an existential threat. It has argued that it needs to destroy the group.

Yet, in 2017, Hamas [revised its original 1988 charter](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/5/2/hamas-accepts-palestinian-state-with-1967-borders) to recognise, in effect, a two-state solution — and therefore the existence of Israel as a legitimate entity. This, even as Israel insists it can no longer allow Hamas to exist, and as Israeli politicians, led by Netanyahu, have ruled out a two-state solution.

On Sunday, [Netanyahu rejected a Hamas proposal](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/22/netanyahu-rejects-hamas-deal-to-end-war-release-captives#:~:text=Israel's%20Prime%20Minister%20Benjamin%20Netanyahu,armed%20group's%20governance%20of%20Gaza.) to end the war and release more than 100 captives held by the group, in exchange for a withdrawal of Israeli forces, the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and recognition of Hamas governance over Gaza.

A look into the history of Hamas — among Palestine’s most popular resistance fronts — suggests that its political leadership has, over the years, proposed numerous long-term truces or ceasefires to Israel in exchange for the realisation of a sovereign independent Palestinian state.

Israel has rejected those offers, arguing that Hamas could not be trusted to adhere to any long-term ceasefire, and insisting that the proposals for short-term pauses in fighting were insincere and strategically aimed only at helping the armed movement regroup from losses.

Sunday was only the latest instance of Israel rebuffing those offers.

A timeline of Hamas truce proposals:

* 1988: Just one year after the group was founded, Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar met the late top Israeli officials Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, and proposed that Israel withdraw from the 1967-occupied territories in exchange for a truce. This was before Hamas had built its armed wing, the Qassam Brigades. Also, in 1988, Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmad Yasin himself indicated a willingness to negotiate with Israel under the condition that it “first acknowledge the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination and right of return to their land”.
* 1994: Hamas offered a truce to Israel after the abduction and killing of Israeli soldier Nachshon Wachsman. A year earlier, the Palestinian Authority (PA) had accepted the proposal of a Palestinian state comprised of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. Hamas agreed to that proposal.
* 1995: Hamas again proposed a 10-year truce based on the same condition of Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories.
* 1996: In March, after Israel assassinated Hamas military leader Yahya Ayyash in January, the movement offered a ceasefire.
* 1997: September: Days before Israel attempted to assassinate Hamas political leader Khaled Meshaal in the Jordanian capital, Amman, the movement offered Israel a 10-year truce. October: After his release from Israeli prison, Hamas founder Yasin renewed the call for a ceasefire. November: Hamas again proposed a truce. The Qassam Brigades said attacks against Israeli civilians would stop if Israel stopped targeting Palestinian civilians.
* 1999: Yasin made another ceasefire offer provided Israel withdrew from the 1967 territories. In a letter to European diplomats, Hamas offered to cease all hostilities in exchange for Israeli withdrawal, evacuation of settlements, and release of Palestinian prisoners.
* 2003: In December, Yasin offered a ceasefire on the condition that Israel withdraw from the Palestinian territories. He was killed four months later in an Israeli attack.
* 2004: Yasin’s successor and Hamas co-founder Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi again proposed a 10-year truce. Israel killed him one month after Yasin.
* 2006: Hamas again offered a 10-year truce that would be “automatically renewed if [Israel] commits to restoring the full and legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to them within a final solution that matches what is accepted by the PLO”.
* 2007: Senior Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh repeated the group’s call for a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders.
* 2008: Hamas leader [Meshaal](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/2/meshaal-we-want-to-restore-our-national-rights) again offered a 10-year truce, which he repeated a year later.
* 2014: Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad offered a 10-year truce in exchange for the lifting of the Israeli blockade and release of Palestinian prisoners.
* 2015: Hamas proposed a long-term ceasefire in exchange for the lifting of the blockade.
* 2017: Hamas presented its revised charter announcing that it accepted a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders.

Hamas revises its 1988 charter

The Hamas movement was founded in 1987, two decades after Israel’s 1967 military occupation of the remaining Palestinian territories it failed to capture in 1948. Its leaders were shaped by the hard realities of occupation, which was marked by mass arrests of Palestinians, expropriation of Palestinian lands and control of resources.

More than half a million Palestinians were arrested and tried in Israel’s military-run courts between 1967 and 1987, some 1,500 Palestinian homes were demolished, and thousands of other people were forcibly deported.

After Hamas won the 2006 elections in Gaza, its leader Haniyeh said the group accepted a state on the 1967 borders and all the decisions taken by the PA and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), but there were no takers.

Hamas leaders have also backed the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative that called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from territories occupied in 1967, the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes they have been displaced from since 1948, and the formation of a sovereign independent Palestinian state in return for Arab recognition of Israel.

But Hamas’s offers were repeatedly dismissed by Israel and ignored by its Western allies, including the United States, despite Washington’s claims of playing the role of an “honest broker” in the conflict.

“Hamas has always said that they are ready to offer a truce and to stop targeting civilians if the [Israeli] occupation removes its settlers,” Tareq Baconi, author of Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance, told Al Jazeera.

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At least 750,000 Israelis live in hundreds of fortified illegal settlements and outposts across the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the vast majority of which have been built either entirely or partially on private Palestinian land.

In 2017, Hamas formally amended its 1988 charter, announcing once again that it would accept a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders.

“The Hamas thinking from the very start was clear: ‘We are not facing a religious war’,” Meshaal told Al Jazeera at the time.

“Hamas, ever since its inception, realises the nature of the struggle against the Israeli occupier, that it is not a struggle because they are Jews, but because they are occupiers.”

Israeli officials dismissed the new policy paper as “lies”. In a video, Netanyahu symbolically threw the document into a bin, saying it was an attempt to deceive the world.

‘Not about Gaza’

However, some analysts say that Israel has not shown interest in a political settlement, whether with Hamas or other Palestinian political parties such as Fatah, which governs the occupied West Bank.

“The issue is not about Gaza,” Sari Orabi, a Ramallah-based analyst, told Al Jazeera. “It’s also not about whether Israel or Hamas started the war. There are daily killings and assaults in the occupied West Bank, there are attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque, there are prisoners and checkpoints.”

“The people in Gaza are refugees. They were isolated and separated from the rest of the Palestinian people,” he said.

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The vast majority of Gaza’s population are refugees, expelled from their cities and villages in what is now the state of Israel by [Zionist militias in 1948](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2023/5/15/recreating-a-palestinian-village-75-years-after-the-nakba).

Analysts also blame Israel for the failure of the Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and 1995, between Israel and the PLO – which was representative of the Palestinian people at the time.

The agreements led to the formation of the PA, an interim, five-year governing body meant to lead to an independent Palestinian state comprising the occupied territory of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

However, 30 years into its existence, the PA has failed to create a state in the face of Israeli occupation, illegal land grabs and settlements. Hamas took control of Gaza from the PA in 2007.

While there was initial support for the Oslo Accords among Palestinians, the failure to reach a final peace agreement by 1999 and the growing settlement projects particularly under Netanyahu, left many disappointed. In a leaked video in 2010, Netanyahu boasted how he made sure the Oslo Accords did not succeed.

The hopes of the Oslo Accords have turned into despair as Israeli policies under successive governments continued to undermine the PA and its aspirations.

Today, the PA has limited administrative rule over pockets of the occupied West Bank, while Israeli settlements, which are considered illegal under international law, have grown rapidly. The settler population in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem has grown from 250,000 Israelis in 1993 to more than 700,000 this year.

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“The Israelis wanted Oslo [Accords] because that’s how they maintain their colonisation; by maintaining the facade of a peace process,” said Baconi.

“Hamas was showing a mirror to the Israelis to say: If you’re actually talking about the possibility of ending the occupation, then end it,” he told Al Jazeera.

“That was their offer instead of the [1993] Oslo agreements – that they would stop armed resistance if Israel left Palestinians be in the eastern side of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.”

Hundreds of schools, including those run by the UN, in the besieged Palestinian enclave have been bombed, and students and teachers killed, in more than [100 days](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/1/14/israels-100-days-of-relentless-war-on-gaza) of Israeli bombardment that has ravaged educational infrastructure and caused mental trauma to thousands of beleaguered students.

January 24 marks the sixth International Day of Education as proclaimed by the UN General Assembly, but tens of thousands of Gaza students cannot go to schools, which are lying in ruins.

Here’s a look at how the war has taken a toll on Gaza’s education infrastructure:

How many schools and students are in the Gaza Strip?

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More than 40 percent of schools (288) in Gaza are run by the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), while the rest are either directly operated by the Palestinian Authority or privately managed.

All of them are currently shut as more than 85 percent of Gaza’s 2.3 million people have been displaced amid continued Israeli ground and air offensive that has killed more than 25,000 people, including 10,000 children.

According to UNRWA data from 2018, Gaza had 737 schools. At least 9,367 teachers work in the 288 UNRWA schools.

How many children are out of school in Gaza?  
No Gaza student has been able to attend school since November 6, 2023, when the Ministry of Education suspended the 2023-2024 school year due to the war that has seen indiscriminate targeting of residential areas, including offices and schools. Israel has defended itself, saying it was battling Hamas fighters but rights groups say Tel Aviv has made little efforts to protect civilians.

OCHA reported on October 27, 2023 that there were more than 625,000 pupils and more than 22,500 teachers in Gaza.

How many schools have been targeted in Gaza?

Up to 280 government schools and 65 UNRWA-run schools have been destroyed or damaged, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Education.

Ninety percent of Palestinian Authority schools have been subject to direct or indirect damage. About 29 percent of school buildings are out of service after being demolished or severely damaged.

Save the Children’s director for Palestine, Jason Lee, said in October: “Attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals where children are seeking refuge, are beyond unconscionable. This war is eroding humanity and is spiralling out of control.”

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It’s the same story with private schools. “It was a painful first month because schools were directly targeted,” said Amer.

At least 133 schools are being used as shelter for internally displaced Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. These schools are sheltering far more people than their capacity as more than 1.9 million people have been displaced.

Israel has attacked multiple schools serving as shelters, killing displaced Palestinians. In November 2023, Israeli forces attacked the UNRWA-run [Al Fakhoura school](https://aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/4/israeli-strikes-target-schools-hospitals-mosques-on-gaza), killing at least 15 people. A week after that, at least 25 people were killed in [Al-Buraq school](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/10/gaza-hospital-says-received-50-bodies-after-strikes-on-school). In December 2023, several were killed in attacks on [Shadia Abu Ghazala School](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/12/26/classroom-massacre-survivors-say-israel-executed-innocents-in-gaza-school).

Why every university in Gaza destroyed

It is not just schools that have borne the brunt of the Israeli onslaught. Centres of higher education, including universities, have been completely paralysed. Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that 12 higher education institutions in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, completely disrupting university education.

Geneva-based independent Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor said that Israel systemically destroyed every university in Gaza in stages. The first stage included the bombing of the Islamic and Al-Azhar universities, the monitor said in a [statement](https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/6108/Israel-kills-dozens-of-academics,-destroys-every-university-in-the-Gaza-Strip) issued on Saturday.

Israa University, located in the south of Gaza city, was demolished by Israeli forces, as evident from a video released by Israeli media on January 17. The university authorities said Israel occupied and used the campus as a military base and detention facility for months before destroying it.Additionally, the Israeli army has killed 94 university professors, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor said. The monitor deemed the Israeli destruction of schools an “intentional destruction of Palestinian cultural and historical properties”.

“The targeted academics studied and taught across a variety of academic disciplines, and many of their ideas served as cornerstones of academic research in the Gaza Strip’s universities,” the monitor said in a statement.

Euro-Med said that it would be very difficult to return to academics post-war in the wake of the shear scale of the destruction of life and properties.

Palestinians have one of the highest literacy rates in the world, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in 2018. Palestinian graduates have ended up performing high in fields such as mathematics, engineering and business.

How many students and teachers have been killed and injured in Gaza?

Up to 4,327 students have been killed and 7,819 others have been injured as of January 16, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Education, which added that 231 teachers and administrators were also killed.

When would students be back in school?

It is uncertain when students in Gaza would be back in school as Israel’s war continues. It will likely take months, even years, to repair all damaged school buildings.

There are plans to launch e-learning for Gaza school students. Teaching, however, would be delivered from the occupied West Bank, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Education.

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The e-learning model would be difficult to apply to Gaza, where telecommunications blackouts are common and students and teachers do not have access to stable electricity and internet. Moreover, most people have been forced to flee their homes and shelter at refugee camps.

“It is impossible for there to be e-learning. There is no shelter, no internet and no suitable conditions,” Amer, the science teacher from Gaza, said.

Meanwhile, schools and universities in the occupied West Bank are already shifting to an e-learning model with online classes as raids and settler violence have dramatically risen since October 7. This includes 55 schools located in the West Bank’s “seam zone” – an area separated from the rest of the occupied West Bank by Israel’s separation wall.

The occupied West Bank has been reeling from rising settler and Israeli forces attacks, with at least 371 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces and settlers since October 7.

Since her school was forced to shut down, Amer has met some of her students in public or spoken to them online. Three of her students have been killed in the war and some of them have lost their homes. The students in Gaza, she said, need psychological support for the trauma they suffer due to the war.

“I want to support them psychologically, but the circumstances they are living in are difficult,”

The Israeli bombardment began after Hamas’s surprise attack on southern Israel on October 7 killed at least 1,139 people, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on official Israeli statistics. Around 250 other people in Israel were taken hostage by Palestinian armed groups.

Reporting from Rafah in southern Gaza, Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud said there was intense ground fighting near a key hospital in Khan Younis on Sunday.

“Snipers have taken positions in high-rise buildings, shooting people on the street below. People in [Nasser] hospital have no place to go,” said Mahmoud, adding that “It’s street-to-street, house-to-house fighting.”

The previous day, Israeli shelling east of the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza [killed four Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/1/20/israels-war-on-gaza-live-israel-denied-70-of-aid-to-north-gaza-says-un) and injured 21 others, according to the Palestine Red Crescent Society.

‘Heartbreaking’ deaths: UN chief

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres denounced Israel for the “heartbreaking” deaths of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

“Israel’s military operations have spread mass destruction and killed civilians on a scale unprecedented during my time as secretary-general,” Guterres said at the opening of the G77+China summit in the Ugandan capital of Kampala.

Guterres told Al Jazeera that the resolution to the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict lies in “the acceptance of the right of the Palestinians to statehood and the acceptance of a two-state solution”.

The comments come a day after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu doubled down on his [opposition to Palestinian statehood](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/21/israels-netanyahu-doubles-down-on-opposition-to-palestinian-statehood)

At least 62,681 people have been wounded in the Israeli assault on Gaza, according to Palestinian authorities.

Some 85 percent of the territory’s population has been displaced, with thousands sheltering in UN-run camps in the southern part of the coastal enclave in squalid conditions.

The UN has said there are “famine-like” conditions in Gaza as around one in four of the population of 2.3 million people face [extreme hunger](https://www.wfp.org/stories/gaza-brink-one-four-people-face-extreme-hunger).

Only a fraction of the aid needed has been delivered due to fighting and severe Israeli restrictions on shipments.

Women and children are the biggest victims in the war, according to the UN.

Netanyahu has vowed to keep up the offensive until Hamas is wiped out, with Israel also ramping up fighting on other fronts, sparking fears of [tensions boiling over regionally](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/21/iraqi-iran-backed-group-attacks-us-base-as-region-faces-threat-of-wider-war).Who could have anticipated such widespread devastation, loss of life, pain and tears? Who could have foreseen the displacement, expulsion, intimidation and suffering? Who could have predicted the hunger, thirst, poverty and drought?Since the beginning of the war on October 7, all the horrors and nightmares seem to have converged on our lives in the Gaza Strip.

Every day, while reporting from Al-Aqsa Hospital alongside my brother who accompanies me, we’ve struggled to find fitting names for this war amid the countless harrowing stories we encounter.

Yet, no single descriptor seems adequate. An unprecedented war? A shameless war? A war against infants, hospitals and places of worship? Amid the daily horrors, we agree on one term: genocide.

As we welcome the New Year, like many Palestinians in Gaza, I find myself without a home, displaced with my family to the south, along with hundreds of thousands, grappling with the constant threat of yet more forced displacement.

At the war’s onset, my apartment and the building I lived in suffered severe damage from a nearby bombing. I moved to my parents’ home, which was then damaged by a bombing in its vicinity. We then sought refuge in my husband’s family’s home, only to receive evacuation orders from the Israeli army to move to the south.Enduring times of bombing, terror and relentless efforts to secure life’s essentials, our singular dream became survival and a return to our homes in the north.

I clung to the hope that my damaged house stood standing and resilient, merely requiring repair and reconstruction for me to inhabit it again.

Yet, a few days ago, on December 21, Israel declared the complete demolition of the Palestine Mosque Square, where my small house had been. Upon seeing the images, it was time to accept the painful truth: our entire residential building had been reduced to rubble.

It was a heart-wrenching moment. One cannot grieve over mere stones amid the larger tragedy of victims, the deceased, annihilated families, and charred children’s bodies. Yet, as a human being with emotions, I mourn the years of effort and the life I built — all gone.

Like millions of other Palestinians from Gaza, if we ever return to the north, we return homeless.

My cosy apartment, my children’s memories, my belongings—all crushed beneath the rubble.

How many times must we restart our lives from scratch? Who will compensate for the lost years and efforts spent securing life’s basics?

The war has made us see our siege as a paradise, the deterioration of our conditions as a bliss in the past, and the previous restrictions on our lives as a dream we long for.

We wrote about the Nakba, never imagining that we would live it. Now we endure conditions harsher than our ancestors described.

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Sleeping in the streets and tents, queuing for flour and water, living in darkness without electricity, hot water, or basic amenities—we crave salt, sugar, rice, and clean water.

My daughter yearns for chocolates, chips, and candies, while we navigate empty supermarket shelves.

Searching for infant formula has become a futile quest. We change milk types for our children, tears in their eyes, as we cry for necessities. Infants born in tents receive water and sugar due to the unavailability of milk.

Amid this struggle for life’s details, the war has humiliated us. It has stripped away our humanity, dignity and self-esteem. We are left homeless, barefoot and exposed in streets and tents.

In the face of such adversity, we find ourselves alone, bearing witness to a battle we cannot match. Gaza lacks the resources of a superpower, unable to withstand the onslaught of massive military equipment funded by the United States.

I have seen extravagance in life, luxury and money spending, but I did not expect to see extravagance in the use of weapons that destroy stones and people.

The lavish use of US weapons in Gaza—artillery, planes, tanks, quadcopters, naval boats—comes at the cost of innocent lives, the majority of whom are women and children.

As we close the year, tending to wounds and bidding farewell to loved ones, there is no time for proper goodbyes or tears.

Three weeks ago, my aunt, her family, and grandchildren were killed when their six-storey home was bombed. Forty-five people were killed and their bodies remained trapped under the rubble for days.

My father and I mourned while offering condolences to my only surviving cousin, who was displaced with her husband to Deir el-Balah.

She told us that no one was able to get them out because of the presence of tanks and snipers around the place. Neighbours told them that they heard some of them alive screaming and pleading for help from under the rubble, but they could not help them. Then these voices eventually faded away after a few days.

This is how lives end in Gaza. This is how people are killed. They get bombed in homes, left to bleed to death under rubble, without rescue. Pain eats away at the hearts of their loved ones who watch their deaths helplessly. The wider world’s inability to stop this highlights how little our lives are valued. Our death and killing, our spilled blood, have become permissible.

While the world was illuminated to celebrate the New Year last night, I lit a candle for my five-month-old child, amidst the darkness of continuous bombings around.

Our only wish is survival, an end to the war. Farewell to a sorrowful and painful year. Long live Gaza.“This morning three young men were martyred by the bullets of the occupation [Israeli] forces who stormed the Ibn Sina Hospital in Jenin and shot them,” the Ministry of Health in Ramallah said.

The Israeli army said its troops had “neutralised” the men, who were hiding in the hospital and belonged to a “Hamas terrorist cell”.

Security camera footage circulated online appeared to show about a dozen undercover personnel, including three in women’s clothing and two dressed as medical staff, pacing through a corridor of the hospital with assault rifles.

The Israeli military identified one of the men killed as Mohammad Jalamneh, 27, who it claimed was planning an imminent attack and had been transferring weapons and ammunition to other members.

The two other men killed, brothers Basil and Mohammad Ghazawi, were hiding inside the hospital and were involved in attacks, the military alleged.

“A gun was found on a wanted person, which was confiscated by the forces,” the army statement added.

Al Jazeera’s Charles Stratford, reporting from Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, said: “One can only imagine the terror of the patients and staff at the hospital in Jenin.”

“It’s just another example of how determined the Israeli army is to keep up raids as it targets armed resistance fighters across the occupied Palestinian territory,” he added.

Hamas said in a statement that the Israeli army’s “crimes will not go unanswered”, adding that the killings are a “continuation of the occupation’s ongoing crimes against our people from Gaza to Jenin”.

One of the men, Basil Ghazawi, was injured and in bed when he was killed, said the Palestinian armed group.

Basil was injured by missile fragments following an Israeli drone attack on October 25 targeting a group of men near the Jenin camp cemetery and had been receiving treatment at the hospital for three months, according to Al Jazeera sources.

Hamas confirmed that Jalamneh was one of its members. The Jenin Brigade, which includes a number of Palestinian armed resistance groups, said in a statement that two of the three men were members of Islamic Jihad.

Jalamneh’s father Walid told Al Jazeera from Jenin that the path his son took was the “path of the honorable – of the free.”

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“The path that my son Mohammad took, many of our sons have gone through before him. He was not alone; they found no other way to deal with this occupation, other than with firepower, because this occupation and enemy does not deal with us, even our children, except with firepower,” said Walid.

“They tried to achieve “peace” for tens of years. I want to ask those who are betting on “peace,” does this enemy want peace? Tens of years of negotiations, while the occupation is stealing more land, killing thousands of Palestinians, insisting to keep the Palestinian people under occupation, in front of the world’s eyes, because they consider themselves to be above the law,” he continued.

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned “in the strongest terms the occupation forces’ assassination of the three young men”.

Thousands of Palestinians thronged the streets of Jenin as the funeral ceremony for the three men was underway. They were to be buried at a cemetery in the Jenin refugee camp.

The mother of the Ghazawi brothers said the two were loved by everyone. “The last time I saw them was yesterday night … I was in the hospital,” she said in a video shot by local media, adding that she went home as Mohammad said he would stay with Basil.

“I was still waking up this morning when I heard that special forces raided the hospital … They were killed while they were asleep,” the mother said.

Ahmad Shawish, a friend of Mohammed, said he was a “very kind” person.

“Mohammad was very loved,” Shawish told Al Jazeera from Jenin.

“He would not let anyone get upset from him. If anyone of his friends or family were bothered, he would apologize and make things right even if it wasn’t his fault,” continued Shawish.

‘Undercover assassins’

According to the medical staff one of the three Palestinians killed in the hospital was being treated for an injury received during a previous army raid months ago, Al Jazeera’s Stratford reported.

“The Israeli army often surrounds and in some instances has attacked the three Palestinian hospitals in Jenin during nightly raids on the city,” he said.

“But this is the first time they have entered a civilian medical facility in what seems to have been a well-planned, targeted assassination operation that Palestinian authorities are calling another violation of international law,” he added.

Al Jazeera’s Rory Challands, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, said that assailants were dressed as doctors, nurses and even civilians.

“This unit comprised Israeli police and army personnel. They went up to the third floor of the hospital and shot three young Palestinians dead,” he said.

“It does not look like there was any attempt to arrest these men. They were killed as they were sleeping,” he added.

Violent clashes were reported in the area surrounding the hospital.

Since the beginning of [Israel’s war on Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/1/30/israels-war-on-gaza-live-israeli-forces-detain-dozens-in-un-shelter-raid), Israeli forces have carried out raids and arrests in the occupied [West Bank](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/1/30/voices-of-the-occupied-west-bank-ill-keep-speaking-with-love) on a daily basisHundreds of people have been [killed and arrested](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/21/palestinian-american-teen-one-of-hundreds-killed-by-israelis-in-west-bank) since Hamas’s October 7 attacks on Israel, in which about 1,140 people were killed and some 240 taken captive.

Approximately 100 of the [captives were returned](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/30/hamas-and-israel-free-more-detainees-in-sixth-captive-exchange) to Israel under a truce deal last November in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

At least 26,637 people have been killed and 65,387 wounded in Israeli attacks on Gaza.The judges pointed to a wide list of policies – including the building and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, use of the area’s natural resources, the annexation and imposition of permanent control over lands and discriminatory policies against Palestinians – all of which it said violated international law.

The court said Israel has no right to sovereignty of the territories, is violating international laws against acquiring territory by force and is impeding Palestinians’ right to self-determination.

It said other nations were obliged not to “render aid or assistance in maintaining” Israel’s presence in the territory. It said Israel must end settlement construction immediately and existing settlements must be removed, according to a summary of the more than 80-page opinion read out by Salam.

Israel’s “abuse of its status as the occupying power” renders its “presence in the occupied Palestinian territory unlawful”, the court said.“Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the regime associated with them, have been established and are being maintained in violation of international law,” the court said.

The court’s opinion was sought in a 2022 request from the United Nations General Assembly.

The ICJ, also known as the World Court, is the highest UN body for hearing disputes between states.

Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem – areas of historic Palestine that the Palestinians want for a state – in a 1967 war. It has since built settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and steadily expanded them. It also had settlements in Gaza before a 2005 withdrawal.

The UN and the vast majority of the international community consider the Palestinian territory as Israeli-occupied.

‘Watershed moment’

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Maliki told reporters in The Hague that the ruling signalled a “watershed moment for Palestine, for justice and for international law”.

“The ICJ fulfilled its legal and moral duties with this historic ruling. All states must now uphold their clear obligations: no aid, no assistance, no complicity, no money, no arms, no trade, no nothing – no actions of any kind to support Israel’s illegal occupation,” he said.

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Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian ambassador to the UN, said the ruling was a “significant step” in the direction of ending the occupation and attaining the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination, statehood and the right of return.

The right to return is a demand that Palestinians who were forced from their homes in the 1948 Nakba and the 1967 Arab-Israeli war be allowed to return to them.

Mansour said his team would study the entire opinion and “dissect every sentence”.

“We will consult with an army of friends at the United Nations and in all corners of the globe,” he said, adding, “We will produce a masterpiece of a resolution” at the UN General Assembly.Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected the opinion as “fundamentally wrong” and one-sided.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office issued a statement in which it called the ruling a “decision of lies” that distorted the truth and asserted that “the Jewish people are not occupiers in their own land”.

Jeffrey Nice, a human rights barrister, told Al Jazeera that it will be hard for world leaders to completely “disregard” the ICJ ruling even though it is nonbinding.

“This is one part of the legal system saying enough is enough,” he said.

He said it would also be “difficult for the interested, informed, concerned public not to say, ‘It’s time Israel put its house in order.'”

Al Jazeera’s senior political analyst, Marwan Bishara, said: “There is a lot of room for hope that this ruling will support a movement, an international movement, across the board in the West and elsewhere in the world in favour of more sanctions, more pressure on Western governments to put more pressure on Israel.”

In a separate case brought by South Africa, the [ICJ is considering](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/11/a-quick-guide-to-south-africas-icj-case-against-israel) allegations that Israel is committing genocide in its [war on Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-war-on-gaza/).

A preliminary ruling has already been made in that case with the court ordering Israel to prevent and punish incitement to genocide and to increase provisions of humanitarian aid.

In May, the [ICJ](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/24/icj-orders-israel-to-halt-its-offensive-on-rafah-gaza-in-new-ruling) had also ordered Israel to halt its offensive on Rafah, a city in southern Gaza, citing “immense risk” to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians taking shelter there. But Israel has continued its attacks on Gaza, including Rafah, in defiance of the UN court.

On January 26, the very day the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an interim ruling on South Africa’s case accusing Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinian people, the Israeli government dropped a bomb. It was not the usual [900kg US-made bunker buster](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/2/us-gives-bunker-buster-bombs-to-israel-for-war-on-gaza-report), but a much more lethal one: it accused 12 employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) of having ties to Hamas or being involved in its October 7 operation. This immediately resulted in over a dozen countries cutting their financial support for the agency and UNRWA’s chief, Philippe Lazzarini, firing nine of the accused (of other three – one is dead and two are unaccounted for).

Given the meagre aid trickling into Gaza and the looming starvation of its people, particularly in northern Gaza, defunding UNRWA now is worse than collective punishment –  it could be a death sentence for many destitute and hungry Palestinians.

UNRWA was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1949 to provide relief to all Palestine refugees originally defined as “persons whose place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as the result of the 1948 war”. The definition was broadened to include persons displaced by the “1967 and subsequent hostilities”.

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Today, UNRWA has 30,000 staff, mainly Palestinian physicians, nurses, educators, relief workers, drivers, engineers, logisticians, etc who provide humanitarian relief, healthcare, education and other assistance to millions of Palestine refugees throughout the Middle East. In Gaza, UNRWA’s 13,000 staff have supported almost all aspects of Palestinian life, especially after Israel imposed a blockade of the Gaza Strip in 2007 with Egypt’s support.

Critics have pointed out that the UN has delegated to UNRWA important international legal obligations that would otherwise be incumbent on Israel as the occupying power. Under the Geneva Conventions, basic services such as shelter, healthcare and education in occupied territories are the responsibility of the occupying state. Thus, in effect, the UN has subsidised, and possibly prolonged, Israel’s occupation of Palestinians.

From Israel’s perspective, UNRWA is another enemy that has prolonged Palestinian resistance to its occupation. It is a “barrier” to solving the Palestinian refugee question by simply resettling Palestinian refugees in other countries, as it is now openly advocates. For all Israeli governments, implementing UN Security Council resolutions and international law on the inalienable “right of return” of Palestinians forced by Zionist militias and subsequently the Israeli army to leave their homes in 1948 is anathema to Israel’s existence.

The accusations against the 12 UNRWA staff should be seen in this context; it is also important to remember who is making them. Israel is an occupying power facing allegations of genocide deemed plausible by the ICJ. Israeli forces have repeatedly attacked UN-protected facilities including schools and hospitals, killing thousands of civilians, mainly children and women seeking refuge on UNRWA premises, as well as 152 UNRWA staff. Israel also has a long history of unsubstantiated accusations against UNRWA employees and within the context of the current conflict, it has been caught lying repeatedly about alleged crimes by Palestinians (eg, the beheading of 40 babies on October 7).Bolstered by the UN’s hasty decisions taken without establishing through an investigation a prima facie case, Israel now claims that 10 percent of Gaza-based staff have links to “militant groups”.

Under the UN’s internal rules, due process is compulsory when misconduct is alleged. When serious allegations backed by incontrovertible evidence against UN personnel are put forward, the UN’s secretary-general has the authority to order the summary dismissal of the accused staff. Such extreme cases are rare.

In all other cases, typically, a board of inquiry is established to investigate the most serious cases, or accusations are picked up by the UN’s internal investigatory department that may initiate a formal inquest based on preliminary evidence. In the interim, the staff member facing allegations of misconduct may be suspended.

In the case of the 12 UNRWA employees accused by Israel, summary dismissal is a surprising decision not least as the circumstances of the cases – an all-out war and possibly a genocide –  and the credibility of the accusing party should compel a cautionary approach.

Yet the UN leadership was quick to jettison the presumption of innocence of their staff. On January 28, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a statement to advise that of the “12 people implicated, nine were immediately identified and terminated by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini; one is confirmed dead, and the identity of the two others is being clarified. Any UN employee involved in acts of terror will be held accountable”. In his statement, Guterres further states that “the abhorrent alleged acts of these staff members must have consequences”.

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Already, the secretary-general has seemingly adjudicated the case and promised “consequences”. He has shown no such outrage or made calls for accountability for the murder by the Israeli military of his own staff – as if such war crimes are not abhorrent acts that call for consequences.

Firing staff at will based solely, as Guterres admits, on “allegations” is troubling and should be of concern to all staff members and staff unions of the United Nations.

But more alarming and consequential is the [swift decision](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/28/which-countries-have-cut-funding-to-unrwa-and-why) of the United States, Austria, Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Iceland, Sweden, Switzerland, Romania and the United Kingdom to suspend their funding to UNRWA during an all-out war on the people it was established to protect.

Worse, when Israel is in the dock of the ICJ facing plausible allegations of perpetrating a genocide, such decisions may even be deemed a breach by these states of their obligations under the 1948 Genocide Convention. But this shouldn’t come as a surprise since some of the same governments choose to overlook the many war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by Israel and continue their military support for its onslaught on Gaza, now in its fourth month.

In the end, even if the 12 accused staff are found guilty of grave crimes, this hardly justifies starving UNRWA of funding when it tries to save from starvation Palestinians in Gaza. Cutting down a septuagenarian olive tree because it might have 12 “bad” olives on it is not only collective punishment – it is furthering a genocide.

The emergency measures were announced as the court begins its deliberations on South Africa’s genocide case against Israel, for which it heard evidence earlier this month. South Africa has described Israel’s actions in Gaza as genocide but Israel has rejected the allegation, claiming that its activities in Gaza stem from “self-defence”, and are necessary to root out Hamas. It has added that the war cannot end until that goal has been achieved.Secretary Rice invoked the “birth pangs” analogy in support of the US argument that a ceasefire should be thwarted at all costs to prevent a return to the “status quo ante” in Lebanon. Insofar as the “status quo ante” signified a country where apartment buildings and villages had not been converted into bomb craters and rubble, the delivery was a rousing success.

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And yet the soaring public support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and the wider region during the 2006 Israeli war was not exactly the newborn Middle East that the US and Israel had envisioned popping out of the womb of mass slaughter. But, hey, the greater the enemy, the greater the opportunities for homicidal obstetrics in the future.

Summer 2006, of course, belonged to a previous era of Israeli slaughter-fests, when killing 1,200 people in 34 days was still considered extraordinarily shocking. Also belonging to this era was, for example, [Operation Cast Lead](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2010/1/19/what-the-gaza-war-meant-for-israel) in the Gaza Strip, during which Israel killed some 1,400 people over 22 days in December 2008 and January 2009. In Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014, the Israeli military killed 2,251 people in 50 days.

We have now apparently transitioned into an age of obscenely intensified birth pangs; Israel’s latest assault on the Gaza Strip murdered [more than 20,000 Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/12/20/israel-hamas-war-live-israel-kills-around-100-palestinians-in-one-day) in the first two and a half months alone, and destruction in the besieged enclave is of a scale the human mind can barely process.

 the US has ramped up its support for the aggressors, while repeatedly agitating against a ceasefire or a halt to the savagery. From an aesthetic perspective, at least, the “status quo ante” is long gone in Gaza, the territory now resembling the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust. As it currently stands, the newest “new Middle East” is defined by [Zionist genocide](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/12/21/the-anatomy-of-zionist-genocide) – the problem for Israel being that, no matter how much you bomb, you can’t really annihilate a people that refuses to cease to exist.

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In mid-December, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken advocated once again for a continuation of the war, arguing: “How can it be that there are no demands made of the aggressor and only demands made of the victim?” Anyone with a minimal grasp of logic may be surprised to learn that by “victim” he meant the state responsible for killing more than 20,000 Palestinians in Gaza in two and a half months.

Anyway, inversions of reality are par for the course in the US political and media establishment.

So, too, is Orientalist discourse. Since the onset of this latest bout of Israeli-induced carnage, there has been [no shortage](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/11/12/how-americas-bloodthirsty-journalism-cheers-on-israels-war-on-gaza) of paternalistic, infantilising lectures emanating from said establishment, which is bent on condemning Hamas – and by extension Palestinians in general – as uncivilised troublemakers who brought this whole apocalypse on themselves.

To be sure, the United States’s Orientalist disdain for a region on the receiving end of one Western “mission civilisatrice” after another is an integral component sustaining the whole imperial mission. After all, there’s no better reason than unrelenting backwardness to bomb folks into something, um, new – a place where the US and Israel are entirely and unquestioningly calling the shots.

The case of Iraq, another Middle Eastern locale that has for decades been on the receiving end of calculatedly patronising US rhetoric as well as explosives, confirms that a “new” Middle East is hardly a better Middle East, at least in terms of human wellbeing and so forth.

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Writing for Time magazine at the time of Condoleezza Rice’s “birth pangs” diagnosis in 2006, journalist Tony Karon remarked that Iraq was “Exhibit A of the Bush Administration’s ‘New Middle East,’ and it’s a bloody mess that is growing worse by the day.”

It remains to be seen what can possibly be “born” from the present genocide in Gaza – another “bloody mess” that is naturally far messier for the babies, children, and larger people who actually have to live it and not for their assassins in Tel Aviv and Washington, DC.

Whatever happens in the new year, a US-Israeli-birthed baby is by no means viable in the Middle East – and genocide should be aborted at once.

“This evacuation is for your own safety,” the Israeli military declared on October 13, when it [ordered](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/israel-orders-1-1-million-people-in-gaza-to-move-south-what-to-know) 1.1 million Palestinians in northern Gaza to leave their homes. Thousands heeded the warning and headed south, only to be bombed along the way and upon arrival.

The massive evacuation order was only the inauguration of an array of announcements and legal technologies developed by the Israeli military and its legal team in order to organise the violence against the Palestinian population and shroud it in an obfuscating narrative of international humanitarian law precaution

Israel’s deadly ‘humanitarian efforts’

In November, shortly after the Israeli army launched its ground offensive, it designated Gaza’s main north-south route – Salah al-Din Street – as a “[safe corridor](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/3/death-corridor-the-al-samounis-recall-terror-of-safe-passage-in-gaza)”. A map with the evacuation passage was shared by the occupation forces, underscoring their “humanitarian effort” to protect civilians. But since then, Gaza’s main road artery has become a corridor of horror where Palestinians have been randomly bombed, executed, forcibly disappeared, tortured and humiliated.

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Meanwhile, the Israeli army continued to bombard the territory south of Wadi Gaza which it had repeatedly declared a “safe area” where Palestinians from the north could seek safety.

When at the end of November, the death toll of the war reached [15,000 Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/11/30/israel-hamas-war-live-sixth-captive-prisoner-swap-ahead-of-truce-deadline), many of whom were civilians killed in the “safe zones”, the United States administration tried to conceal its support for Israel’s indiscriminate targeting of civilians with a cosmetic request to “expand” the so-called safe areas. So the Israeli army responded by introducing a new “humanitarian tool”: the [evacuation grid system](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/12/4/fact-or-fiction-israeli-maps-and-ai-do-not-save-palestinian-lives). It published on social media a grid map dividing the Gaza Strip into 600 blocks and indicating which areas were supposed to be “evacuated” and which were “safe”.

Instead of increasing the areas of safety for civilians, the system – deployed while Gaza was cut off from all forms of communication by the Israeli military – increased the level of chaos and death.

Areas previously designated as safe like Khan Younis and Rafah were transformed into urban battlegrounds. As a result, Israel ordered Palestinian civilians in these areas to leave again to new safe zones. But the areas where the evacuation grid system told the Palestinians to flee to were immediately targeted by the Israeli military.

In December, a New York Times investigation revealed that during the first month and a half of the war, Israel “routinely used one of its biggest and most destructive bombs in areas it designated safe for civilians”. The 2,000-pound United States-made bombs dropped in the safe zones posed “a pervasive threat to civilians seeking safety across south Gaza”.

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Nevertheless, the Biden administration has repeatedly commended Israel for its “efforts” to protect civilians.

Organising genocidal violence

According to international law, both in the Geneva Conventions and in the Additional Protocols, safe zones must be recognised in an agreement between the fighting parties. However, in conflicts, this rarely happens and safe zones – and the legal technologies associated with them – can become tools for the organisation of violence.

The concentration of defenceless civilians in areas designated and delimited on a map as protected, can be used and exploited by the actors on the battlefield to manage and direct their use of lethal force.

This was the case in Bosnia, with the infamous Srebrenica “safe zone”. The area was instituted by the United Nations in 1993 in order to protect Bosnian Muslims under attack, but the disarmament of the safe zone transformed it into easy prey for Serb forces. They first obstructed the delivery of humanitarian aid to the area and then rounded up and massacred thousands of Muslim civilians.

Safe areas became lethal also in the case of Sri Lanka, where the government imposed the creation of Tamil safety zones in which it [killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/3/12/sri-lanka-reveals-plans-for-inquiry-into-war-crimes) thousands of civilians, while blaming the Tamil Tigers for allegedly using the refugees concentrated in the safe zones as “human shields”.

Similarly, in Gaza, Israel is imposing unilaterally what and where is “safe” for Palestinian civilians. In doing so, it is deploying the discourse of safety and its associated legal technologies – warnings, safe zones, safe corridors, evacuation grids – as a lethal tool to implement the ethnic cleansing of different areas of the territory designated as safe/unsafe.

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Areas or parts of the territories defined as safe serve to concentrate the displaced population and better manage the military operations and the killing of civilians. As one poignant Reuters [headline](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlGmwCMETMs) put it: “Israel orders Gazans to flee, bombs where it sends them”.

In other words, by putting under evacuation order and depopulating vast swaths of Gaza’s territory, Israel has been concentrating the ethnically cleansed population into shrinking zones which it targets immediately after they are designated as “safe areas”. This shows a clear intent to liquidate Palestinian civilians after displacing them, and can become a tool for making extermination more efficient.

In overpopulated areas like Rafah with an extremely high population density due to the influx of displaced people from northern and central Gaza, one single attack can kill [a large number of people](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/28/israel-says-improper-munitions-cause-of-high-death-toll-in-maghazi-attack) at once.

Apart from serving a clear military purpose, this necropolitical appropriation of the humanitarian duty to warn and create safe spaces for civilians is also part of Israel’s legal strategy to defend itself from the accusation of having committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.

With the recent [genocide application](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/3/can-south-africas-icj-case-against-israel-stop-war-in-gaza) submitted by the Republic of South Africa to the International Court of Justice, which accuses Israel of acts “intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group”, there is heightened urgency for the Israeli government to try to present itself as abiding by international law.

Israel has always tried to provide its 75 years of ethnic cleansing and dispossession with a semblance of legality. But this time the genocidal force of annihilation it has unleashed has reached such an unprecedented scale – putting 2.3 million people at concrete risk of death – that its legal discourse of safety cannot camouflage its complete disregard for the civilian status of the population in Gaza.

The outline is part of a “vision for phase three” document submitted to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s war cabinet on Monday. It states that civil administration of the enclave would pass to unnamed “Palestinian players”, while Israel would retain the ability to carry out military activities within the Strip after the warWhat is the ‘day after’ plan?

Under this latest plan, neither Hamas nor Israel would govern the Gaza Strip [once hostilities](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2023/11/9/why-are-some-leaders-more-concerned-about-gazas-post-war-future) there conclude, but this comes with certain caveats, Gallant revealed.

The plan states that Israel’s war in the territory will continue until it has secured the return of the hostages taken by Hamas in southern Israel on October 7, dismantled Hamas’s “military and governing capabilities” and removed any remaining military threats, Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported.

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Once all of that has been achieved, a new phase will begin in which “Hamas will not control Gaza and will not pose a security threat to the citizens of Israel”, with other Palestinian bodies assuming the territory’s governance.

Israel would reserve the right to operate inside the territory, which means its forces would be able to come and go as they pleased – similar to current arrangements in the occupied West Bank. However, Israel would not keep a constant civilian presence in the enclave after the aims of the war have been met, nor would there be any Israeli settlements.

Gallant also said that Israel would continue its intense supervision of Gaza’s border. This could involve maintaining a blockade on the Strip via land, air and sea, as well as carrying out inspections of everything that comes in and out of Gaza post-war, Al Jazeera correspondent Hamdah Salhut reported.

Gallant did not specify which Palestinian officials would govern the strip, simply stating that: “Gaza residents are Palestinian, therefore Palestinian bodies will be in charge, with the condition that there will be no hostile actions or threats against the State of Israel.

“The entity controlling the territory will build on the capabilities of the existing administrative mechanism (civil committees) in Gaza,” Gallant’s plan states.

He also addressed plans for the reconstruction and rebuilding of Gaza after the war, stating that a coalition of international actors, including Arab and European states and other Western allies, would be in charge.

How does the plan compare with what Netanyahu has said?

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Netanyahu has also [said](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/10/netanyahu-says-not-seeking-to-occupy-gaza-but-strip-must-be-deradicalised) that a “civilian government” should rule Gaza after the war is over, but is opposed to the idea of the Palestinian Authority, the Fatah-led government which partly controls the West Bank, being placed in charge of the Gaza Strip.

He also said that the Israeli military first needs to “eliminate Hamas” before post-war plans can come into effect.

In November, Netanyahu stated that Israel would take responsibility for Gaza’s security for an “indefinite period” without specifying how this would happen. He added that this would be necessary to prevent the “eruption” of another “Hamas terror”.

What have other senior Israelis said?

On Monday, the far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, called for Israeli settlers to return to the territory after the war and for a “solution to encourage the emigration” of Gaza’s Palestinian population, echoing similar comments by right-wing finance minister Bezalel Smotrich.

In an interview with Israeli Army Radio on Sunday, Smotrich said that removing about 90 percent of Gaza’s population from the enclave would help security in the region post-war, as Gaza is a “hotbed where two million people grow up on hatred and aspire to destroy the State of Israel”.

“If there are 100,000 or 200,000 Arabs in Gaza and not two million, the whole discourse about the day after will be different,”

What does the PA say?

In an interview with the Financial Times, Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said any eventual arrangement must involve “a political solution for all of Palestine”, and not just Gaza.

“[Israel] wants to separate Gaza from the West Bank politically,” Shtayyeh said.

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“I don’t think Israel is going to leave Gaza very soon. I think Israel is going to create its own civil administration that functions under the Israeli occupying army. And therefore the issue of the ‘day after’ is not clear yet.”

What does the US think?

Washington has been pushing for a two-state solution and has [suggested](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/8/israel-should-not-reoccupy-gaza-us-top-diplomat-blinken) that Gaza be governed by a “revitalised” Palestinian Authority, based in the occupied West Bank.

Gallant’s plan is “completely contrary to what the Americans envisage as their so-called ‘day after’ concept”, said Al Jazeera correspondent Mike Hanna.

“The Americans have based their ideas on the fact that the PA would take over control or administration of Gaza,” he added.

On Thursday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken departed for a visit to Israel where discussions about Gaza’s post-war future are likely to be on the agenda.

For 100 days now, Israel’s sustained genocidal war on Gaza has propelled the Middle East into new orbits of death, destruction, and ever-rising fears of greater mayhem to follow. The past 10 days brought us another recurring spectacle from the modern legacy of Arab-Israeli clashes: a regional tour by the United States secretary of state to “calm things down”.

In touring the region, Antony Blinken – we were told – had four aims: to reduce the drumbeats of an impending regional conflagration, increase humanitarian aid to Gaza as Palestinians are withering away under Israel’s starvation siege, reduce the number of Palestinians killed and injured by Israel’s genocidal daily bombing raids, and explore how political agreements after the fighting stops could launch negotiations for a stable, peaceful region.

This sounds noble and sensible – to the man on the moon perhaps. Few people on Earth who follow the Middle East and know its modern history believe the US’s stated aims. The crippling problem with Blinken’s efforts – and with how the US mainstream media cover them – is that almost every statement or goal he utters is contradicted by the impact of actual US policies in the Middle East, and every danger he seeks to curtail is usually caused or intensified by American militarism in the region.

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To the people of the Middle East, Blinken, the fireman, looks more like the arsonist’s assistant. For his or any recent US secretary of state’s efforts are hobbled by the 5 Ds of Washington’s policies on Israel-Palestine and the region: delusion, denial, dishonesty, distortion, and diversion. All were on full display during Blinken’s tour.

Delusion describes well how the US projects its image as the selfless foreign power that comes to bring calm and brotherhood to the Middle East region, all while fuelling and prolonging violence and conflict.

The US has contributed heavily to the region’s rampant warfare, increasing poverty, and state fragility by carrying out military operations and maintaining a military presence there; using sanctions and threats against indigenous powers that defy it; supporting Israeli settler-colonialism that has now run amok in a genocidal spree in Gaza and the West Bank; and fortifying Arab autocrats who have immunised the Arab people against democracy and human rights.

The official delusions are faithfully conveyed to the public by the US mainstream media. A January 4 news report, for example, quoted the Department of State spokesperson Matthew Miller as saying: “There are obviously tough issues facing the region and difficult choices ahead. But the secretary believes it is the responsibility of the United States of America to lead diplomatic efforts to tackle those challenges head on, and he’s prepared to do that in the days to come.”

Better journalism could have clarified that the US had played a key role in creating “the tough challenges”.

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Denial describes well the US rhetoric about the circumstances that fuel a wider conflict in the region. This violent confrontation has been building up for three decades very much due to Arab-Iranian reactions to two chronic American policies: support for Israel’s subjugation of Palestinians and the suppression of Arab movements that resist US-Israeli domination.

These resistance forces now militarily engage Israeli and American troops in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, but the epicentre of the expanding regional confrontation remains the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. If the US genuinely wants to prevent a wider conflict, it can do so right now by supporting a ceasefire in Gaza.

It is not only not doing so, but it is in fact escalating the situation. Shortly after Blinken’s “peace-seeking” tour ended, the US and its allies carried out air raids of their own against Yemen. Yet US media widely quoted official statements and US officials that insisted “they were not seeking an escalation” and “their aim remains to de-escalate tensions”. Air bombardment hardly constitutes a de-escalation, especially when a Gaza ceasefire could actually do that instantly.

Dishonesty describes well Washington’s statements over the last half century about working for peace by creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel – when the US has actually funded Israel’s military dominance of the region, its slow and now active genocide against Palestinians, and the colonisation and theft of Palestinian lands for new Jewish settlements that have been growing since 1967.

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If actions speak louder than words, the US has been screaming for 50 years that it aims to prevent the emergence of a Palestinian state. And yet, US media outlets continue to report today that there is a “significant divide” between the US and Israel over the two-state solution. But there is no disagreement here, the two have very much reached a consensus that Palestinians do not deserve self-determination.

Distortion describes well how the US says its recent military build-up in the region aims to deter the Gaza war expanding, and Iran and Hezbollah from threatening Israel – while US militarism since the 1950s has primarily maintained a frozen Cold War regional order to its liking.

This has allowed Israel to do whatever it wishes; kept most autocratic Arab governments dependent on US security and economic assistance to survive; and suppressed democratic aspirations and movements for socioeconomic justice in Arab states.

This context is usually absent from reporting in US media, where instead the US is presented as striking a “delicate balance” in the Middle East and seeking “regional security”.

Diversion describes well how the Biden administration responds to worldwide and American citizens’ accusations that it ignores the Israeli genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, as well as America’s own complicity in this gravest of all crimes. American officials in their sleep repeat that Israel has a right to defend itself, indicating that Washington does not take seriously international law, UN conventions, or decisions.

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The Biden administration tries to divert public attention away from Israel’s ongoing atrocity and apartheid by stressing that it believes that too many Palestinian civilians have died and that it is working to allow more humanitarian aid to reach Gaza – but in fact aid flows have increased only symbolically, the average number of Palestinians killed or injured daily actually increased recently, starvation stalks the Gaza Strip, and Israel’s use of US weapons to destroy Gaza’s schools, hospitals, homes, and other basic life facilities continues unchecked.

And yet US media regularly report that Israel’s actions are “testing” the US administration’s support for its war and that it “doesn’t have long”. Still, we have seen no evidence of any change of course: the US stands firmly by its genocidal ally.

The 5 Ds have long camouflaged realities and fooled the world through the complicity of mainstream media and dishonest or confused officials. They now wither because the truths of American-Israeli policies are out in the open in Palestine and at the International Court of Justice – or hastily buried underground, wrapped in tiny blankets around thousands of babies and children whose tragic deaths confirm the dreadful reality that Palestinian lives still do not matter to Israel or the US government.“I am hopeful today shall pass peacefully, or at least be anything unlike last night,” she told us.That morning – December 7 – after making contact with my news desk in Doha to let them know that we had survived the heavy overnight bombardment, I joined my 65-year-old father, Rafik, who was listening to the news.

None of us had any idea what was about to come.

It happened in a matter of milliseconds. In an instant, the morning’s bright sunshine disappeared, as the entire world turned dark and my two-year-old son, Rafik, my wife, Asmaa, father, mother, Nadia, and sister, Fatma, were all thrust into a black world of choking dust, smoke and fire.

Everything seemed to vanish. All I knew was that pain was coursing through my body and I was trapped under what I later learned was the [weight of the ceiling](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2023/12/28/under-the-rubble-the-missing-in-gaza) pressed down upon my family and I.

In a panic, I screamed the names of my family one by one. Unable to see any of them, I prayed and cried that one of them would answer me.

None of them did.

A few moments later, I passed out.

This picture taken from the Israeli border with the northern Gaza Strip shows Israeli soldiers viewing Gaza City on January 1, 2024 [Menahem Kahana/AFP]

Total confusion

Hours later, it was the voices that came first.

Muffled shouts of “He’s alive too!” that became, “He’s breathing!”. It didn’t matter to me. All I cared about was finding out if my family were safe.

“They are all OK, don’t worry about them,” a stranger assured me, trying to stop the flow of blood from my arms and my shattered fingers.

“Just, please, don’t make any effort to move – keep your head up,” he instructed as he searched my body for other injuries and wounds.

All I felt was absolute confusion. I couldn’t make any sense of what was happening. I didn’t understand who all these people were, or how we had been hit by an air strike that no one had heard coming. I couldn’t tell where my family were, or think clearly about what had happened.

I remember the explanations. It had been two hours since the house had been bombed. All that time, we had remained buried under the rubble, lying there as our neighbours struggled frantically to break through the cement walls of the house to reach us.

As I slowly started to grasp what had happened, the pain I was in seemed to intensify.

We had all sustained injuries during the air strike. I can remember my son, Rafik, screaming, his face matted with blood and dust as strangers tried to clean him up.

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How we survived the bombing, the glass and the metal falling upon us as the two-storey building collapsed over our heads, I cannot tell. It still seems like a miracle.

But even though that air strike did not kill us, it destroyed something inside us. It wiped out any [last remnants](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/31/israeli-bombardment-destroyed-over-70-of-gaza-homes-media-office) we had of normality and of life continuing. In one tiny instant, it planted the seeds of the mental wounds that we will carry through each day with us for a lifetime.

A week of unending agony

Our neighbours were able to give us immediate first aid, cleaning and bandaging our wounds. But there was nothing to alleviate the pain that now racked our bodies. No one had any illusions that accessing medical care would be straightforward.

Hospitals and medical facilities have been severely affected by the bombardments. A lack of adequate medical supplies has led to many of the injured later losing their lives to infection. Moving anywhere in northern Gaza brings the serious risk of being targeted by an Israeli sniper or being caught in a barrage of gunfire. Nevertheless, despite the orders from the Israeli forces to leave, this area remains home to hundreds of thousands of civilians, all of whom must endure these risks daily.

For six days, in the ruins of our home, we dreamed about finding painkillers – or something that would, at the very least, allow us to sleep.

There were none.

We were told that we had been lucky to survive the bombing. While that may be true, it offers little comfort during the night, when the pain from your injuries becomes indescribable, depriving you of sleep or any comfort.

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Infection is a constant worry. Every time the first trace of contamination appears, the wounds have to be cleaned with scorching water, fluid so hot that it burns the healthy skin around the wound. It was difficult to get Rafik to understand that we weren’t trying to burn him. Still, despite the pain of the searing water being greater than that of any infection, he accepted it.

The alternative isn’t worth thinking about.

Fleeing in terror

One week passed and we started to notice some improvements in our health. All the while, the bombardment continued.

At about noon on December 14, our [neighbourhood](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/1/1/israel-flattened-my-home-killed-my-family-but-i-lit-a-candle-for-gaza) was subjected to an overwhelming air and artillery barrage. It was unbelievable and appeared entirely indiscriminate. Our neighbours were dying by the minute. Many more were injured.

When the Israeli troops arrived in the wake of the bombardment, those who could, fled for their lives – my family included. I can only describe that point in time as pure terror. Those who had been hit, or were injured as a result of the barrage, were left behind.

To stop and help was to die.

As we zigzagged through the streets amid crowds of terrified people, the pain from our wounds returned with a vengeance.

My wife, our terrified son in her arms, suggested we seek shelter in one of the schools run by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), relatively far from the focus of the bombardments.

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There, we joined thousands of others, all of whom spoke of having left scenes of death and carnage behind.

Now we are left with little to live off but the essentials. Food and medicines aren’t available.

There aren’t enough mattresses and blankets to protect against the night’s biting cold. Clean drinking water is a luxury, leaving people with nothing to drink but dirty water, increasing the chances of bacterial infection and stomach disease.

Children, pregnant women, the young and the elderly are all facing the same daily struggle: survival.

Life in this school is about waiting for death.

There is nothing more we can lose. We have lost friends, loved ones, colleagues, teachers and doctors. Everything – absolutely everything we had – is gone.

Even if the war comes to an end now, it will take years for us to start reclaiming something of what we have lost.

When we might again have somewhere we can call home, we have no idea.

the Birthright Israel programme resumed operations following a brief suspension of activity. The hiatus was triggered by the October 7 [Hamas attack](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/21/hamas-says-october-7-attack-was-a-necessary-step-admits-to-some-faults) and the ensuing Israeli-perpetrated genocide in the Gaza Strip, which has thus far killed well over 30,000 Palestinians.

Since 1999, Birthright has treated some 850,000 Jewish young adults from around the world to 10-day, all-expenses-paid trips to Israel, jointly funded by the Israeli government and private donors. Participants ride around on buses, see the sights, enjoy “[hormonal encounters](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2013/2/2/the-birthright-project-relocation-and-procreation)” with Israeli soldiers, and otherwise bond with stolen Palestinian land.

Rather than being a coincidental byproduct of the whole experience, hormones in fact serve a calculated purpose in Birthright expeditions. Consider a 2013 Haaretz [article](https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/2013-01-05/ty-article/what-happens-in-tiberias-stays-in-tiberias/0000017f-dc56-d3ff-a7ff-fdf6b5870000) on the frequency of romantic hookups and marriage resulting from Birthright trips, which quoted a 24-year-old Israeli soldier assigned to accompany one of the groups: “We come in uniform and they make a big deal out of us… [T]hese Jewish programmes are very well thought out. They really know what to do to get Americans emotional and excited.”

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And the more “emotional and excited” young American Jews get, to be sure, the better for the Zionist project, given the key role of the United States in abetting the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Of the more than 400 Birthright trippers who descended upon Israel in January 2024 – a drop in the bucket compared with the 23,000 individuals the programme had [reportedly](https://www.timesofisrael.com/birthright-to-resume-free-trips-to-israel-for-first-time-since-october-7-hamas-attack/) envisioned sending this year – the majority were from the United States.

Obviously, Birthright Israel has always been heinous in its premise, endowing as it does anyone with one Jewish parent – and in some cases even converts to Judaism – with a “birthright” that is categorically denied to Palestinians, including those literally born on the land in question.

In light of the present genocide, however, the Birthright programme accrues even more horrifyingly sinister implications, as Israel denies Palestinians the very right to live – much less to be born in peace. With much of Gaza’s medical infrastructure [bombed to ruin](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/18/bloodbath-israel-keeps-hitting-gaza-hospitals-amid-international-uproar) and with hospitals continuously targeted, Palestinian mothers are now forced to [give birth in tents](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-stream/2024/1/26/why-pregnant-women-are-bearing-the-brunt-of-israels-war-on-gaza) and other improvised spaces.

Having completed their gestation under relentless bombardment, these Palestinian newborns presumably enter the world already traumatised. Meanwhile, as Doctors Without Borders, known by its French initials MSF, recently told the United Nations Security Council, the “psychological injuries” being inflicted on the Gaza Strip “have led children as young as five to tell us that they would prefer to die”.

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Genocidal panorama notwithstanding, a February article by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) proclaims that “Birthright trippers find visiting Israel during war is a unique and invigorating experience”. The Birthright itinerary has been modified slightly for wartime, and now encompasses excursions to “Hostage Square” in Tel Aviv as well as Schneider Children’s Medical Centre in the city of Petah Tikva, where, according to the JTA article, 23-year-old Alon Fishman of Rockland County, New York was moved by “seeing how much people cared and understanding that this is what Israel is about”.

Never mind that the mass slaughter and [starvation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/28/children-die-of-malnutrition-in-gaza-hospitals-health-ministry) of Palestinian children in Gaza is actually what Israel is currently “about”. Anyway, the point of the Birthright programme has never been to convey reality but rather its exact opposite: a landscape free of any hints as to the fraudulent nature of the Jewish “birthright” narrative or the criminal behaviour of the state of Israel.

To that end, the resumption of Birthright tours not only constitutes a “powerful symbol of a potential return to normalcy for Israel”, as The Times of Israel [put it](https://www.timesofisrael.com/birthright-to-resume-free-trips-to-israel-for-first-time-since-october-7-hamas-attack/), but also helps to shift the focus away from genocide and onto other matters – such as an alleged surge in anti-Semitism on US university campuses.

In a recent burst of anti-Semitism-centric propaganda penned for The Jerusalem Post, Gidi Mark – the International CEO of Birthright Israel – cited a survey by the Jewish Anti-Defamation League (ADL) according to which, prior to October 7, 67 percent of Jewish college students in the US “felt physically safe on campus”, while 66 percent “felt emotionally safe”. After October 7, as per the survey results, the numbers dropped to 46 percent and 33 percent, respectively.

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Try finding anyone in Gaza who feels physically or emotionally safe.

Of course, “anti-Semitism” is a conveniently charged accusation that is often disingenuously deployed against, for example, folks merely opposed to Israel’s genocidal policies. And, in Mark’s view, it is also a good reason young Jews should go on Birthright – because “[r]esearch has shown for years that no other immersive, relatively short experience is as impactful as a group experience in Israel”.

Mark concludes: “There is no better way to ensure Jewish students feel safer and more secure in their skin in hostile university environments than by visiting Israel”. What he doesn’t say is that the hormone-heavy Birthright curriculum is also a pretty good way to ensure continued support for Israeli military efforts to annihilate the Palestinians.

Shortly after the onset of hostilities in October, journalist Alina Dizik took to the pages of Tablet Magazine to declare that “Birthright worked” – and to describe how her own Birthright trip nearly two decades earlier now enabled her to “feel connected” to the conflict in a way that would not have been possible if she had not “spent time ‘on the bus’”.

In Dizik’s words, she “suddenly realised what Birthright’s founders knew all along: When a tragedy of this scale happens, the in-person connection to Israel is critical to preserving the country’s existence”.

In the end, though, it is not Israel’s existence that is at stake; instead, one people’s usurped “birthright” has been weaponised into another people’s death sentence. And that diabolical tradeoff should not be allowed to “work”, at all.

The US diplomat, who is on his [fourth visit to the Middle East](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/6/us-diplomat-blinken-meets-turkeys-erdogan-kicking-off-gaza-diplomacy-tour) since the conflict began, said Israel had taken steps to ensure that aid reached the population of Gaza, including opening Karem Abu Salem, also known as Kerem Shalom, border crossing with Gaza.

Blinken travelled to Turkey, Greece, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates before Israel, and was in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday for talks with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah.

Blinken’s visit to Ramallah and Israel showed there was no fundamental change in Washington’s stance, said Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri.

The Palestinian armed group said in a statement that Blinken’s position “reflects the extent of US involvement in these crimes and the widespread violations of all international laws committed by the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip”.

Speaking in Israel earlier of plans for post-war Gaza, Blinken said countries in the region had expressed their readiness to work towards an “integrated region”, but that any agreement must include the fulfilment of Palestinian political ambitions.

“Many countries in the region are prepared to invest when the conflict is over in [Gaza’s] reconstruction and security,” Blinken said. “But it is essential to them that there also be a clear pathway to the realisation of a [Palestinian political state](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2023/11/25/is-a-two-state-solution-for-israel-and-palestine-still-possible).”

He added that the present moment presented a “powerful opportunity” but that all parties must work together towards this goal. “Israel must stop taking steps that undercut Palestinians’ ability to govern themselves effectively,” he said, including “settler violence carried out with impunity, settlement expansion, demolitions and evictions.

“All make it harder – not easier – for Israel to achieve lasting peace,” he said.

The top US official also reiterated that Washington rejects any plans for the permanent displacement of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.

“As soon as conditions allow, we want to see people move back home and we’ve been very clear about that,” he said, adding that a UN assessment mission had been agreed upon to determine the presence of suitable conditions for residents to move back to northern Gaza.

“The aim of the visit was to support the security of the occupation,” he told the Reuters news agency.‘This war could end tomorrow’

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Blinken deflected a reporter’s question on whether the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government would accept a two-state solution and agree to a diplomatic solution, saying he could not speak for Tel Aviv.

Al Jazeera’s diplomatic editor Marwan Bishara said Blinken spoke for Arab leaders, but refused to relay Israel’s position “because Netanyahu disagrees”.

“He doesn’t want a two-state solution, he does not want to leave Gaza or the West Bank, he wants to continue to settle illegally,” Bishara added.

Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), based in The Hague, after [South Africa](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/9/which-countries-back-south-africas-genocide-case-against-israel-at-icj) filed the lawsuit at the end of December.

Blinken rejected the accusation as “meritless”, saying the lawsuit “distracts the war” and downplays the threats against Israelis and Jews.

The conflict broke out on October 7, when Hamas launched an attack on southern Israel that killed 1,139 people, according to Israeli authorities. Israel responded with a devastating bombardment and a ground invasion of Gaza that has destroyed much of the territory and killed more than 23,200 people, mostly women and children, according to Palestinian officials.

Blinken said the war could “have ended on October 8” if Hamas had given up its weapons and released the hostages. Israel said that of about 240 people seized by Palestinian armed groups on October 7, 132 are still being held in Gaza and 25 have died in captivity.

“This [war] could end tomorrow if Hamas makes those decisions,” he added.

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Regional tensions

In his meeting with Netanyahu, Blinken “stressed the importance of avoiding further civilian harm and protecting civilian infrastructure in Gaza”, according to the US Department of State.

The secretary of state voiced hope that, after the war, Israel could push on with its efforts towards regional integration following its US-brokered normalisation deals with the UAE and other states.

Several dozen protesters gathered outside the hotel where Blinken was holding the meetings and called for a ceasefire to secure the release of the captives.

Israel’s Defence Minister Yoav Gallant told Blinken that increasing pressure on Iran was “critical” as it could prevent a regional escalation.

“An increase in the pressure placed on Iran is critical and may prevent regional escalation in additional arenas,” Gallant was quoted as saying in a government statement.

Tensions mounted on the Israel-Lebanon border on Tuesday as the Israeli army and the Iran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah [traded fire](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/9/brink-of-war-hezbollah-israel-trade-strikes-as-fear-of-escalation-rises). In Jordan on Friday, Blinken noted “real concern” over the situation along the Lebanese border, which is stoking fears of a wider regional conflagrationWhat is the International Court of Justice?

The ICJ, also called the World Court, is the highest United Nations legal body that can adjudicate on issues between member states. It is separate from the International Criminal Court (ICC), which tries individuals in criminal cases.

The ICJ comprises 15 judges appointed for nine-year terms through elections at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the Security Council (UNSC). The court’s rulings are binding and cannot be appealed by member states, but it depends on the UNSC to enforce the decisions.

What are South Africa’s accusations against Israel?

South Africa has accused Israel of committing the crime of genocide in Gaza in violation of the 1948 Genocide Convention, which both countries are party to.

The killing of Palestinians in Gaza in large numbers, especially children; destruction of their homes; their expulsion and displacement; blockade on food, water and medical assistance to the strip; the imposition of measures preventing Palestinian births by destroying essential health services crucial for the survival of pregnant women and babies, are all listed as genocidal actions in the suit.

What are South Africa’s immediate demands?

South Africa is requesting that the ICJ move urgently to prevent Israel from committing further crimes in the strip using “provisional measures” – essentially an emergency order that can be applied even before the main case begins.

It argues that provisional measures are necessary “to protect against further, severe and irreparable harm to the rights of the Palestinian people under the Genocide Convention, which continue to be violated with impunity”.

What has Israel said?

Israel, which has lambasted South Africa for bringing the case, has promised to defend itself at the court. Senior Israeli officials, including President Isaac Herzog, have called the case “preposterous” and say it constitutes a “blood libel”.

Israel is likely to argue that its killing of more than 23,000 people in Gaza is in self-defence. Herzog, speaking to visiting US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday, said Israel “will present proudly our case of using self-defense under our most inherent right under international humanitarian law”.

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How long will the trial go on?

The initial proceedings will likely last only a few weeks, so we should expect a sentencing from the court, in favour of or against South Africa’s urgent request, in a few weeks.

The main case though, could take much longer – years. The ICJ’s deliberations are a painstaking process, involving detailed written submissions followed by oral arguments and counter-arguments by the team of top legal counsels representing each state. Experts say a sentence in this case could take three to four years.

How does the ICJ decide cases?

After the initial proceedings this week on provisional measures, and later on in the main case, ICJ judges will take a vote to decide on a sentence.

Judges ought to be impartial but in the past, some have voted in line with their countries’ politics. When the bench voted in favour of a decision to provisionally order Russia out of Ukraine in March 2022, judges from Russia and China voted against the decision.

What’s the response of the international community?

Several countries and organisations have backed South Africa’s suit. Malaysia, Turkey, Jordan, Bolivia, the Maldives, Namibia, Pakistan, Columbia, and members of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) are among them.

The European Union has been silent, but Israel has seen support from its number one backer and weapons supplier, the United States. Department of State spokesperson Matt Miller said in a statement the “allegations that Israel is committing genocide are unfounded”, but he added that Israel must “prevent civilian harm” and investigate allegations of humanitarian crimes.

This is the moment the UN was created for. In the wake of the horrors of World War II, the nations of the world came together to charter a new institution that promised “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person”.The UN was born with a bold and urgent mission to ensure the horrors of the Holocaust would never be visited upon the world again. But right now, we find ourselves in the midst of what [experts widely believe](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/11/12/genocide-in-gaza-a-call-for-urgent-global-action) is a genocide unfolding in Gaza.

Our protest was a prayer service because our calls for a ceasefire are sacred to us. In Jewish tradition, saving a life is a [central religious value](https://www.sefaria.org/Sanhedrin.73a.7-8?lang=bi&with=Translations&lang2=en). We are obligated to [break the Sabbath](https://www.sefaria.org/Shulchan_Arukh%2C_Orach_Chayim.328.3?lang=bi) if it means rescuing a single stranger. Prayer is an ancient language Jews have used for thousands of years to funnel our fears, dreams, hopes and despair. These words that soothed and inspired our ancestors for millennia endure as vehicles for our hopes, righteous indignation and conviction today.

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The UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins much the same way the Torah does. The preamble reads: “Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Likewise, the first chapter of the first book of the Torah affirms the dignity of each person created in the [image of the Divine](https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.1.27?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en).

This idea of the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings is the root of our call for ceasefire. As we say in our [mission statement](https://rabbis4ceasefire.com/statement/): “Ceasefire means no more bombing. Ceasefire means no ground war. Ceasefire means all Israeli hostages must be released now. Ceasefire means immediate engagement by the international community toward a just and lasting peace in Israel-Palestine. Ceasefire is the only way to prevent more death and destruction.”

I started Rabbis for Ceasefire because I believe that rabbis have a special responsibility to carry the torch for a Judaism that affirms life. I became a rabbi to caretake Jewish tradition, so that generations of Jewish wisdom can continue as a scaffold for a life of ethical rigour and spiritual depth. All the more so in times of crisis and trauma, rabbis are needed to guarantee a worthy Judaism will be passed to the coming generations.

Our urgent plea for a ceasefire stems from our religious convictions as rabbis. As rabbis we have dedicated our lives to serve the Jewish people and to ensure our traditions endure as a source of inspiration towards pursuing justice, peace and life. This responsibility, to safeguard the ethical core of Judaism, has never felt as urgent as it is today.

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Israel and the United States continue to maintain that their actions are in the interest of Jewish people. As rabbis who serve the spiritual and practical needs of Jewish people, we know this couldn’t be more wrong. More than [23,000 Palestinians killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) is not in the interest of Jews. Starving Palestinians is not in the interest of Jews. Denying Palestinians basic human rights is not in the interest of Jews. We know that what makes Jews truly safer is solidarity and engagement from the international community.

The banners we unfurled at the UN headquarters read: “Biden: The World Says Ceasefire” and “Biden: Stop Vetoing Peace” – a reminder that the US and Israel stand alone in going headlong into death and destruction instead of diplomacy.

In recent weeks, US President Joe Biden’s administration has sent huge sums of money and arms shipments without consulting the US Congress. Israel has used this funding not for defence, but for slaughter.

The UN knows firsthand the cost of allowing this war to continue. Workers at various UN agencies continue to operate on the ground in Gaza in extremely difficult conditions. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization are doing incredible work despite the challenges they face. To date, more than 140 UN workers have been killed in Gaza, the most UN workers lost in any single conflict in its 78-year history.​​​​​​​

And there is no end in sight – unless the international community refuses US intransigence at the UN. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that the war would continue for “[many more months](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/31/netanyahu-says-gaza-egypt-border-zone-should-be-under-israeli-control)” but the people of Gaza will not survive that. Currently, all of Gaza’s residents are facing starvation with more than 90 percent reporting that they regularly go without food for a whole day.

Jews have ended each meal and each prayer service by calling out for shalom throughout history and around the globe. This ancient commitment to peace continues through times of threat, persecution, isolation and danger. In that tradition, we took our prayers for an immediate permanent ceasefire into the hallowed chambers of the UN because we know peace is the only way for us all to survive. President Biden, we invite you to join us and stop vetoing peace.The claim from the military spokesperson that Israel has nullified the Palestinian armed group in the north of the enclave extends the signs that it plans to shift to a more precise campaign. It came as top American and European envoys toured the region on Sunday, stepping up the international pressure over the mounting death toll and humanitarian crisis in Gaza

The spokesperson said Israeli forces have now completely dismantled Hamas’s “military framework” in northern Gaza after killing about 8,000 fighters, and will now end major combat operations.

Hamas fighters “without a framework and without commanders” are still present, he continued, and scattered fighting is to be expected, along with rockets sporadically being launched towards Israel. But Hamas no longer operates in an organised manner in the area, he asserted.

The military did not address troop deployments in northern Gaza going forward, but the spokesperson said it will “continue to deepen the achievement” in the area.

However, the onslaught in the rest of the enclave, including the south, to which Israel previously pushed Palestinians labelling it a safe area, is set to continue.

“We are now focused on dismantling Hamas in the centre of and south of the strip,” the spokesperson said.

The Israeli military’s assault using drones, missiles and ground forces was launched following Hamas’s attack on October 7, which killed about 1,140 people in Israel and saw some 240 taken captive.

The latest figures on casualties in Gaza show that close to 23,000 people have been killed and more than 58,000 wounded. Many more are missing, feared under the rubble of bombed buildings. Most of the 2.3 million population has been displaced, and are struggling for food and shelter.

Spillover

Amid these figures and the ongoing humanitarian crisis, pressure has been growing on Israel for weeks to end its indiscriminate warfare.

In particular, the United States, Israel’s main backer, is reported to be pressing Tel Aviv to end its tactic of widespread bombardment, and the associated civilian casualties.

However, Israel has remained defiant. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted the war will not end until the objectives of eliminating Hamas, getting Israel’s hostages returned, and ensuring that Gaza will no longer be a threat are met.

The military spokesperson reiterated that stance, stating that “fighting will continue during 2024. We are operating according to a plan to achieve the war’s goals, to dismantle Hamas in the north and south.”

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Yet, as the death toll mounts, the risk that the war could spark a regional conflagration looks to be rising. Violence is flaring in the [occupied West Bank](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/7/human-remains-scattered-as-israeli-drone-targets-west-banks-city-of-jenin), on the Israel-Lebanon border, in Iraq and Syria, and in the Red Sea.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Josep Borrell, the EU’s top diplomat, are currently in the Middle East seeking to prevent Israel’s high-intensity campaign from spilling over into a wider war across the region.

On his [fourth visit](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/6/us-diplomat-blinken-meets-turkeys-erdogan-kicking-off-gaza-diplomacy-tour) to the region in three months, Blinken is stressing that Israel should adjust its military operations to reduce civilian casualties and significantly boost humanitarian aid into Gaza.

However, many in the region suggest that they expect Washington to do more to rein in Israel, which is receiving billions of dollars worth of support from the US. Jordan’s King Abdullah on Sunday warned the US secretary of state of “catastrophic repercussions” from the continuation of Israel’s military campaign.

Israel’s legal representatives on Friday claimed South Africa’s case was “unfounded”, “absurd” and amounting to “libel”, and said Israel sought not to destroy a people but to protect its people.On Thursday, on the [first day of hearings](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/11/day-one-of-the-icj-genocide-hearing-against-israel-key-takeaways), South Africa argued Israel had committed “systematic” acts of genocide in Gaza, where more than 23,500 Palestinians have been killed amid Israel’s military campaign, with at least 70 percent of whom were women and children, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry.

Israel’s arguments revolved around its “right to self-defence” following the [attacks by Hamas on October 7](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/what-happened-in-israel-a-breakdown-of-how-the-hamas-attack-unfolded), as well as what it called a lack of evidence of “genocidal intent”.

Christopher Staker, a lawyer representing Israel, said, “The inevitable fatalities and human suffering of any conflict is not of itself a pattern of conduct that plausibly shows genocidal intent.”

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Malcolm Shaw, a professor of international law representing Israel, said the case relates only to charges of genocide, which “stands alone among violations of international law as the epitome of evil”. If the charge of genocide is levelled incorrectly, “the essence of this crime would be lost”

such evidence was lacking in the arguments South Africa presented a day earlier.

Detailing its evidence on Thursday, Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, a lawyer for South Africa, said, “The evidence of genocidal intent is not only chilling, it is also overwhelming and incontrovertible.”

‘Massive disconnect’

Israel’s legal representatives insisted its army has acted in compliance with international law in Gaza and aimed to mitigate civilian harm by warning of impending military actions, including via telephone calls and leafleting.

Omri Sender, another lawyer, argued that Israel’s efforts to facilitate humanitarian assistance to people in Gaza testified to its objective of protecting the civilian population, rather than destroying it.

However, Thomas MacManus, a senior lecturer in state crime at Queen Mary University of London, told Al Jazeera the ICJ is likely to see a “massive disconnect” between the picture Israel painted of its humanitarian concern for Gaza and “the reality on the ground where UN agencies say people are starving, lacking water, and seeing attacks on hospitals, schools, and universities”.

Speaking before the ICJ hearing, Galit Raguan, acting director of the international justice division at Israel’s Ministry of Justice, refuted the claim that Israel had bombed hospitals. She argued Israel had found evidence of Hamas using “every single hospital in Gaza” for military purposes.

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Responding to claims that hospitals were used as military bases, Palestinian foreign ministry official Ammar Hijazi told Al Jazeera outside The Hague that Israel’s arguments were not based in fact or law.

“What Israel has provided today are many of the already debunked lies,”

‘Plausible right to self-defence’

The ICJ is set to rule on [nine provisional measures](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/11/a-quick-guide-to-south-africas-icj-case-against-israel) effectively seeking the suspension of military operations in Gaza, but a timeline for when that will happen has not been stated. Israel has argued the provisional measures cannot require a state to refrain from exercising a “plausible right to defend itself”.

On the issue of jurisdiction, Israel argued that one of the requirements of the ICJ’s mandate is that the state putting forward the case should try to sort out this problem first. According to Israel, they did not manage to talk to South Africa before they brought this case to the court. In turn, South Africa argued it had reached out to Israel but obtained no response.

The Israeli team did make strong “jurisdictional and procedural arguments”, Al Jazeera’s senior political analyst Marwan Bishara said, but he added that “Israel lost the moral, factual, historical and humanitarian argument because of the way the situation has unravelled in Gaza – with the sheer death and industrial killing there.”

Tal Becker, the legal adviser of Israel’s foreign ministry, told the ICJ hearing that South Africa enjoyed close relations with Hamas and was therefore attempting to put forward a “distorted factual and legal picture”.

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South Africa “firmly rejects” that claim, Al Jazeera’s Fahmida Miller said, reporting from South Africa.

“The South African government has said that it doesn’t have bilateral relations with Hamas and that its stance in terms of supporting the Palestinian struggle against occupation does not equate to the support of Hamas,” she said.

In its presentation on Thursday, South Africa’s lawyers also condemned Hamas’s actions on October 7.

ICJ President Joan Donoghue ended the two-day hearing saying the court will announce its decision in the coming days.

An [ancient harbour](https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5719/) dating back to 800 BC, a mosque that was home to rare manuscripts and one of the world’s oldest Christian monasteries are just a few of at least 195 heritage sites that have been destroyed or damaged since Israel’s war on Gaza began on October 7, according to an NGO documenting war damage on cultural sites.

Wiping out the cultural heritage of a people is one of the many war crimes South Africa alleges against Israel [in a lawsuit](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/9/which-countries-back-south-africas-genocide-case-against-israel-at-icj) that was heard this past week at the International Court of Justice. [It states](https://www.icj-cij.org/index.php/node/203394): “Israel has damaged and destroyed numerous centres of Palestinian learning and culture”, including libraries, religious sites and places of ancient historical importance.

Gaza, one of the world’s longest inhabited areas, has been home to a pastiche of people since at least the 15th century BC, according to historians.

Empires – including the ancient Egyptians, Assyrians and Romans – have come and gone, at times dominating the land of the Canaanites, the ancestors of the Palestinians, leaving relics of their own cultural heritage behind. Greeks, Jews, Persians and Nabateans have also lived along this stretch of coast over the centuries.

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Strategically located on the Mediterranean’s eastern shores, Gaza was always in a prime position on the trade routes from Eurasia to Africa. Its ports made it a regional hub for commerce and culture. Since at least 1300 BC, the Via Maris – a route running from Heliopolis in ancient Egypt, cutting across Gaza’s western coastline and then crossing into Syrian lands – was the main route that travellers would take on their journeys to Damascus.

“The crime of targeting and destroying archaeological sites should spur the world and UNESCO into action to preserve this great civilisational and cultural heritage,” Gaza’s Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities said after Gaza’s Great Omari Mosque was destroyed in an Israeli air strike on December 8.

As a result of that particular strike, an ancient collection of manuscripts kept at the mosque may be forever lost. “The manuscript collections remained in the vicinity of the mosque and are currently inaccessible because of the continuing conflict,” Columba Stewart, the CEO of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML), told Al Jazeera soon after the strike.

The 1954 [Hague Convention](https://en.unesco.org/protecting-heritage/convention-and-protocols/1954-convention), agreed to by both Palestinians and Israelis, is supposed to safeguard landmarks from the ravages of war. Isber Sabrine, president of an international NGO that documents cultural heritage, explained that crimes affecting cultural heritage are part of the “collateral damage of genocide”.

“Libraries serve as cultural repositories, and attacking them is an attack on cultural heritage. What is happening now is a war crime. It goes against the first Hague convention,” Sabrine said. “Israel is trying to erase the connection of the people with their land. It’s very clear and intentional. Gaza’s heritage is part of its people, it’s history and their connection.”

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While cultural genocide erases tangible heritage like museums, churches and mosques, intangible heritage includes customs, culture and artefacts. These, too, have been damaged, including the Union of Palestinian artists on Jalaa Street in Gaza City and the well-known clay pots once baked in the city’s al-Fawakhir district.

In a statement to Al Jazeera, UNESCO said: “While priority is rightly given to the humanitarian situation, the protection of cultural heritage in all its forms must also be taken into account. In accordance with its mandate, UNESCO calls on all actors involved to strictly respect international law. Cultural property should not be targeted or used for military purposes, as it is considered to be civilian infrastructure.”

Here’s a closer look at some of the sites that have been destroyed or damaged:

Museums

There are four museums in Gaza, and two have been levelled,

The Rafah Museum had completed a 30-year project to curate a collection of ancient coins, copper plates and jewellery, making it Gaza’s main museum of Palestinian heritage. It was an early victim in the war, destroyed in an air strike on October 11.

Farther east and once sitting on a hilltop, Al Qarara Museum (also known as the Khan Younis Museum) was opened in 2016 by Mohamed and Najla Abu Lahia, a husband and wife team who said they wished to preserve a history of Gaza’s lands and heritage for generations to come.

Its collection consisted of about 3,000 artefacts dating back to the Canaanites, the Bronze Age civilisation that lived in Gaza and across much of the Levant in the second century BC.

All that remains of the museum now are shards of pottery and smashed glass that has been blown out of the widows during an October air strike.ICOM-Arab told Al Jazeera this museum was given advanced warning by Israeli forces to empty its contents and evacuate to the south of Gaza.

The Mathaf al-Funduq, a small museum opened in 2008 and housed in the Mathaf Hotel in northern Gaza, was damaged by shelling on November 3.

In Gaza City, the 13th-century Qasr Al-Basha, or Pasha’s Palace, was turned into a museum in 2010 by the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism, and a collection of artefacts from different periods of Gaza’s history was on display. The site was hit by Israeli air strikes on December 11, damaging its walls, courtyard and gardens.

Like many of the heritage sites in Gaza, this building has changed ownership and functions several times over its history. The two-storey fort, built by Mamluk ruler Sultan Zahir Baybars in the mid-13th century, was once a seat of power, constructed as a defence against the Crusaders and Mongol armies. During the 17th century, it was used by Ottoman rulers and once served as lodgings for the French commander Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799 when he entered Gaza to try to stave off an expected Ottoman invasion of Egypt, where the French held court.

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Before the 1948 Nakba, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees during the creation of Israel and many fled into Gaza, the palace served as a police station for the British, who controlled the area, and later, it became a Palestinian girls school.

Libraries

During a [week-long pause](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/1/the-israel-hamas-truce-has-ended-what-we-know-so-far) in the Israeli bombardment that began on November 24, Palestinians were able to briefly survey the extent of the damage to their homeland. It rapidly became clear that many public service buildings had been destroyed, including the Rashad El Shawa Cultural Center in Gaza City, once the venue for peace talks between PLO leader Yasser Arafat and US President Bill Clinton in the 1990s. Samir Mansour’s community bookshop, which was [painstakingly restored](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2022/2/24/books-across-borders-rebuilding-gazas-destroyed-bookshop) after the Israeli bombardment of 2021, was also badly damaged.

The Library of the Great Omari Mosque in Gaza City was once filled with rare manuscripts, including old copies of the Quran, biographies of Prophet Muhammad and ancient books on philosophy, medicine and Sufi mysticism. The library, established by Sultan Zahir Baybars and opened in 1277, once boasted a collection of 20,000 books and manuscripts.

Many of the rare books and manuscripts housed there were lost or destroyed during the Crusades and World War I, leaving only 62 books. These hard copies have now also been destroyed in a [strike](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/hamas-says-gaza-mosque-destroyed-urges-unesco-to-save-heritage) on the Omari Mosque on December 8.

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A digitisation project of these books was completed last year by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library and at the British Library and are accessible online at [HMML Reading Room](https://www.vhmml.org/readingRoom).

Mosques

Gaza’s Tourism and Antiquities Ministry estimated that as many as 104 mosques have been damaged or destroyed since the start of the Israeli assault. This includes the Othman bin Qashqar Mosque in Gaza City’s Zeitoun neighbourhood, which was built in 1220 at the site where Prophet Muhammad’s great-grandfather is believed to have been buried. It was badly damaged in an air strike on December 7.

The Sayed al-Hashim Mosque, built sometime in the 12th century and rebuilt in 1850, was damaged in an October air strike. This mosque, built of sturdy limestone in the Old City of Gaza, is of great significance for Muslims because it’s said to house the tomb of another of Prophet Muhammed’s great-grandfathers, Hashim bin Abd Manaf. Local lore says he was a merchant travelling back to Mecca from Syria when he became ill, died and was buried in what is now Gaza’s Daraj neighbourhood.A brief interlude of Crusader dominance followed the mosque’s contruction before the Mamluks took over and rebuilt it. It would later be renovated under the watch of Ottoman Sultan Abdul Majid in 1850 and again after damage in 1917 during World War I.

Early in the current war, the mosque caught fire during an Israeli air strike, which damaged its walls and ceilings.The Great Omari Mosque has been a site of religious worship in one form or another for about two millennia.  Known in Arabic as Al-Masjid al-Omari al-Kabir, it’s thought to be the first mosque built in the Gaza Strip 1,400 years ago. On December 8, it was [destroyed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/hamas-says-gaza-mosque-destroyed-urges-unesco-to-save-heritage) in an Israeli air strike.

Built out of local sandstone to accommodate as many as 5,000 worshippers for congregational prayers, all that remains is its Mamluk-era minaret, bent and broken.

“This was more than just a mosque for the community,” Sabrine said. “One man told me he felt more sad about the destruction of the mosque than that of his own home.”

Named after the second caliph of Islam, Omar bin Khattab, it was built in the seventh century on top of the ruins of an ancient church built in 406, which itself was built over the foundations of a pagan temple to the Canaanite fertility god, Dagon.

Like many historical sites that outlive the people who built them, this one has different stories behind it. According to one account, Samson, an Israelite warrior mentioned in the Old Testament who was known to hold his strength in his hair, became buried under the rubble of the structure after he brought the walls of the pagan temple down upon himself. Others say the temple fell after the Byzantines burned down all pagan sites when they took over rule of Gaza from 390.

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Ayyubid conqueror Salah al-Din turned the building back into a mosque after the Crusaders had converted it to St John the Baptist Cathedral.

The mosque had been used as a place of worship by the local Muslim community since 1291 and had served as a focal point for gatherings and cultural activities.

In partnership with the British Library Endangered Archives Programme, HMML last year [digitised a selection](https://www.vhmml.org/readingRoom) of ancient, single copy books from the mosque’s library that are unavailable “anywhere else in the world”, an HMML adviser told Al Jazeera. Works included the 14th century Book of Sufi Poems of Ibn-Zokaa and books by famed Gazan jurists, including Sheikh Skaike.

The December strike was not the first time the mosque had been hit. It was also struck on October 19 and was also damaged during World War I and again during the 2014 assault by Israel on Gaza.

Churches

The floor of the Byzantine Church of Jabalia, built in 444, was once decorated with colourful mosaics depicting animals, hunting scenes and palm trees. Its walls were adorned with 16 religious texts written in ancient Greek, which dated back to the era of Emperor Theodosius II, who ruled Byzantium from 408 to 450.

The Palestinian Tourism and Antiquities Ministry reopened the church in early 2022 after a three-year restoration in collaboration with a French organisation, Premiere Urgence Internationale, and the British Council.

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At the time, the ministry’s Nariman Khella said: “The church was discovered during the paving of Salah al-Din Street, and the first thing that was discovered were two tombs, one for an old person and the other for a young child.” That same year, a farmer discovered [a series of intricate mosaics](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2022/9/20/photos-byzantine-mosaics-discovered-under-gaza-farm) nearby. The state of the tombs and the nearby mosaics remains unclear.

As for the historic church itself, it was destroyed in October by Israeli air strikes.

The Monastery of Saint Hilarion is in an area called Tell Umm Amer in Nuseirat village on the coast and dates back to about 340 during Roman rule of the region. A “tell”, is a flat-topped mound, or hill, often marking the position of an ancient city.

To withdraw from worldly life and immerse himself in spiritual pursuits, Saint Hilarion, a Christian who is said to be the founder of monasticism, built a small and simple room for himself in what he thought was a secluded spot in today’s Deir el-Balah in the central Gaza Strip. Despite his desire for solitude, pilgrims sought him out in search of cures for ailments and spiritual guidance. Buildings around his simple room spread over the years, eventually becoming one of the largest monasteries in the Middle East.

Within the 25-acre (10-hectare) monastery’s sanctuary, there would eventually be five churches, a burial site, a baptism hall and ancient baths. Mosaics and limestone decorated the floors and walls to welcome pilgrims travelling the Via Maris from Egypt to Damascus. Damaged in an earthquake in 614, the site lay abandoned until Palestinian archaeologists started excavations in the late 1990s. The site, which UNESCO added to its Tentative World Heritage list in 2012, has been damaged in the Israeli bombardments.

The Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Porphyrius has been located in Zeitoun for 16 centuries. It was struck and damaged on October 19. Considered to be the third oldest church in the world, Saint Porphyrius was built in 425 on the foundations of an ancient pagan site and was named after the Byzantine saint who had made it his mission to close down the pagan temples. He is thought to have been buried on the grounds of the church.

Like other significant sites, this church was turned into a mosque in the seventh century but reverted back to a church in the 1150s when Crusaders reclaimed it. Renovated in 1856, it has remained a place of worship for Gaza’s [Christian community](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/1/under-israeli-attack-who-are-the-christians-of-gaza) to pray and seek shelter during times of conflict.

In the [October 19 Israeli bombing](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/20/we-were-baptised-here-and-we-will-die-here-gazas-oldest-church-bombed), 17 people were killed when the roof of the church caved in. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem said targeting the church “constitutes a war crime”. The neighbouring Ottoman-style Katib al-Wilaya Mosque, built in the 15th century, sustained damage in the same attack.

The Holy Family Church, built in 1974, is Gaza’s only Roman Catholic church and a shelter for the local community. It was hit in an air strike on November 4. A school in the church complex was partially destroyed.

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem confirmed that shrapnel from Israeli military strikes on buildings near the Holy Family Church had destroyed water tanks and solar panels on the roof of the church.

Other heritage sites

Ard-al-Moharbeen, or the Roman Necropolis, was unearthed last year by archaeologists from Palestine and France after construction workers building new homes discovered tombs at the site.[At least 134 tombs](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/25/four-tombs-unearthed-at-roman-era-cemetery-in-gaza) dating from 200 BC to 200 AD with skeletons still intact were found in what is believed to be a Roman necropolis.

Two intricately decorated lead sarcophagi were discovered, one with grape harvest motifs and the other featuring dolphins.

Fadel Alatel, an archaeologist in Gaza and part of the Heritage for Peace network, was working on this excavation before October 7. He told Al Jazeera he was fearful of what may have happened to these rare tombs.

“This is in the area where white phosphorous was dropped. Its damage to the site is unknown,” he said. “Also the winter weather and heavier rains may mean the rare discovery could be destroyed.”

Alatel has worked to preserve Gaza’s heritage and archaeology through countless Israeli air strikes but said this time the situation is much worse and he has been unable to return to the site to survey the extent of the damage.

Forensic Architecture (FA), an investigative journalism agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London, has been documenting the destruction of cultural heritage in Gaza in its investigation [Living Archaeology](https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/living-archaeology-in-gaza). On October 8, one day after the Hamas attacks on Israel that started the war, researchers at the agency using satellite technology found evidence of three large craters from Israeli rockets at the archaeological site.

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In a report, FA stated: “This disregard for and destruction of Palestinian cultural heritage both diminishes Palestinian claims to statehood and denies Palestinians their fundamental right to access and preserve their own heritage.”

The fate of another ancient site, a harbour, is known. It has been destroyed.

Located in the northwest corner of Gaza, the enclave’s first known seaport, Anthedon, also known as Balakhiyah or Tida, was inhabited from 800 BC to 1100 AD, or from the Mycenaean era to the early Byzantine age. It became an independent city during the Hellenistic period.

After Roman temple ruins and mosaic floors were discovered on the 5-acre (2-hectare) archaeological site, it was placed by UNESCO on its Tentative World Heritage list in 2012.

Other remains date back to the late Iron Age and the Persian, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods.

The Hammam al-Sammara, or Samaritan Bathhouse, was destroyed on December 8. It had pre-dated Islam and was likely established by the Samaritans, a religious sect of ethnic Jews who lived in the Zeitoun area, also known as the Jewish Quarter. The area had a thriving Jewish community until Crusader rule in the 12th century. The last Palestinian Jewish family [lived in the neighbourhood](https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/12/lost-history-gazas-jewish-quarter) until the 1960s.

The only other piece of Jewish history in Gaza was the King David Mosaic, which dates to 508. It was discovered at the remains of a sixth century synagogue and depicted King David playing a harp. It was transferred to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem after Israel captured the Gaza Strip during the 1967 Six-Day War.

At one time, Gaza City had 38 bathhouses. Many were lost during wars and occupation because there were a lack of resources to maintain them. The Hammam al-Sammara was the last one remaining. A sign once hung by its entrance stating it had been restored in 1320 by Mamluk ruler Sangar ibn Abdullah.

The site was a popular meeting place for Gazans to socialise and seek cures for ailments under its traditional vaulted ceilings. With intricate, inlaid marble tiled floors the hammam was still heated using traditional wood-fired ovens and aqueducts.

Located northeast of Nuseirat, the fortified city of Tell el-Ajjul, or Calves Hill, sits between the Mediterranean Sea and Wadi Gaza. It was established about 2000 to 1800 BC and has been damaged in the Israeli bombardment.

British Egyptologist William Matthew Flinders Petrie discovered the site in the 1930s after he moved east into Palestine after excavating Giza’s Great Pyramid. Here he discovered gold jewellery and ancient coins used by the Hyksos, Romans and Byzantines.

Most of his discoveries made between 1930 and 1934 when Gaza was under the British Mandate now reside at the [British Museum’s](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/x32568) Institute of Archaeology in London. Other finds included imported pottery from Cyprus, bottles and scarabs, with many pieces dating as far back as the Bronze Age about 3,600 years ago. The artefacts also suggest Tell el-Ajjul was once a trading hub.

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Status unknown

The status of Gaza’s many other historic sites remains unknown. According to Alatel, it is difficult to keep up with the situation on the ground because it “changes every five minutes”. Local photographers have been unable to return to many sites to assess the damage because of the dangerous situation.

These are a few of the sites whose condition is not yet known:

Dating back to the 14th century, the Khan Younis caravanserai was built to serve the needs of people travelling along the Via Maris.

Named after its Mamluk founder, Younis al-Nuruzi, the khanate, or khan, was a type of inn that was popular in the region from around the 10th century, offering a place for travellers to rest and take a break during their journeys. This caravanserai, built in 1387, has a mosque, a post office and storage rooms.

During an archaeological excavation from 1972 to 1982, a collection of unique, human-shaped pottery coffins were discovered at Deir el-Balah Cemetery, dating back to the late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BC).

Located in the Daraj neighbourhood, the Sufi mosque of Ahmadiyyah Zawiya was established in 1336 by followers of Sheikh Ahmad al-Badawi, a well-known 12th century Sufi scholar who lived in Gaza.

Sufi worshippers would gather there for collective prayers on Mondays and Thursdays. There has been shelling in the area, Alatel said, but it is as yet unknown what has become of the sacred site.

“All our heritage sites are clearly marked, yet the Israeli military strikes, the tanks and the bulldozers continue,” the archaeologist said. “But I have faith all this will end. Even if they attempt to destroy our past, we will build back Gaza’s future.

“Shame on those who remain complicit and not call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Shame on them,”Blinken’s social media post on Sunday night only referred to the captives taken by Hamas, saying the US has vowed to bring them back since “100 days of captivity in Gaza is far too long”.

A total of 24,100 Palestinians – including more than 9,600 children – have been killed and about 61,000 injured in Israeli strikes on Gaza since October 7, the day Hamas launched a surprise attack inside the Israeli territory.

Israeli authorities say Hamas fighters killed 1,139 people that day and took more than 200 captives, of which about 132 remain in Gaza. On Sunday, a Reuters news agency report, quoting Israeli officials, said at least 25 of them have died in captivity.

The other captives were exchanged during a weeklong truce in November.Even the [White House statement](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/01/14/statement-from-president-joe-biden-marking-100-days-of-captivity-for-hostages-in-gaza/) marking the 100th day of the war on Gaza made no mention of Palestinian killings and displacement of residents.

In the message, US President Joe Biden lamented the capture of the captives, stating that “for each of those 100 days, the hostages and their families have been at the forefront of my mind”.

Biden hailed the US efforts to bring back the captives and laid blame on Hamas for failing to extend a deal to return more of them.

Meanwhile, Israel’s relentless bombardment of Gaza continues with no signs of abating, as the humanitarian crisis in the besieged enclave deepens and threats of a regional spillover of the war loom.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the war will “continue until victory” but faces domestic pressure over bringing the captives back.

Global calls to end the war continue, with rallies held across the world and the US capital seeing one of [its largest turnouts](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/13/pro-palestine-demonstrations-around-the-world-as-gaza-war-nears-100-days) yet.

“Tanks and bulldozers surrounded the building. Shells had been hitting the building for days. The situation was desperate,” said Umm Odai Salem, whose husband was among those killed.

The Israeli soldiers stormed the building. “They banged on our door. My husband … told them we are all civilians. They took him to another apartment. I followed them, pleading with them to let him go because we are civilians,” she said.

“They beat me and my daughters. They put us women in one place and threatened us with guns and knives. They made us strip. They searched us, insulting us using the most terrible words,”

The soldiers disregarded their pleas and proceeded to “execute” all the men they rounded up outside.

“My husband was one of the 19 men killed in this building. They ordered them to bend down and executed them. They killed them all.”‘She was dying’

The footage shows the bodies of men with the entry holes of bullets in their back.

After the men were killed, the apartment that Salem and her daughters were sheltering in was hit, one of her daughters told Al Jazeera, killing her three-year-old sister, Nada.

“I was holding my sister in my arms. Then the shelling resumed. Nada was hit. She made some soft sounds. She asked for some water.”

“I thought she was crying. But she was dying. Shrapnel had entered her head, eyes and neck. My sister tried to carry her body but she fell from her arms at the door.”

William Schabas, professor of international law at Middlesex University in London, says the footage, along with testimonies, would constitute evidence in the [International Criminal Court](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/19/palestinians-welcome-chile-and-mexico-call-for-icc-probe-into-gaza-war).

“I should add that it’s not really important to demonstrate that they’re civilians. Summary executions even of fighters, even of combatants is a war crime,”

who was a chairperson of the Commission of Inquiry on the [2014 Gaza war](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/9/14/the-2014-war-through-the-eyes-of-gazas-youth), added that beyond testimonies and footage of bodies, prosecutors would need to submit the identity of perpetrators to get this to court in the first place.

“That’s one of the great challenges in a situation like this, [which] is actually finding out who were the people who fired the weapons or gave the orders,” he said.

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‘Systematic’ killings

Muhammad Shehada, of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor in Copenhagen, told Al Jazeera his organisation believes there is a pattern of a “systematic” [killing](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/21/idf-executed-palestinian-men-in-front-of-their-families-un-confirms) taking place on the ground.

“In at least 13 of field executions, we corroborated that it was arbitrary on the part of the Israeli forces,” said Shehada, the group’s chief of programmes and communications.

The monitoring group’s members who visited crime scenes and gathered testimonies from witnesses and family members of those who were killed, as well as reports from the health ministry in Gaza, said the soldiers have a sense of impunity.

Israeli forces have previously been accused of executing civilians since the current conflict erupted on October 7.

In December, citing one instance, the United Nations human rights office called for an independent inquiry into allegations that Israeli soldiers executed at least 11 Palestinian men in Gaza in what it called “a possible war crime”.

The key issue is how such probes would be conducted, analysts say, since none of the entities that could investigate alleged Israeli crimes against Palestinians is currently allowed into the Gaza Strip.

Many Palestinians have also accused Israeli forces of [mistreatment and torture](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/19/un-says-palestinians-detained-by-israeli-forces-humiliated-beaten) after being held in Israeli prisons.Muhammad Abu Samra, a detainee released in Gaza, accused the Israeli army of “torture” and “beatings”.

“The army … threatened to shoot us while we were naked in the cold. Then female soldiers attacked us and we were subjected to obscene insults,”

Another released prisoner, Abdel Qader Fatesh, said soldiers ordered him to take his clothes off, tied his hands and blindfolded him.

A UN human rights official said on Friday that [detainees in the Gaza Strip](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/19/un-says-palestinians-detained-by-israeli-forces-humiliated-beaten) were subjected to weeks of imprisonment in unknown locations and physical abuse.

No matter how it concludes, South Africa’s lawsuit in the International Court of Justice arguing Israel has violated the Genocide Convention will go down in history. It will either be remembered as the first step towards finally holding a rogue state accountable for repeated, longstanding violations of international law; or as the last, dying breath of a dysfunctional, Western-led international system.

For the hypocrisy of Western governments (and the Western political elite as a whole) has finally brought the so-called “rules-based world order” they purport to lead to the point of no return. Full-throttled Western support for Israel’s genocidal rampage in Gaza has truly exposed the double standards of the West with regard to human rights and international law. There is no turning back, and the West has only its own arrogance to blame.

The litany of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel in Gaza are clear as the light of day for anybody who has access to a smartphone. Social media feeds are overflowing with videoclips of hospitals and schools being bombed, fathers pulling out the lifeless bodies of their children from under destroyed buildings, mothers crying over the corpses of their babies. And yet, the reaction of Western governments – besides seemingly limitless military and political support – has been to label any criticism of Israel as anti-Semitism and attempt to ban outright any expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

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Regardless of this oppression, tens of thousands of people are coming out on the streets day after day expressing their disgust at Israeli atrocities and Western complicity. Desperate to regain some semblance of credibility, Western governments (including the US) have recently started to be marginally critical of Israeli attacks. However, it is too little, too late. Western credibility has been shredded irrevocably.

Of course, Western hypocrisy is nothing new. According to Western governments, the world should be up in arms about Russian aggression but should be perfectly happy with Israeli brutality and flouting of international norms. Ukrainians who throw Molotov cocktails at Russian occupation forces are heroes and freedom fighters, while Palestinians (and others) who dare to speak out against Israeli apartheid are terrorists. White-skinned refugees from Ukraine are more than welcome, while black and brown-skinned refugees from conflicts in the Middle East, Asia and Africa (most of which the West are behind) can sink to the bottom of the Mediterranean. The Western attitude has truly been: rules for thee, not for me.

The Western position towards China exhibits the same insincerity. China is virtually encircled by American and allied military bases, armed to the hilt. Yet it is China that is guilty of… what? Unable to point to any concrete infraction, Western governments and media can only accuse China of “increased assertiveness”, ie, not knowing its assigned subjugate place in the Western hegemonic order.

International justice has become a sick joke. Were the International Criminal Court (ICC) functioning effectively, Israeli leaders would be on trial even as we speak, and there would have been no need for South Africa to approach the ICJ. As it stands, though, the ICC only indicted Africans until 2022, when it announced an investigation into the Russian invasion of Ukraine less than a week after its start. The ICC issued indictments, including for Russia’s President Vladimir Putin, in less than a year. Conversely, it took over six years for the ICC to open an investigation into the situation in Palestine, and even now, years later, meaningful action has yet to be taken. While Israel continued its orgy of violence against the people of Gaza, Karim Khan, the British Chief Prosecutor of the ICC, visited Israel and stressed the need for Hamas’s crimes to be prosecuted, while going soft on Israeli crimes. Little wonder many civil society organisations are calling for him to be fired.

Of course, Western hypocrisy is nothing new. From the get-go, international legal norms were intended to apply only to so-called “civilised” – read white – peoples. Savages did not count, and the powerful Western states could – and did – do to them what they pleased. Natives certainly did not “own” land or natural resources, and colonial powers were free to steal and exploit those as they wished. Zionism was also founded on such racist attitudes – attitudes that remain at the core of Israeli policies to this day.

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These double standards are apparent with regard to the right to national self-determination – the fundamental right of all peoples to choose their own political system and control their own natural resources. After World War I, US President Woodrow Wilson insisted that self-determination be the guiding principle of the new world order – but, of course, only for Europeans. Palestinians and other Arab peoples found out the hard way that colonialism was alive and well: They were subject to League of Nations Mandates, which justified colonial rule for “peoples not yet able to stand by themselves”. The Charter of the United Nations also included provisions for Trusteeship, essentially along similar lines as the Mandates of the League.

The wars of independence in Asia and Africa put a stop to this. The newly independent countries demanded successfully that self-determination be elevated to a right for all. The two international covenants on human rights, adopted in 1966, both stipulate the right of all peoples to self-determination in their common Article 1, making it clear that only with political and economic self-determination can any other human right be meaningful.

The discussion on the right of self-determination went further, to the chagrin of Western governments. The UN General Assembly has stated repeatedly that armed struggle (including that of the Palestinian people) against colonial rule is legitimate. And the 1977 Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, on the laws of war, also stated that struggles against colonial and racist regimes are valid. International law has definitely developed in the right direction.

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Still, the systems to implement international law remain weak. This is by design, and it allows powerful countries to act with impunity, and to shield its proteges – as we see with the US and Israel. Even if the ICJ issues a provisional order for Israel to halt its violence, and even if, years later, it finds Israel guilty of genocide, without any enforcement, Israel can (and probably will) simply ignore those decisions. That would surely be the end of the current world order, as any facade of fairness would collapse.

Enforcement of international law is in the hands of the UN Security Council, but with its veto rights for the five countries that happened to be on the winning side in 1945, that body has time and time again proven itself incapable of fulfilling its mandate. The General Assembly lacks any enforcement power. And the UN, the ICC, and most other international organisations are perennially underfunded, meaning they rely heavily on voluntary contributions from states. This makes them vulnerable to undue influence by the rich and powerful: in other words, the wealthy Western countries.

On a more fundamental level, these international institutions are not representative. Though civil society organisations can contribute to most of the debates, only governments have a say in the decision-making process – despite the fact that, as we see in the case of Gaza, even the governments of ostensible democracies do not necessarily represent the will of their people.

Israeli aggression and colonisation must stop, and abusers of human rights in Palestine must be held accountable – including Western leaders who are complicit in genocide. However, we must not stop there. We must demand a revolutionary reform of international institutions. They must be made truly democratic and egalitarian. They must reflect the voice of the people, through civil society organisations and other democratic modes of representation – not governments that are too often in the pocket of rich and powerful interests.

Creating a world order that will ensure justice and equal rights for all will not be easy. It will require sustained efforts on the part of global citizenry, through putting pressure for change on governments and international organisations. However, it is the only way to ensure that “never again” becomes a reality.

The Jordanian army said on Wednesday that it held Israel responsible for a “flagrant breach of international law” due to the damage to the facility.Elsewhere in the city, people at and around Nasser Hospital were forced to flee as Israeli tanks approached the district overnight following a statement from the Israeli army that it had come under fire in the area.

Palestinian health officials said at least seven people were killed by Israeli air raids that damaged homes near the hospital.

At least 24,448 people have been killed in the Israeli assault on Gaza since October 7, the Palestinian health ministry has said.

At least 1,139 people, mostly civilians, were killed in the Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7 according to an Al Jazeera tally based on official figures.

reporting from southern Gaza, said there were growing fears that Nasser Hospital could soon not be operational as happened with several other facilities targeted by Israeli forces since the start of the war.

Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy said extra field hospitals were expected in the coming days.

“These have, of course, been necessitated by Hamas’s strategic militarisation of Gaza’s existing hospitals,” he said.

Hamas has repeatedly denied using hospitals for cover.

Israel also announced on Wednesday that it had killed six Palestinian fighters in southern Gaza.

In a statement, the military said its latest operation had resulted in the death of counterespionage officer Bilal Nofal and “significantly impacts the terrorist organisation’s capacity to develop and enhance its capabilities”.

“The vast majority of healthcare facilities were attacked, destroyed and left severely damaged to the point that they’re pushed out of service completely

Aid

Under a deal brokered by Qatar and France, desperately needed aid and medication has arrived in the Egyptian city of El Arish near the Gaza border.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has welcomed the deal, which will see the 61 tonnes of medicine and food enter the enclave, and called it a “much-needed moment of relief”.

Israel’s war on Gaza has left its population facing crisis levels of hunger and at growing risk of disease as supplies run low, aid agencies said.

On Wednesday, the head of the Palestine Investment Fund, Mohammed Mustafa, told the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, that it would take at least $15bn to rebuild houses in Gaza, not accounting for basic infrastructure and hospitals.

“If the war in Gaza continues, more people are likely to die of hunger or famine than war,” At the beginning of January, Israel announced it was scaling back operations in northern Gaza and beginning a new phase of lower-intensity bombing.

However, Al Jazeera’s Tareq Abu Azzoum, reporting from Rafah in southern Gaza, said that does not seem to be reflected on the ground.

“The strikes have not stopped over the last few hours across the Gaza Strip, despite the fact that Israel says that they’re moving to a completely new phase with low-intensity bombing,” he said.

“We can see that the death toll and casualties among civilians keeps rising, to reach more than 163 Palestinians killed in the previous 24 hours,” he said, citing Palestinian authorities.

The aid, which includes medicines for the Israeli captives that Hamas is still holding, was making its way from Egypt on Wednesday, after being flown from France to Qatar. Paris and Doha announced the previous day that they had brokered the first deal between Israel and the Palestinian group since a truce ended on December 1.More than 100 of the 240 or so captives taken by Hamas during its assault on Israel on October 7 were freed during that weeklong pause in fighting, which followed lengthy negotiations mediated by Qatar and the United States. In exchange, Israel released hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

However, efforts to return Israel and Hamas to the negotiating table have been faltering since. Israel has said it would not halt its bombardment of Gaza until the captives are all released and Hamas destroyed; Hamas says it would not release further captives without a full ceasefire.

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France said on Tuesday that negotiations over the aid deal had been going on for some time, and that the initial idea had come from the families of some of the Israeli captives.

The aid will be delivered to the International Committee of the Red Cross. Once it crosses the border into Gaza it will be handed over to Hamas.

Back and forth

Paris said it took months to [organise the supply](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/16/qatar-announces-israel-hamas-deal-for-medicine-and-aid-to-enter-gaza) of the medicines.

“France’s Foreign Ministry has issued a statement saying that 45 captives will be receiving medicine for various chronic illnesses and that the medicine should last around three months,” said Al Jazeera’s Stefanie Dekker, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem.

“There’s been a lot of back and forth on this deal,” said Dekker.  “The Israeli Prime Minister’s Office announced it a couple of days ago but there’s been a lot of logistical issues to iron out.”

Several elderly men are among the more than 100 remaining captives held by Hamas. Most women and children were released during the weeklong truce that ended on December 1.

They will be receiving prescription medications for their illnesses, said Dekker – an element that has helped to delay the deal.

“This medication is to go to specific hostages and Hamas has voiced concerns that perhaps it could be traced, for Israel to find out where they [the captives] are,” she said.

Families of the captives are demanding proof that these medicines will reach their loved ones, said Dekker.

The Israeli government, meanwhile, has been party to this agreement because it wants to show that it is taking serious action to get the captives out, she added.

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The aid for Gaza is also desperately needed, with most of the enclave’s 2.3 million people displaced, and at risk of starvation. The Palestinian population faces “famine-like conditions”, Hani Mahmood, reporting from Rafah on the border with Egypt, reported.

The deal will see humanitarian aid delivered to civilians in “the most affected and vulnerable areas”, In all parts of the strip, heavy Israeli bombardment continued overnight

New deal due?

Amid the worsening situation in Gaza, reports suggest that the push for another truce between Israel and Hamas may be picking up momentum once more.

On Tuesday, the White House said that US Middle East Envoy Brett McGurk has been in Doha in recent days discussing a possible agreement that could free the Israeli captives.

National security spokesperson John Kirby told reporters that McGurk was involved in “very serious and intensive discussions” with the Qataris about another deal.

“We are hopeful it will bear fruit and bear fruit soon,” he said.

At the same time, Israel stepped up its air strikes on the south of Gaza on Wednesday.

“It was the most difficult and intense night in [the southern city of] Khan Yunis since the start of the war,” said the Hamas government, whose health ministry reported 81 deaths across the Palestinian territory.

Over the past decade and a half, I have attended many meetings and conferences, and met many people in Western governments, think tanks and academia who have been concerned about the rise of autocracies across the world. Many of them believe that authoritarian tendencies are the biggest threat to the liberal world order and rules-based system.

But I beg to differ. I believe the biggest threat to the liberal world order comes from liberal democracies and not their autocratic nemeses. That is because there is a widening chasm between the values Western governments proclaim to uphold and their actual conduct. That has triggered a credibility crisis that threatens to unravel the liberal world order.

What we say about our value system and how we project our foreign policy objectives in our statements is important, but even more important is what we do afterwards. People have eyes and ears, and when what they see is the opposite of what they hear, they lose trust.

This is what is happening now with Western rhetoric and actions in relation to Israel and Palestine. This mismatch between what is said and what is being done is, of course, nothing new.

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I come from a region where we have suffered immensely as a result of the great liberal promise of the West; our neighbour Afghanistan faced disaster not once, but twice because of it. As we moved from one war to another after the 9/11 attacks in the US, the Western-made liberal order started to lose its credibility faster than the West had time to realise. It left behind a debris of chaos, bloodshed and broken promises of “democratisation” and “emancipation”. The “others” started questioning the Western narrative and its legitimacy.

Wars leave behind devastation that persists long after the fighting and funding for “reconstruction” end and long after the media spotlight, the fervent hashtags and impassioned posts move on, as the world’s collective conscience loses interest. The aftershocks are felt in the geography where the wars are conducted for generations, as people continue to experience a conflict’s intended and unintended consequences.

I was in office when the Russian war on Ukraine started and I experienced firsthand how the US, the EU, the UK and other Western countries tried to convince many in the developing world that they must not stand on the side of aggression, that they must not be “on the wrong side of history”.

As the UN Security Council could not pass any resolution because of Russia’s veto, the West expended a great deal of political capital to bring resolution after resolution in the General Assembly in support of Ukraine. It aimed to show the world that Russia was using its veto power against the global consensus and was in fact isolated on the world stage.

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And then came the war in Gaza. I watched with incredulity when pleas echoed from Gaza in the form of resolutions brought forward to the UN Security Council urging an end to the bloodshed and asking for a humanitarian ceasefire only to be vetoed by the US.

As the UN pleaded for action – calling Gaza a “graveyard for children” and reporting that more UN aid workers had died in the last few months in Gaza than in any other conflict – the West, which had historically been a champion of multilateralism, did nothing. In fact, it came in the way of those who were trying to stop the indiscriminate killing of civilians.

This forced UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to [invoke](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/7/un-secretary-general-invokes-article-99-on-gaza) in early December Article 99 – used only at times when international peace and security are threatened. Even then, the West took no action; the US [vetoed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/antonio-guterres-urges-un-security-council-to-push-for-gaza-ceasefire) a subsequent resolution for a humanitarian ceasefire at the UNSC and then [voted](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/13/unga-decisively-backs-gaza-ceasefire-resolution-how-your-country-voted) against a nonbinding resolution at the General Assembly supported by 153 countries. The UK abstained in both votes. Let that sink in.

What makes this more unpalatable than Russia’s veto at the Security Council is that unlike Russia, the US and UK sanction people and countries on human rights violations and call for interventions on human rights grounds. How can the rest of the world have trust in the West’s self-declared “value-based leadership” when countries like the US and UK abdicate their responsibility and side with the aggressor?

This obvious hypocrisy is reminiscent of the tale of the emperor’s new clothes: Everyone can see Western rhetoric is naked.

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The West talks about commitment to human rights and democratic values, while at the same time offering full diplomatic cover to the state of Israel and ensuring its impunity in massacring as many Palestinians as it desires in the pursuit of its official, declared goal of complete extermination of the Palestinian people.

In supporting Israel and enabling it to kill tens of thousands of civilians, the majority of them women and children in the name of “self-defence”, Western countries are putting themselves at the opposite end of the values and principles of multilateralism and respect for human rights they have put mammoth effort in promoting in the past. They are going against the very fundamentals on which the United Nations was built.

I believe in the commonality of our values, I believe that the West has much to celebrate in its human rights and development records, but I also know that the West has shown glaring disregard for these principles outside of its own geography.

Anyone concerned with the US’s global leadership or retention of its status as the leader of “the free world” should certainly be asking themselves why it has decided to isolate itself on the world stage and why it is willing to pay such a high diplomatic price that will have reputational and credibility repercussions for decades.

Washington’s stance today would not only undermine efforts to promote it as the only reliable world power, but would also sabotage its ability to play the role of a peace builder in the future.

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If the US wants to save its global reputation, it should first and foremost stop standing in the way of Security Council resolutions demanding a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. It should also stop opposing General Assembly resolutions that commit to a two-state solution and condemn Israeli settlements; both of these elements are already part of US-stated policy. Finally, it needs to respond to the appeals of UN institutions and stop obstructing its actions.

Those who claim the UN has failed in the wake of this crisis are grotesquely wrong. The UN continues to unambiguously report what is happening on the ground and call for global action. Whether it is the UNGA, the voice of the collective conscience of the world, or the secretary-general, or the WHO chief or the UNICEF chief – they have all made incredible efforts to get the world to act and stop the violence.

I have served in government long enough to know that as officials, we often make the mistake of thinking our job is to maintain positions on certain issues that our countries have historically held. But this is the wrong way to go about building policy. Our job should be to hold principles not positions. Leadership requires strength to stand on the side of what is right not on the side of historical positions.

US and Israeli press reported late on Monday that Israel is optimistic that it could conclude a deal with the help of the US. The plan comes against a backdrop of intensified combat in southern Gaza as well as [increasing pressure](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/22/gaza-hostages-relatives-storm-israeli-parliament-as-protests-intensify) on the Israeli government to find a deal to bring the captives home.US website Axios quoted Israeli officials as saying that the proposal has been presented to Hamas through Qatari and Egyptian mediators. It includes a two-month truce during which all Israeli detainees in Gaza will be released.

Israel’s Channel 13 reported that the principles of the deal consist of three to four stages of captive release. Meanwhile, the Israeli military would withdraw from some areas of the enclave, but without ending the war.

US Middle East envoy Brett McGurk is in Cairo and is expected to travel across the region for “active” discussions on a possible hostage release deal.

White House spokesperson John Kirby said Washington would support a longer humanitarian pause in Gaza to ensure the release and for aid to be brought in. The conversations are very sober and serious about trying to get another hostage deal in place,” Kirby told a regular White House briefing, adding that the discussions included how long of a pause would be needed to get the hostages out.

Qatar also said mediation efforts were ongoing.

“We are engaged in serious negotiations and discussions between the two sides of the crisis in Gaza,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari told a press conference in Doha.

“Mediation efforts between the Palestinians and Israel are still ongoing and will not stop, regardless of the circumstances on the ground,” he added.

Phases

Reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, Al Jazeera’s Stefanie Dekker said that the proposal included plans to release captives in phases, starting with women and those over 60.

A second phase would see a handover of female soldiers and men deemed as non-soldiers by Hamas. The third phase would include male soldiers and bodies remaining inside Gaza.

Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers could be redeployed away from some urban areas to allow Palestinians to return home.

“Of course, the question is what do they have to return to,”

In Israel, the families of the captives have been applying increasing pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to agree a deal. Amid the ongoing bombardment of Gaza, they worry that time is running out to bring their relatives home alive.

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On Monday, dozens of relatives [stormed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/22/gaza-hostages-relatives-storm-israeli-parliament-as-protests-intensify) a parliamentary committee meeting, demanding that the government seek a deal to win their loved ones’ release.

Stuttering

A weeklong truce in November saw the release of about 100 of the 240 or so captives taken into Gaza on October 7 when Hamas launched a surprise attack inside Israel. Efforts to put another pause or even ceasefire in place have been stuttering since.

But Israel is facing mounting impatience as it ignores calls to scale back its onslaught.

The EU on Monday gave Israel’s Foreign Minister Israel Katz short shrift as he pitched the construction of an artificial island in the Mediterranean near the Gaza coast as a hub for the enclave’s commercial relations with the rest of the world.

But facing political pressure and demands from hardline coalition partners, Netanyahu has repeatedly vowed to press ahead with the offensive until Hamas is crushed.

The reports of the truce negotiations come amid an intensification of fighting in southern Gaza, with the hundreds of civilian casualties adding to the death toll in the enclave, which local authorities now say tops 25,000.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said early on Tuesday that its headquarters in Khan Younis had been shelled.

Writing on X, the NGO said that the shelling coincided with “intense gunfire from Israeli drones, resulting in injuries among internally displaced individuals who sought safety on our premises”.

UN agencies and aid groups have sounded the alarm about the growing threat of disease and famine in Gaza, where 1.7 million people are estimated to have been displaced from their homes.

That makes a cessation of fighting ever more urgent, and there will be hope that alongside the pressure from the families, recent troop losses could give added momentum to efforts towards dialling down the conflict.

On Tuesday, the Israeli military reported it lost at least 21 soldiers in one of the deadliest attacks on its troops since the war began three months ago.“Over the past day, troops carried out an extensive operation during which they encircled [Khan Younis](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/1/22/palestinians-flee-khan-younis-as-israel-steps-up-ground-operation) and deepened the operation in the area,”“Ground troops engaged in close-quarters combat, directed [air] strikes and used intelligence to coordinate fire, resulting in the elimination of dozens of terrorists,” it said of the attacks on Gaza’s second-largest city. “from an extreme shortage of food, water and medical supplies”.

Khan Younis was “designated as a safe zone for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who evacuated from the northern parts and Gaza City at the start of the war”, Mahmoud said, adding that it “is now a scene of much suffering and devastation”.

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Israeli forces killed at least 65 people in attacks on Khan Younis on Monday, according to medical sources.

Palestinian officials said at least 25,490 people have been killed and 63,000 wounded in Israeli attacks on Gaza since October 7. The death toll from Hamas’s attacks in southern Israel stands at 1,139.

Hospitals under attack

Gaza’s Ministry of Health said [Nasser Hospital and El Amal City Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/23/israels-war-on-gaza-list-of-key-events-day-109) in Khan Younis, among the few partially functioning hospitals in the territory, were under “extreme danger” from Israeli bombardment.

“The buildings of the Nasser Medical Complex are exposed to shrapnel, endangering the lives of patients, staff and displaced people,” the ministry said on its Telegram channel on Tuesday.

“The Israeli occupation places Nasser Medical Complex and El Amal Hospital in Khan Younis in extreme danger,” it said, calling for “urgent intervention” to safeguard both facilities.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society, which operates El Amal Hospital, on Tuesday said Israeli drones were targeting anyone moving around the facility.

It said its ambulances were unable to reach the injured and a civilian was killed by Israeli gunfire at the entrance of the hospital, noting “gunfire and repeated targeting of displaced individuals” in posts on X.

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Leo Cans, the head of mission for Palestine with the international medical charity Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF), said about 20 percent of healthcare workers were still working in Nasser Hospital with most having to flee for their own safety and that of their families.

“This is a strategy that has been used by the Israeli military to scare people, to terrorise the healthcare workers for them to leave without having to shut down the hospital,” Cans told Al Jazeera.

The Israeli military has repeatedly asserted that Hamas fighters operate in and around hospitals, which medical staff and Palestinian health officials have denied

Deadliest day for Israel

An Israeli military spokesperson said 21 soldiers were killed on Monday in an explosion in central Gaza when two buildings they had mined for demolition collapsed after Palestinian fighters fired grenades at a nearby tank.

Three soldiers were killed in a separate attack on Monday in southern Gaza, taking the total killed in a single day to 24. At least 217 soldiers have been killed since the ground offensive began.

“Yesterday, we experienced one of our most difficult days since the war erupted,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday. “In the name of our heroes, for the sake of our lives, we will not stop fighting until absolute victory.”

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said the war would determine Israel’s future “for decades to come”. “The fall of the fighters is a requirement to achieve the goals of the war,” he said.

The day’s death toll comes at a time when Israel is beginning to see stirrings of discontent with Netanyahu’s war strategy.

Last week, a member of Netanyahu’s war cabinet, former military chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot, whose soldier son was killed in the ground offensive in Gaza, said the campaign had yet to achieve its aims of dismantling Hamas and there was no hope of [freeing the captives held in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/19/israeli-minister-says-only-a-deal-can-free-captives-as-rifts-split-cabinet) in a military operation.

Under the terms of a deal reached in the 1990s, Israel collects tax on behalf of the Palestinians and makes monthly transfers to the PA pending the approval of the Ministry of Finance.

While the PA was ousted from the Gaza Strip in 2007, many of its public sector employees in the enclave kept their jobs and continued to be paid with transferred tax revenues.

Weeks after the Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7, Israel took the decision to withhold payments earmarked for those employees in the Gaza Strip on the grounds that they could fall into the hands of Hamas.

Now, Israel says it will instead send the frozen funds to Norway. “The frozen funds will not be transferred to the Palestinian Authority, but will remain in the hands of a third country,” the Israeli prime minister’s office said in a statement released on Sunday.

Why does Israel control Palestinian tax revenue?

The system by which taxes and customs duties are collected by Israel on behalf of the PA and transferred to the authority on a monthly basis was agreed in a 1994 accord.

Known as the Paris Protocol, the accord was meant to manage the economic relationship between Israel and the Palestinian territories it occupied until a final peace settlement was reached between the two states.

Approved in the wake of the optimism generated by the [Oslo Accords](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/13/what-were-oslo-accords-israel-palestinians), which were publicly ratified by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat at the White House in September 1993, this protocol was supposed to end within five years.

However, 30 years later, the financial settlement continues to give the Israeli state what the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has called “a disproportionate influence on the collection of Palestinian fiscal revenue, leading to deficiencies in the structure and collection of customs duties resulting from direct and indirect importing into Palestine”.

How much money is Israel withholding?

The tax revenues collected by Israel on behalf of the PA amount to around $188m each month, and account for 64 percent of the authority’s total revenue.

A large portion of this is used to pay the salaries of the estimated 150,000 PA employees working in the West Bank and Gaza, despite it having no jurisdiction over the Strip.

On November 3, the Israel security cabinet voted to withhold a total of $275m in Palestinian tax revenues, including cash collected for prior months that was still with Tel Aviv.

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“The PA is not clear about how much of the tax revenues go to Gaza – it’s a black box,” Rabeh Morrar, director of research at the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute-MAS, told Al Jazeera. “Sometimes they say 30 percent, sometimes 40, sometimes 50.”

Under terms set by Israel’s cabinet on Sunday, the monthly tax revenue previously allocated to PA staff in Gaza will instead be transferred to a Norwegian-based trust account. However, that money cannot be released by the fund to pay workers in Gaza without permission from Israel.

The only member of the Israeli government to oppose plans to send the funds to Norway was far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who insisted that the initiative “does not guarantee that the money will not reach the Nazis from Gaza”.

How does Israel exercise ‘disproportionate influence’ over the PA?

The Israeli state has often used its control of the PA’s tax revenues as a means to blackmail and punish the authority.

In January 2023, for instance, the newly-formed Israeli government – seen as the most far-right coalition government in the country’s history – decided to withhold $39m in tax revenues from the PA following the authority’s decision to ask the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to rule on the legality of Israel’s decades-long occupation.

“Israeli blackmailing of our tax revenues will not stop us from continuing our political and diplomatic struggle,” said Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh at the time after Israel’s security cabinet had earlier described the PA’s ICJ move as a “decision to wage political and legal war against the State of Israel”.

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What effect has Israel’s withdrawal of public money had on Palestine?

“The PA owes billions in internal debt to local banks, hospitals, medical companies and the private sector,” said Morrar. “There are also debts [owed], for example, for privately owned buildings rented out by the government. They have not been able to pay those back.”

In 2021, the [PA’s financial crisis](https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/12/2/palestinian-authority-struggles-to-pay-public-employees), exacerbated by Israel’s periodic refusal to pay the PA its total tax revenue share pre-October 7, prompted it to reduce all salaries by 25 percent.

Since November, when Israel decided to freeze funds earmarked for Gaza, the PA has refused to accept any money at all in protest.

Against the backdrop of Israel’s continued bombardment of the Gaza Strip, which has killed more than 25,000 Palestinians since October 7, and as a result of its decision to refuse Israel’s terms, the PA has not been able to pay employee salaries for a month and a half.

While some reports have emerged that the PA may be about to relent and agree to receive partial payments from Israel, which would release some much-needed funds to many of its cash-strapped staff, the occupied West Bank remains at the mercy of Israeli diktats.

Indeed, Israel suspended the work permits of some 130,000 day workers from the occupied West Bank after the war began. And a total of 355 Palestinians have been killed in the territory, including in occupied East Jerusalem, by Israeli forces and Israeli settlers since October 7.

In November, the Bank of Israel put the war’s “[gross effects](https://www.boi.org.il/en/communication-and-publications/press-releases/a27-11-23/)” on Israel at 198 billion shekels ($53bn) and pared back its estimates for economic growth to 2 percent per year for 2023 and 2024, down from 2.3 percent and 2.8 percent.

In December, Israel’s Finance Ministry said that the war will likely cost Israel approximately $13.8bn this year if its high-intensity phase concludes during the first quarter of 2024.

In the midst of that, experts are watching to see how business is doing on the ground.

One of the industries that have continued to do well is the high-tech sector, Israel’s fastest-growing area for several years, which today accounts for close to 20 percent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) and 14 percent of jobs.

Since the Israeli startup scene exploded in the 1990s, Israel has established itself as the largest tech centre in the world, second only to Silicon Valley. More than 500 multinational corporations – from Google to Apple, IBM to Meta, and Microsoft to Intel Corp – operate in Israel.

And while there are concerns if companies would continue investing in a nation at war, for the moment at least, there’s no evidence to say that’s a real threat.

Show of support

Within one week of October 7, more than 220 venture capital firms, including Bain Capital Ventures, 8VC, Bessemer Venture Partners, and GGV Capital, signed a [public statement](https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vTc_OIs8MSVxqz0To2diHiDd_UIQBg_wBHLnmIQNtoTRQaFrC2ZcUWiOqR7dHMe2KnfnU-Bi7n-1XpW/pub) to express solidarity with Israel and called on investors worldwide to continue to support its tech ecosystem.

From December 17-20, dozens of senior executives from US-based venture capital, tech and private equity firms took part in the Israel Tech Mission, entailing meetings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv between these executives and top Israeli government officials. Essentially, it was a high-profile delegation showing the Israeli tech sector support amid this war.

Ron Miasnik is an investor for Bain Capital Ventures who co-organised the Israel Tech Mission with David Siegel, the CEO of Meetup.com.

“We are longtime investors in the Israeli startup ecosystem, and have made it a priority to visit the region and meet with teams there to continue to support stability and economic prosperity in the area,” Miasnik told Al Jazeera. “In the long term, we believe in the resilience of the Israeli startup ecosystem and are committed to not only continuing but deepening our focus on the area,” he added.

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Hillel Fuld, a tech columnist and startup adviser based in Beit Shemesh, Israel, pointed out that in December, US chipmaker Intel Corp [confirmed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/26/israel-grants-intel-3-2bn-for-largest-ever-25bn-chip-plant-investment) its plans to build a $25bn chipmaking factory in southern Israel – a development hailed by Netanyahu as the “largest investment ever” in Israeli history. With a $3.2bn grant from the Israeli government, Intel’s planned investment is a big boost to Israel’s tech sector amid this war.

In the final quarter of last year, Israeli startups managed to raise $1.5bn and “out of those deals, high-risk ‘seed’ funding was $220m in 31 rounds”, Fuld said.

Palo Alto Networks, a Santa Clara, California-headquartered multinational cybersecurity company founded by American-Israeli entrepreneur Nir Zuk, has a history of acquisitions in Israel. On October 29, it acquired Dig Security for roughly $300m, then it acquired Talon Cyber Security for $615m.

But the picture is slightly mixed, said Benjamin Bental, a principal researcher and economics policy programme chair at the Jerusalem-based Taub Center for Social Policy Studies. “When one looks at the number of players, one sees a decline. When one looks at the sums invested, one sees basically stability, meaning that those who stay invest more,” he said.

Israeli officials face the challenge of needing to restore confidence and a sense of security – which will not prove easy – to boost investments.

“Beyond a clear military and political outcome both in the Gaza Strip and along the Lebanese border, and a repatriation of the hostages, this requires a clear and goal-oriented economic policy. It is not yet clear how this will eventually be addressed,” Bental told Al Jazeera.

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Tens of thousands of people have been displaced in the last few weeks on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border as Israeli troops and Hezbollah fighters have fired missiles at each other.

Tourism nosedives

Perhaps the sector of the Israeli economy that has suffered the most amid this war is tourism which accounted for [2.6](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/b11b5fe7-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/b11b5fe7-en) percent of GDP before the pandemic in 2019, before falling to 1.1 percent in 2021. Both foreign and domestic tourism in Israel have flatlined since the start of the war.

Across Israel, restaurants and stores remain empty. Soon after Hamas’s incursion into southern Israel and the eruption of the war on Gaza, a long list of airlines [cancelled or suspended](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/10/which-airlines-paused-or-cancelled-flights-to-israel-after-hamas-attacks) the majority of their flights to Tel Aviv, and many tourists cancelled their plans to visit Israel.

Nonetheless, some major airlines such as Lufthansa and some of its subsidiaries, including Swiss International Air Lines and Austrian Airlines, resumed their flights to Israel earlier this month.

Prior to Operation Al Aqsa Flood, visitors to Israel numbered above 300,000 each month. In November, that figure reportedly sank to 39,000.

“War is not only tragic, it’s also expensive. The impact on tourism, for example, is a very real one and there is no ignoring it,” Fuld told Al Jazeera.

Hard-hit construction industry

Construction, accounting for 14 percent of Israel’s GDP, has taken a huge hit since this war began. Across Israel, construction projects have been paused since October and Israel indefinitely froze worker permits for Palestinians who make up [65-70](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/palestinian-construction-workers-in-israel-caught-between-indispensable-and-disposable/) percent of the workforce in Israel’s construction sector.

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Consequently, industry in Israel and the West Bank’s economy have taken a huge hit. Of the 110,000 Palestinians who had permits to work either in Israel-proper or on illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, most were working in construction.

The gap has not been filled by Israeli workers, given how the reservists have been called to fight in the war, nor by foreign workers who have, in large numbers, fled Israel amid this conflict.

In November, the Israel Builders Association said that Israel’s construction industry was operating at roughly 15 percent of its pre-October 7 capacity. A month later 8,000-10,000 Palestinian workers were permitted to resume work on Israeli settlements in the West Bank – a decision the government made after it came under significant pressure from business and factory owners hit hard by “supply shocks”.

But that’s far from sufficient and to fill the gap, Israel plans to bring in approximately 70,000 construction workers from China, [India](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/1/24/undeterred-by-gaza-war-thousands-of-indians-turn-up-for-jobs-in-israel), Moldova and Sri Lanka.

The Gaza war’s ripple effects throughout the greater Middle East are also negatively impacting Israel’s economy.

Israel imports diamonds, cars, petroleum, and broadcasting equipment, among other things, goods that come via the Red Sea. The recent Houthi missile and drone attacks in this body of water in retaliation for Israel’s attack on Gaza have not only disrupted global trade but also impacted Israel’s imports. Many of Israel’s imports from Asia are now being rerouted around Africa, bumping up costs.

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The road ahead

Roughly 20 percent of the Israeli public reports their household income being hit to a “large” or “very large” extent since the start of their country’s war on Gaza.

In a recent survey, aid organisation “Latet” (“to give”) found that more than 45 percent of the public fear that economic hardship awaits them either later on in this war or after the war finishes. What is clear is that those Israeli families who were already living in poverty or who qualified as food insecure prior to October 7 will suffer the most from the economic problems stemming from this war.

“It’s hard to know what’s going on in the minds of our politicians, but [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu and his government are facing unprecedented global diplomatic pressure to end the war and the economics of the war is playing less of a role in the decision-making,

At least 30 bodies were found in “black plastic bags” near the Hamad school in northern Gaza, with Palestinian officials accusing Israeli soldiers of killing the civilians “execution-style”.The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called for an international investigation on Wednesday into what it described as Israeli “massacres”, demanding that a team visit Gaza “to find out the truth and dimensions of the genocide to which our people are exposed”.

Witnesses told Al Jazeera that the deceased were blindfolded, tortured and killed before being placed in the bags.

“As we were cleaning, we came across a pile of rubble inside the schoolyard. We were shocked to find out that the dozens of dead bodies were buried under this pile,” one witness told  Al Jazeera.

“The moment we opened the black plastic bags, we found the bodies, already decomposed. They were blindfolded, legs and hands tied,” the witness added.

“The plastic cuffs were used on their hands and legs and cloths straps around their eyes and heads.”

Hamas said human rights organisations should “document” the mass grave.

“This heinous crime and others committed by the neo-Nazis against our Palestinian people will remain a curse that haunts them, and the day will come when they will be held accountable for their brutality and crimes that exceed the most horrific violations known to humanity in our modern era,” the Palestinian armed group said in a statement on Telegram.

Al Jazeera’s Tareq Abu Azzoum, reporting from Rafah in southern Gaza, said the “condition of these bodies ranges from severely decomposed to mere skeletal remains … making it hard to identify them”.

“But people still come to the site, searching for closure in this place of tragedy,” he added.

Palestinian human rights lawyer Diana Buttu told Al Jazeera on Thursday that this incident was “precisely [why Israel was taken to the ICJ](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/26/what-has-the-icj-ordered-israel-to-do-on-gaza-war-and-whats-next)“.

Buttu added that the discovery of the mass grave was “clearly a war crime” and urged that it must be investigated.

The International Court of Justice has ordered Israel to take [“all measures within its power”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/27/icj-ruling-in-gaza-genocide-case-renews-calls-to-end-israel-arms-transfers) to avoid Palestinian casualties and acts that could amount to “genocide”.

The Foreign Ministry said the discovery of the mass grave was evidence of the forms of “[genocide committed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/27/icj-ruling-in-gaza-genocide-case-renews-calls-to-end-israel-arms-transfers) by the occupation forces against our people in the Gaza Strip without accountability or oversight”.

Palestinian detainees are routinely abused by Israeli forces in the enclave, subjected to weeks of imprisonment in unknown locations, beatings and verbal abuse.

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Last month, a United Nations human rights official called for an end to [Israel’s mistreatment of Palestinian detainees](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/19/un-says-palestinians-detained-by-israeli-forces-humiliated-beaten) and said he had met men who had been held for weeks and were beaten and blindfolded.

“These are men who were detained by the Israeli security forces in unknown locations for between 30 to 55 days,” Ajith Sunghay, a UN human rights representative, told reporters by video link from Gaza, who met released detainees in the enclave.

“There are reports of men who are subsequently released, but only in diapers without any adequate clothing in this cold weather,” he said, adding that it was not clear why they were made to wear diapers but that “they were clearly visibly shocked and even shaken when I met them”.

Several videos shared by the Israeli army since the war began show hundreds of Palestinian men stripped to their underwear, sitting outdoors in the cold, sometimes blindfolded. In a few videos, women and children were also seen.

Much of the densely populated Gaza Strip has been destroyed after four months of intense Israeli bombardments and ground offensive.

Gaza’s health authorities have said at least 26,900 Palestinians have been killed since the war began on October 7, following Hamas attacks in Israel that killed at least 1,139 people.

“the results of their unflagging support” for Israel, including its human rights implications

“disputes over foreign policy are considered nonjusticiable political questions” and fall outside his jurisdiction.

“There are rare cases in which the preferred outcome is inaccessible to the Court. This is one of those cases. The Court is bound by precedent and the division of our coordinate branches of government to abstain from exercising jurisdiction in this matter,” he wrote.

But White added that, as the [International Court of Justice (ICJ) said](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/26/world-reacts-to-icj-ruling-on-south-africas-genocide-case-against-israel) in a provisional ruling last month, “it is plausible that Israel’s conduct amounts to genocide.”

“This Court implores Defendants to examine the results of their unflagging support of the military siege against the Palestinians in Gaza.”

Despite Wednesday’s decision, the plaintiffs and their supporters said the court’s decision to [hear their arguments](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/26/us-court-hears-civil-case-accusing-biden-of-complicity-in-gaza) marked an important step. A hearing was held last Friday in California, and Palestinians testified about the dire situation in Gaza.

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“It is important that the court recognized the United States is providing unconditional support to Israel’s ongoing genocide in Gaza and that a federal court heard Palestinian voices for the first time,” Mohammed Monadel Herzallah, a Palestinian American with family in Gaza, said in the CCR statement. He was one of the plaintiffs in the case.

“But we are still devastated that the court would not take the important step to stop the Biden administration from continuing to support the slaughter of the Palestinian people,” Herzallah continued.

“Currently, my family lacks food, medicine and the most basic necessities for survival. As Palestinians, we know this is a hard struggle, and as plaintiffs, we will continue to do everything in our power to save our people’s lives.”

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Witnesses insist there were no attempts to arrest the men and instead they were shot as they slept. One of the men was being treated for a spinal injury after being paralysed in an Israeli air strike on a cemetery in Jenin in November. A hospital spokesperson said that although the hospital has been attacked many times before, this was the first time an assassination had taken place on the hospital grounds.

However, this has happened elsewhere in the West Bank before. In 2015, undercover Israeli special forces soldiers i[nvaded a hospital in Hebron](https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/6466.html), arrested an injured Palestinian, killed his cousin and threatened hospital staff at gunpoint.

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These undercover forces are known colloquially as the “mustara’bim”, an Arabic word that literally means “those who live among Arabs”. In this context, it is used for Israeli agents who embed themselves in Palestinian communities or disguise themselves as Palestinians to collect intelligence or conduct operations.

[Since 1948](https://www.newarab.com/analysis/mistaarvim-israels-notorious-undercover-agents), this unit has been made up of agents, usually from Jewish-Arab backgrounds, who are trained to speak Palestinian Arabic, understand Palestinian customs and dress to blend in. They commonly infiltrate protests to create chaos and an atmosphere of paranoia, but they also occasionally participate in special operations like the one in the Jenin hospital.

In December, a Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF) [report](https://www.msf.org/palestine-increase-israeli-attacks-against-civilians-and-healthcare-jenin) noted that there was a “staggering” increase in attacks against healthcare services in Jenin, including the obstruction of ambulances and tear-gassing of medical facilities. Access to hospitals has become so difficult that Palestinians in the Jenin refugee camp have had to establish “trauma stabilisation points” – makeshift clinics where medical volunteers conduct first aid and severe trauma treatment.

Other areas of the West Bank have also seen deliberate disruptions to healthcare services. There has been several incidents in which Palestinian ambulances have been prevented from reaching critically wounded people and medical staff have been detained for long hours. The increase in the number of checkpoints and road closures across the West Bank since October has only made this worse.

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The MSF report details what Palestinians have long known: Far from isolated incidents, the Israeli regime’s attacks on Palestinian healthcare are systematic and are part of a wider policy to disrupt Palestinian access to medical care and life-saving treatment.

Indeed, even before the genocide, Gaza’s health system had been in gradual decline as a result of the Israeli blockade on the strip, which, among many things, [severely limited imports](https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1363-15-years-of-blockade-leaves-gaza-facing-a-perpetual-health-crisis) of medical equipment and medications. As a result, many vital and life-saving treatments, such as chemotherapy, were not available. Palestinians in Gaza were forced to apply for (and were often denied) permits for such life-saving treatment in Jerusalem and elsewhere.

Before the beginning of the genocide, the health sector in Gaza and elsewhere in occupied Palestine was already in a state of perpetual crisis. Now, the Israeli regime’s targeting of Palestinian healthcare is even more blatant.

Tlaleng Mofokeng, United Nations special rapporteur on the right to health, said that in Gaza, [“the practice of medicine is under attack”.](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/12/gaza-un-expert-condemns-unrelenting-war-health-system-amid-airstrikes)  This is not an exaggeration as there have been well over 600 attacks on medical facilities since October.

In November, Gaza’s main hospital, al-Shifa, was [subjected to a brutal siege](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/15/israels-raid-on-al-shifa-hospital-heres-what-you-should-know), in which sections of the hospital were shelled, staff were abducted and interrogated, and fuel was denied for life-saving machinery.

The Israeli regime claimed that the hospital was sitting on top of a Hamas command centre, a claim that they failed to provide evidence for and was widely disproved even by mainstream media outlets.

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After the siege, the World Health Organization visited the site and called the hospital a “[death zone](https://www.who.int/news/item/18-11-2023-who-leads-very-high-risk-joint-humanitarian-mission-to-al-shifa-hospital-in-gaza)”. Most hospitals in Gaza, including al-Shifa, have also become mass graves with makeshift cemeteries being dug within the grounds of the medical facilities because burying the dead outside is too dangerous. In northern Gaza, there are no functioning hospitals left. In the south, [all the remaining hospitals are under intense attack](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/22/israel-batters-gazas-khan-younis-by-land-air-sea-in-bloodiest-bombing) by Israeli ground forces and bombardments.

Under international law, hospitals and medical facilities are considered protected spaces, and attacking them is considered a war crime. But this doesn’t matter much to the Israeli regime, which has enjoyed decades of impunity for such crimes. It also doesn’t seem to matter much to many mainstream media spaces, which seldom mention that these attacks are war crimes. Indeed their reporting on the Jenin hospital raid fails to mention this and fails to mention the context of systematic Israeli attacks on Palestinian healthcare.

The termination of aid came swiftly after Israel accused 12 UNRWA staff of involvement in the October 7 Hamas attack inside Israel. The UN has taken action against UNRWA staff linked to the attack, but has voiced its opposition to the defunding.

“As the war in Gaza is being pursued unabated, and at the time the International Court of Justice calls for more humanitarian assistance, it is the time to reinforce and not to weaken UNRWA,” Lazzarini said in a statement on Thursday.

“If the funding remains suspended, we will most likely be forced to shut down our operations by end of February not only in Gaza but also across the region.”

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Israeli allegations still not verified

The Palestinians have accused Israel of falsifying information to tarnish UNRWA in Gaza, which employs 13,000 people, who run schools, healthcare clinics and other essential services. Experts have said the Israeli allegations remain unverified.

UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday that Israel has not yet shared the intelligence dossier with the UN.

Yasmine Ahmed, the UK director of Human Rights Watch (HRW), told Al Jazeera that HRW is not aware that the UN, or in any of the states that fund UNRWA, have seen any written documentation of evidence that establishes what has been alleged by Israel.

“That is not to say that that has not been provided,” she added.

Ahmed said that HRW has asked the UK government what written evidence they saw of the allegations that led them to suspend the funding.

Here is more about the UNRWA and how critical it is to Palestinians, particularly in Gaza.

Why was UNRWA created?

UNRWA was created by the UN General Assembly on December 8, 1949, to provide basic support including food, healthcare and education to tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees. More than 700,000 Palestinians were forcefully displaced leading up to Israel’s creation in 1948, which Palestinians remember as [the Nakba,](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/23/the-nakba-did-not-start-or-end-in-1948) or “the catastrophe”.

The UNRWA operations are spread across the occupied West Bank – including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

What does it do?

UNRWA supports some six million Palestinian refugees who live within and outside Palestine. It is like a quasi-state providing direct services, such as schools, primary health centres and other social services. It also provides loans to Palestinians.

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However, it does not run refugee camps, as the maintenance of law and order and security are not part of its mandate.

UNRWA operates separately from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which was also established in 1949. While UNHCR provides temporary protection and assistance to refugees, it does not have a mandate over Palestinian refugees within the UNRWA fields of operations.

Although it provides humanitarian aid to Palestinians, the UNRWA body does not have a mandate to resettle Palestine refugees, which Israel opposes.

In 2021, about 545,000 children were enrolled in UNRWA schools; Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP) assistance reached 398,044 beneficiaries; and 1.7 million received critical humanitarian aid.

Why is it important for Palestinians?

UNRWA helps Palestinians in multiple ways, providing them with multiple resources.

Since Israel launched its war on Gaza on [October 7](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/14/on-october-7-gaza-broke-out-of-prison), approximately a million Palestinians from Gaza, or nearly 45 percent of the enclave’s population, have been sheltering in UNRWA schools, clinics and other public buildings. UNRWA schools and buildings operate beyond capacity to provide shelter to internally displaced Palestinians who have very limited safe spaces to go to.

Nearly the entire population in Gaza now relies on UNRWA for basic necessities, including food, water and hygiene supplies.

The UN agency employs thousands of Palestinians in its schools, healthcare centres and other social programmes providing much-needed employment opportunities to Palestinians living under Israeli occupation for the past seven decades.

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More than 30,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and in vast refugee camps in neighbouring Arab countries work for the UNRWA. Its services in Gaza have increased in importance since 2005, when Israel and Egypt imposed a blockade causing an economic collapse with one of the highest unemployment rates in the world.

In December 2023, the International Labour Organisation and the Palestinian Statistics Bureau determined that at least 66 percent of employment was lost in Gaza since the war broke. UNRWA helps curb the unemployment gap among Palestinians by providing them with employment.

Who are the biggest donors to UNRWA?

In 2022, the UNRWA’s top government donors were the US, Germany, the European Union, Sweden, Norway, Japan, France, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland and Turkey.

The US, Germany and Switzerland have [suspended funding](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/28/which-countries-have-cut-funding-to-unrwa-and-why) to UNRWA following the allegations.

The European Union (EU) announced on Monday that it would review whether it could continue to fund UNRWA in light of the allegations. However, the body does not foresee any additional funding for the organisation until the end of February.

Norway, one of the top donors, urged fellow donor countries to reflect on the wider consequences of the funding cuts.

“UNWRA is a vital lifeline for 1.5 million refugees in Gaza. Now more than ever, the agency needs international support. To avoid collectively punishing millions of people, we need to distinguish between what individuals may have done and what UNRWA stands for,” Espen Barth Eide, the Norwegian foreign minister, told Reuters on Wednesday.

How many camps and Palestinian refugees does UNRWA have?

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* In Gaza, 1,476,706 Palestinians are registered as refugees in eight Palestinian refugee camps.
* In the occupied West Bank, about a quarter of 871,537 registered refugees live in 19 refugee camps, while others live in towns and villages.
* There are nine official and three unofficial camps in Syria, where 575,234 registered Palestine refugees live.
* 489,292 Palestinian refugees live in Lebanon’s 12 refugee camps.
* 2,307,011 refugees live in Jordan, where there are 10 UNRWA camps. There are three unofficial camps and other refugees live around the camps.

What does the aid freeze mean for Palestinians?

Now that UNRWA’s biggest donors have frozen aid to it, there is a dire starvation threat to Palestinians in and outside of Gaza.

“It’s difficult to imagine that Gazans will survive this crisis without UNRWA,” said Thomas White, director of UNRWA Affairs in Gaza and UN deputy humanitarian coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory.

“Rafah has become a sea of people fleeing bombardments,” he said, referring to the relentless Israeli bombing that has destroyed more than 70 percent of the houses in Gaza and displaced nearly two million people.

Why does Israel want to weaken UNRWA?

Israel has long advocated for the dismantling of UNRWA, arguing that its mission is obsolete. On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that UNRWA is “perforated with Hamas”.

Netanyahu’s accusations against UNRWA have not been backed by facts. His assertion that UNRWA has been infiltrated by Hamas has been questioned because the UN agency shares the list of its staff with Israel.

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“Every year, UNRWA shares its list of staff with the host countries where it works,” said Stephane Dujarric. “For the work that it does in Gaza and the West Bank, UNRWA shares the list of staff with both the Palestinian Authority and with the Israeli government, as the occupying power for those areas.”

Israel has long sought to end UNRWA, arguing that the UN body “perpetuated” the issue of Palestinian refugees because it allows Palestinians to [transfer refugee status](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/6/22/why-is-netanyahu-trying-to-disband-the-unrwa) across generations and Israel has refused to accept the right of return to these refugees.

Israel’s recent allegations towards UNRWA employees surfaced the same day as the ICJ’s interim ruling ordering Israel to prevent genocidal acts and scale up aid to Gaza.

“I don’t think it is coincidental that these allegations came out immediately after the ICJ ruling,” said Diana Buttu, a Palestinian legal expert in international law. “It is designed to deflect from the ICJ ruling and focus the attention on UNRWA and to undermine any attempts to hold Israel accountable or stop the genocide.”

Former UK Ambassador to Uzbekistan Craig Murray wrote that accusations against the 12 UNRWA staff members “provide a propaganda counter-narrative to the ICJ judgment, and to reduce the credibility of UNRWA’s evidence before the court”.

Israel also wants to eliminate UNRWA to force Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to migrate elsewhere out of desperation, according to Zaid Amali, a UNRWA cardholder and a civil society activist in the West Bank.

There is evidence that Israel has consistently tried to forcefully displace Palestinians, aside from the long history of state-backed [settlers](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/6/who-are-israeli-settlers-and-why-do-they-live-on-palestinian-lands) displacing Palestinians from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israeli ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich have [recently reiterated](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/2/biden-under-pressure-to-act-amid-new-fears-of-ethnic-cleansing-in-gaza) ideas for Palestinians “voluntarily migrating” out of Gaza, an euphemism for forced displacement.

“This step of targeting UNRWA feeds into this overall goal of displacing more Palestinians [from their land] in order to build more illegal settlements

South Africa filed a landmark case at the International Court of Justice alleging that Israel has committed multiple “genocidal acts” against Palestinians in Gaza, including an “assault on Gaza’s healthcare system, which renders life unsustainable”.

Destruction of a healthcare system is indeed an act of genocide – especially in a besieged territory where over two million displaced, desperate, starving people are facing relentless, indiscriminate bombardment and sniper fire. Once the health system is destroyed, injuries cannot be treated, primary care cannot be delivered, and famine cannot be managed – in other words, life cannot be sustained.

While the ICJ will likely take some years to issue a final verdict on the case against Israel, it should be clear to anyone paying any attention to the situation of healthcare in Gaza that the Strip is on a scandalous pathway to complete ethnic cleansing.

Since October 7, Israeli forces have been blocking the entry of essential medical supplies and medicines to the Strip, bombing hospitals and other medical facilities, killing and kidnapping healthcare staff, and targeting ambulances. Even Gaza’s sole paediatric cancer ward has been attacked and destroyed by the Israeli military.

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It is difficult to see these sustained, deliberate attacks on healthcare in Gaza as anything other than an ethnic cleansing strategy aimed at creating a major health crisis that would kill thousands of Palestinians and deem the territory uninhabitable for the survivors.

Since the beginning of its latest war on Gaza, Israel conducted more than 400 attacks on healthcare facilities in the Strip, including on every single one of its hospitals, leaving the majority non-functional. As of February 13, only 11 out of 36 hospitals in Gaza are partially functioning – five in the north and six in the south. According to the WHO, hospital bed capacity across all of Gaza has now been reduced from 3,500 to just 1,400. In many cases, the Israeli authorities tried to justify these attacks by claiming, without providing any independent, conclusive evidence, that hospitals are being used by Hamas, or that there are “Hamas command centres”

At this point in the conflict, the few partially functioning hospitals are only able to deliver desperately needed trauma care and there is no treatment for other critical primary care needs, such as chronic illnesses.

In addition to attacks on health facilities, we [know of](https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1543-more-health-workers-killed-in-israelas-assault-on-gaza-than-all-countries-in-conflict-in-any-year-since-2016) 374 health workers that have already been [killed](https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/israel-hamas-war-gaza/card/health-u-n-workers-killed-in-gaza-vjCNV0O4eFTyH0VFA1nO), some in targeted [assassinations](https://thehill.com/policy/international/4338868-msf-attack-convoy-deliberate-demanding-investigation/#:~:text=On%2520Nov.%252018%252C%2520a%2520convoy,the%2520clinic%252C%2520the%2520organization%2520said.). By late December, the number of health workers killed in Gaza had already exceeded the total number of all health worker deaths recorded across all other conflicts globally last year, and in any single year since 2016. Many health workers have also been kidnapped, including Dr Muhammad Abu Salmiya, the director of Gaza’s largest hospital, al-Shifa, who remains missing.

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Ambulances have also faced attacks in Gaza, with about 120 of them completely destroyed. There have been many incidents in which ambulances have been prevented from reaching critically injured patients. In one case, an Al Jazeera journalist injured from Israeli bombardment bled to death after the ambulance trying to reach him came under fire. In another, Israeli forces bombed the Palestine Red Crescent ambulance trying to rescue a six-year-old child trapped in a car with the dead bodies of her family members, killing the two paramedics onboard. Later, it was revealed that Israeli forces also killed the child they tried to rescue.

Antenatal and maternity care across the territory – care that is crucial for the long-term survival of the Palestinian population in Gaza – is also extremely limited.

It is estimated that 183 women give birth in [Gaza](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)02835-0/fulltext) every day, but access to care for a safe pregnancy is dependent on reaching a facility still able to deliver antenatal care. Few women are able to do so and those facilities that still offer care for pregnant women are hugely [overcrowded](https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/maha-gave-birth-public-bathroom-her-story-not-unique-gaza) and subject to conditions described as catastrophic – lacking basic hygiene necessities, fuel, water, anaesthetics, drugs, blood products, and other [supplies](https://www.unfpa.org/news/after-month-siege-bombardments-and-health-system-obliterated-pregnant-women-gaza-are-caught). With no fully functioning maternal hospitals, many women are forced to give birth in one of the few healthcare facilities that are still partly operational. However these are not geared for maternal care, and the risk of complications is very high for all mothers and babies.

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In November 2023, al-Hilo Hospital, which was serving as a designated maternity hospital after the collapse of all other specialist facilities, was shelled by Israeli [forces](https://www.who.int/news/item/03-11-2023-women-and-newborns-bearing-the-brunt-of-the-conflict-in-gaza-un-agencies-warn). A Palestinian doctor then reported that “[f]ear is the common condition of every pregnant woman” in Gaza.

The looming famine in Gaza – caused by the near complete siege imposed on the territory by Israel since the beginning of the war – is also posing a threat to pregnant women.

Today, half of all pregnant women in Gaza are suffering from [anaemia](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)02835-0/fulltext) and at least 50,000 pregnant women are facing extreme hunger, affecting not just the current generation of people living in Gaza, but the next. There are reports of an increased number of miscarriages, too.

Health workers in Gaza are working under immense stress and hardship, having to carry out amputations, c-sections and other procedures without anaesthesia, electricity, and most basic medical supplies. UN experts have framed the war on the Gaza health system as one that has resulted in the complete obliteration of healthcare [infrastructure](https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-un-expert-condemns-unrelenting-war-health-system-amid-airstrikes-hospitals-and-health-workers-enar).

Presented with evidence for all this and more, on January 26, the ICJ issued a preliminary ruling in the genocide case against Israel, explaining that it has seen sufficient evidence of dispute for the case to proceed, and ordering Israel to take action to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza and provide humanitarian aid to Palestinians.

And yet, despite the ICJ’s provisional order, Israel’s military assault on the health system has continued unabated. In fact, the attacks on remaining healthcare facilities in Gaza intensified significantly in the past few weeks.

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On January 27, just one day after the ICJ announced its provisional orders, Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF) announced that “amid ongoing heavy fighting and bombing in Khan Younis, south Gaza, Palestine/OPT, vital medical services have collapsed at Nasser Hospital, currently the largest functioning health facility in the enclave”.

Since then, the hospital faced numerous other attacks from air, land and sea, and has been under an Israeli siege for weeks. On February 9, Israeli snipers killed at least 21 displaced civilians trying to reach the hospital.

In just more than four months, Israel’s military onslaught on Gaza killed more than 28,000 people, and injured more than 60,000 others. Most of Gaza’s more than two million inhabitants are now displaced, and waiting in fear for the next attack in flimsy tents and damaged buildings in freezing temperatures. The decision taken by several Western nations to suspend funding for UNRWA, the main UN agency providing humanitarian aid and essential services to Palestinians in Gaza, has amplified the looming threat of famine.

With the remaining healthcare services on the brink of collapse, and health workers under constant attack, there is little hope for Palestinian life to continue in Gaza if the international community does not take urgent action.

The evidence before us  – evidence reported by brave Palestinian journalists on the ground, evidence presented to the ICJ by the South African legal team, evidence we see every day on our social media feeds in videos shared by Gaza’s people – is clear: Israel is conducting in Gaza a sadistic ethnic cleansing campaign, a genocide, aimed at ridding the Strip off its native population.

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The sustained attacks on Gaza’s healthcare workers are perhaps the most effective element of Israel’s relentless campaign to render life in the Strip unsustainable for Palestinians. Once this war is over, surviving Palestinians can theoretically rebuild their destroyed homes, schools, businesses and hospitals in a matter of months, but the human capital that is lost to Israeli bombs and bullets – doctors, surgeons, paramedics, nurses and professors killed and maimed by Israel’s actions – can not be replaced for many, many years. Israel’s actions have not only physically and psychologically traumatised the Palestinians, but expertly left them without the very resources that could help them heal and rebuild their lives, on their land that was turned into a wasteland.

The international community, which created the conditions for this humanitarian catastrophe with its indifference to Israel’s violations of international law and crimes against Palestinians, need to take urgent action.

It needs to take action to protect what is left of Gaza’s healthcare system, as a first step to putting an end to Israel’s blatant ethnic cleansing efforts and genocide.

If you have been following Western media to try to make sense of the heartbreaking images and stories coming out of Gaza during Israel’s invasion, you are bound to be disappointed.

Since the beginning of the latest Israeli assault on the besieged Palestinian enclave – which is proving to be one of the swiftest ethnic cleansing efforts in history – Western news organisations have repeatedly published unsubstantiated claims, told one side of the story and glossed over violence selectively to justify Israel’s violations of international law and shield it from scrutiny.

In doing so, Western journalists have abandoned basic standards in their coverage of Israel’s conduct towards Palestinians. None of this is new. The failures of Western journalism have helped Israel justify its occupation and violence against Palestinians for over 75 years.

On August 6, 2022, more than a year before Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel, in a particularly egregious break from good journalism, The New York Times buried the lede on the deaths of six Palestinian children in its report on a “flare” in “Israel-Gaza fighting”.

In the report, the journalists waited until the second paragraph to mention that six children were among those killed by Israeli strikes in the Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza and without even breaking the sentence added that “Israel said some civilian deaths were the result of militants stashing weapons in residential areas” and “in at least one case, a misfired Palestinian rocket killed civilians, including children, in northern Gaza”.

In journalism schools this is identified as “breathless” reporting. And it turned out to be wrong reporting too. Ten days later, the Israeli military finally [admitted](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/16/israel-behind-gaza-strike-that-killed-children-report) that it was behind the strikes that killed those children in Jabalia.

The New York Times did not report this bit as breathlessly.

I could call it unprofessional – which would be true as the coverage of this conflict in Western media has clearly been shaped by ideology rather than rigorous fact-checking. Such an assessment, however, would gloss over a deeper, more profound problem within Western journalism: coloniality.

Conflict reporting is one of the most hyper-colonised corners of the world’s largest newsrooms. Even in racially diverse newsrooms, reporting on conflicts can be tricky. But the egregious errors that appear to get past editorial filters in newsrooms that take pride in the accuracy of their conflict reporting needs to be accounted for. It also needs to be put on record that, with these consistent errors, Western journalists are “mediating” the conflict in Palestine, not simply reporting on it.

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I would be mincing my words if I do not call it what it is: a textbook case of coloniser’s journalism. It is journalism done by practitioners from colonising countries who take pride in their imperial conquests and have an elevated sense of self, every fibre nurtured by centuries of predatory accumulation of wealth, knowledge and privilege. These journalists seem convinced that their countries have fought and defeated particularly immoral and powerful enemies throughout history, stopped evil in its tracks, protected civilisation, saved the day. This is the dominant story of the West and by extension, the story of Western journalism too.

However, the dominant story is often not the true story – it is merely the story of the victors.

And today, Western media are once again telling the story of the victors in Gaza, like they did countless times before in their coverage of conflicts, crises and human suffering in post-colonial nations.

I’ve seen this in the [coverage](https://www.dailynebraskan.com/opinion/opinion-the-media-coverage-of-the-omicron-variant-is-biased-against-africa/article_c687d9b6-53df-11ec-b22b-0f3ad600f849.html) of tropical diseases by reporters who know malaria, dengue or [Ebola](https://www.walshmedicalmedia.com/open-access/role-of-media-in-portraying-ebola-in-and-outside-africa-2329-891X-1000152.pdf) will never course through their veins or affect their communities. I’ve seen it after the [Rohingya genocide](https://caravanmagazine.in/media/how-media-fixation-sexual-violence-exploitation-harmed-rohingya) when genocide survivors were asked whether they had been “held down by five men or seven” as they were gang-raped.

Western journalism is, at its very core, journalism of the victor – it never attempts to deconstruct stories, put them in the right order or add relevant context to speak truth to power and expose the continuing excesses, aggression and violence of the “victors” of history.

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And when it comes to Palestine, it is journalism about occupation by people who will never know what it feels like living under occupation. It is [voyeuristic](https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/world/story/hamas-is-not-palestinian-diplomat-confronts-bbc-journalist-over-do-you-condemn-attack-on-israel-question-401455-2023-10-10) reporting without a moral compass or a bedrock sense of decency.

In coloniser’s journalism, language is a weapon that is used to erase the humanity of the colonised. In [The Wretched of the Earth](https://abahlali.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Frantz-Fanon-The-Wretched-of-the-Earth-1965.pdf), in which he analysed the dehumanising effects of colonisation, philosopher Frantz Fanon wrote of Algerian suffering (during France’s imperial conquest) as being depicted in media reports as “hordes of vital statistics” about “hysterical masses” with “children who seem to belong to nobody”. The book was written in 1961, but its inferences apply perfectly to the Western media coverage of Palestinian suffering today.

This dehumanising use of language has been most visible in the counting of deaths. In early November, The Times of London [noted](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/pro-palestine-protest-ban-met-police-restrictions-8w39lhprc), “Israelis marked a month since Hamas killed 1,400 people and kidnapped 240, starting a war in which 10,300 Palestinians are said to have died”. In Western news, Israelis die in active voice – Hamas “killed” or “murdered” them – while Palestinians die passively. They “[dehydrate to death as clean water runs out](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/17/fears-grow-people-are-dehydrating-to-death-in-gaza-as-clean-water-runs-out)” as the Guardian once put it, as if this is not a wilful crime against humanity but a random act of God.

According to the propaganda machine of the West, Israel has the right to destroy Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Iran, Lebanon, Yemen and any other country in the region to keep Israelis safe. It can kill nearly every Muslim, Jews asking for a ceasefire, [UN staff](https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143512) and [physicians in Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF)](https://www.msf.org/msf-doctors-killed-strike-al-awda-hospital-northern-gaza-palestine), journalists, ambulance drivers and even babies in the process of targeting Hamas. Yet few news organisations ever discuss what it means for Israel and the world, if the only way it can feel secure is by raining death and misery on millions of people. None of them – for there is now an “us” and “them”, a divided world of the colonised and the colonisers – ever meaningfully questioned whether a victory achieved at the expense of the lives of thousands of innocent children can ever be considered a victory in the first place.

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In this slick propaganda of war, Western journalists are obscuring the true story we are faced with here –  that Israel, backed by the most powerful military in the world, is waging war on a stateless people living under its occupation and pulverising innocent men, women and children in their thousands. The story that Western governments have been enabling this carnage while lecturing the world about their superior values, decency and love for democracy. Anyone living in the post colonial world knows that their talk of decency and love for democracy and exceptional journalism and decent politicians – it is all but a swindle.

At this late hour, as war rages and children starve and Israel is tried for “plausible genocide”, it is crucial to point at the blood in the hands of Western journalists. They have, in perfect coordination with their powerful governments, maligned and disempowered multilateral institutions like the United Nations, gave Israeli narratives of “self-defence” a veneer of respectability, and drove Palestinian stories and perspectives into irrelevance.

The few Palestinians who were given a platform – in the name of “balance” and good journalism – were discouraged from discussing the decades of oppression, occupation and abuse they endured at the hands of Israel. They were allowed merely to weep for their dead relatives and beg for more aid to feed their starving children – after condemning Hamas, of course.

Perhaps with this war, the game is finally up for Western journalism. As they watch Israel’s war on Gaza on their social media feeds and see what is happening with their own eyes through the reports and testimonies of Palestinians themselves, more and more people around the world are recognising Western media’s role in perpetuating colonial power, its language and ideologies.

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These days there is growing criticism of how Western leaders have failed, but not nearly enough is being said about how the Western intelligentsia, and especially those leading the West’s most influential newsrooms, have also failed. It’s not just Western liberalism and rules-based order that has been reduced to rubble as a result of Israel’s war on Gaza, but the legitimacy of Western journalism.

In their coverage of the Gaza war, Western news organisations demonstrated clearly that they view mass death, starvation and limitless human misery as acceptable and even unavoidable when it is inflicted by their allies. They showed that conflict journalism, as practiced in Western newsrooms, is nothing but another form of colonial violence – one that is realised not with bombs and drones, but words.

In this moment of overwhelming barbarity, journalists of colour like me are whiplashed by the the monumental amorality of the newsrooms that we are told to look up to. The least Western journalists, with their significant power, could do at this moment is demand a permanent ceasefire and spare us yet another instalment of coloniser’s journalism.

the Israeli military said it is using “new capabilities” in its war on Gaza and on Hamas’s labyrinth of tunnels, “including by channeling large volumes of water into them”.“This is a significant tool in combating the threat of Hamas’s underground terrorist infrastructure,” the statement said.

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The confirmation came nearly four months into the continuous bombardment of the strip that has killed nearly 27,000 people. Israeli authorities have for long aimed to destroy Hamas’s infrastructure, and have argued that the tunnels hold ammunition and captives taken there by the armed group on October 7.

But the plan to pump seawater into the tunnels raises questions about Israel’s plans to rescue those captives, and could add to the lasting devastation of Gaza, including the enclave’s water supply:

How is the flooding done?

Media reports from early December said that Israeli forces were planning to flood tunnels with seawater in Gaza using about five to seven large water pumps.

According to The Wall Street Journal, the Israeli army installed the pumps north of the Shati refugee camp, a beach settlement that housed previously displaced Palestinians located in the northern Gaza Strip. The machines, the report said, could pump thousands of cubic metres of seawater.

By mid-December, the WSJ, quoting unnamed US officials, reported again that the pumping had begun. Another US-based media publication, ABC News, reported that the scale of initial flooding was limited as the Israeli army assessed how effective the method was.

Hamas, which claims its [tunnels run](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/11/8/analysis-how-israel-would-fare-in-gazas-tunnels-part-i) for about 300-500km (186-310 miles), has used the underground passage to break the Israeli siege on Gaza. Palestinians use the network of tunnels to smuggle food, goods, medicines and even weapons. The Palestinian territory has been under Israeli air, land and sea blockade since 2007 and Tel Aviv decides what goes in and out of the narrow strip that is 10km (6 miles) wide and 41km (25 miles) long.

The pumping could take weeks and thousands of cubic metres of water to completely fill and destroy such a network.

Could flooding the tunnels affect Gaza’s water supply?

Environmental analysts warn that flooding the tunnels could damage the aquifer that holds Gaza’s groundwater which the strip’s 2.3 million people largely depend on.

Mark Zeitoun, a professor at the Geneva Graduate Institute, told Al Jazeera that pumping seawater into hundreds of kilometres of tunnels embedded in Gaza’s sandy and porous soil is highly likely to see saltwater seep into water sources, destroying water that’s usually used for drinking, cooking and irrigation.

Zeitoun, who once worked as a water engineer in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, said Israel is [weaponising water](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/people-power/2023/7/27/weaponising-water-in-palestine) in a “dark” way. The engineer is among many who have been warning since December that there could be “catastrophic” consequences, should the Israeli military’s plans be confirmed.

“My first reaction was profound distress,” Zeitoun said, referring to the Israeli army’s Wednesday statement. “Injecting saltwater will definitely contaminate the aquifer and this will have long-term consequences,” he said.

“It would ruin the conditions of life in Gaza. If we don’t react to this kind of behaviour, what’s to stop any other country from doing this to another group of people in the future?”

What water risks do Palestinians already face?

Water infrastructure in Gaza and the West Bank has long been fragile. Israel’s Defence Minister Yoav Gallant ordered a “[total blockade](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/israel-announces-total-blockade-on-gaza)” of Gaza, including a ban on food and water on October 9 as part of its military offensive.

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For decades, Israel has controlled water supply to the occupied territories, cutting off or turning it on at will. Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are not allowed to construct new water wells or any water installations without obtaining a licence from the Israeli authorities – which is often hard to do. Even rainwater collection is monitored in the West Bank. Moreover, Israeli soldiers and settlers attack infrastructure supplying water to Palestinians.

Hemmed in by an Israeli wall to its east and the sea to its west, getting useable water for drinking, cooking and hygiene in the Gaza Strip has always been even more complicated. Residents there rely on a combination of three seawater desalination plants, three pipes running directly from Israel, a host of wells and boreholes pulling untreated water from the ground, and imported water packs from Egypt. In a pre-war setting, those resources were barely enough for the densely populated region.

Adding to the problems is sewage contamination. Gaza’s authorities usually use about four wastewater treatment plants to keep groundwater from mixing with the sewers. Even then, an Amnesty International report in 2017 declared the aquifer overexploited and said 95 percent of the water supply in the strip was contaminated with sewage.

Since October 7 though, [sewage has become unmanageable](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/5/is-israels-war-on-gaza-also-hurting-the-climate), spilling into the streets. Water scarcity too, has worsened. At least two of the desalination plants have shut down, damaged from Israeli shelling. Israel has also cut off some of the water from its pipes, and many of the boreholes no longer work because of a lack of fuel and electricity to pump.

Gaza, one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in a polluted and warming world, has been exposed to even more toxins, sais Amali Tower, director of non-profit Climate Refugees.

“Tens of thousands of unrecovered bodies are decomposing under rubble,” Tower said. “Thousands of explosives from the current and previous wars have polluted the air and ground, including highly incendiary white phosphorus, leaving another toxic layer of chemicals in Gaza’s air and soil.”

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What’s next for Gaza’s water security?

Although water has been used as a tool in many conflicts, including in the Russia-Ukraine war, the case in Gaza is an exception, said Zeitoun, and violates multiple international laws, including possibly the UN Genocide Convention.

The law criminalises intentional actions inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction, in whole or part, of a distinct ethnic group like the Palestinians.

“What we see happening in Gaza is beyond the pale,” Zeitoun said. “With the definition of the Genocide Convention in mind, I think salinating the aquifer, which is the main source of water, will bring about its partial destruction. Part of it could collapse and become unusable.”

Just last week, the International Court of Justice ruling in South Africa’s landmark genocide case against Israel, [ordered Tel Aviv](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2nv8H8doio) to take all measures to prevent genocidal acts – but there have been little to no changes in Israeli military’s scorched-earth tactics in the strip.

Meanwhile, nearly two million Palestinians in Gaza are being forced to drink brackish, untreated water. Women are taking pills to [delay their menstruation due to lack of water](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/31/no-privacy-no-water-gaza-women-use-period-delaying-pills-amid-war#:~:text=Facing%20displacement%2C%20overcrowded%20living%20conditions,painful%20periods%20%E2%80%93%20to%20avoid%20the) and sanitary pads.

Waterborne diseases too, are skyrocketing. The number of Palestinians in Gaza suffering from dysentery multiplied 25 times between mid-October and December, with more than 100,000 cases recorded, [according](https://www.who.int/news/item/21-12-2023-lethal-combination-of-hunger-and-disease-to-lead-to-more-deaths-in-gaza) to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Children make up half of the cases since toddlers are more susceptible to a disease that causes extreme dehydration and, possibly, death.

more than 40 organisations working on health justice around the globe put out an urgent call to the global health and human rights community. In an [open letter,](https://health4palestine.com/) we issued a call to global health bodies, health institutions, professional associations and the World Medical Association (WMA) to take immediate action on the Israeli government’s continuing onslaught on Gaza – because the war on Palestine is an issue of health justice, too.

Israel’s onslaught – which the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has ruled “plausibly” meets the conditions of genocide – has claimed the lives of more than [30,000 Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) in less than five months. This means that since October 7, the Israeli military has killed 250 Palestinians on average per day – [a higher death rate](https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/daily-death-rate-gaza-higher-any-other-major-21st-century-conflict-oxfam) than any other 21st-century conflict. Additionally, more than 70,000 Palestinians have been wounded and over a million have been displaced.

Israel’s deliberate targeting of hospitals across Gaza – considered a war crime under international law – undoubtedly contributed to this staggering death toll. At the time of writing, only [11 out of Gaza’s 35 hospitals](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) are partially functional.

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Israel has destroyed much more than Gaza’s hospitals. The targeting of laboratories, other health facilities, ambulances, doctors, nurses and patients, coupled with the blockade on lifesaving medical supplies, has put a wrecking ball through Gaza’s entire health system and left 2.2 million people with little access to healthcare at a time they are facing near constant, indiscriminate bombardment and the threat of famine. Since the beginning of the war, [at least 337 health workers have been killed](https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-109?_gl=1*162cbmi*_ga*ODMyMjM5Nzk4LjE3MDYxODEyNzk.*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTcwNjE4MTI3OS4xLjAuMTcwNjE4MTI3OS42MC4wLjA), including two of only four pathologists in Gaza.

People suffering from chronic illnesses are unable to access vital medicines, and disease is spreading at an unprecedented rate amid a sanitation crisis caused by a severe lack of access to clean water. The World Health Organization (WHO) has described the state of healthcare in Gaza as being “beyond words”.

Research published by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the United States and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in the United Kingdom suggests an escalation of the conflict could lead to nearly [86,000 excess deaths](https://gaza-projections.org/) over the next six months once the effects of war-induced disease, epidemics and malnutrition are accounted for. The report estimates that even if there is no escalation, and conditions remain as they are today, there will still be 66,720 excess deaths in Gaza over the next six months.

This is why, as activists, health workers and organisations working in the health sector for justice, equity, anti-racism and decolonisation, we are using our voices to speak up and urge as well as compel our colleagues and others, especially global health bodies and associations, to take action. As Israel uses healthcare, food and water as weapons of war, we know all too well – as organisations that have worked on issues of health justice and access to medicines for millions of people around the world – that it is imperative that we speak up and demand an end to impunity, and real action and consequences.

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So why target our call to the global health community? We feel that there has been a widespread lack of regard by many in this community for the unfolding health crisis in Gaza. As we also noted in the open letter we published this week, hardly any discussion on the current state of health services in Gaza has graced the pages of the 17 global health journals that currently fill the public space. Our research shows that a PubMed search on journal articles containing the words “Global Health”, “Gaza” and “health” published since October 2023 retrieved only two, published by The Lancet and the British Medical Journal, that featured any discussion about the ethical, human rights and professional challenges that arose from the current conflict.

So we ask: why have our universities, medical schools, professional associations and academic bodies remained silent? Save for a few, isolated public statements, the response from those who we expect to maintain the highest medical and scientific professional and ethical standards around the world has been a deafening silence.

While the American Medical Association (AMA) rightfully issued, in 2022, a very strong condemnation of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, an effort by some members to do the same for Israel’s war on Gaza in 2023 was [shut down](https://www.medpagetoday.com/meetingcoverage/ama/107302). And at this stage of the genocide, any continued silence will be judged as complicity.

This demonstrates blatant double standards that can only be explained by racist dehumanisation of the Palestinian people.

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A climate of virulent censorship, especially in the Global North, has also led to open victimisation of health workers and academics who dare to speak out in their personal capacity in defence of the rights of Palestinians and against racism. But we refuse to be silenced, and we call on the global health community at large to stand firm in the face of this intimidation.

We must call out Israel’s war crimes and unequivocally condemn the genocide that is under way in Gaza – and Israel’s long-standing medical apartheid in the occupied Palestinian territories – and support colleagues who are being targeted for speaking out about anti-Palestinian racism.

We must also pressure all governments to immediately resume and increase funding for the critical work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and other agencies helping Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere in occupied territory. We should refuse to collaborate with Israeli health institutions, universities, research councils, pharmaceutical companies and any organisations affiliated with the military in any form.

As health professionals and activists, we are obliged to speak out, both morally and professionally. We are also obliged to take whatever steps in our power to halt and prevent this genocide. To do anything less would be a complete dereliction of our duty to support and uphold the right – of everyone – to health.

“Some children are deemed worthy of protection while others are killed in their thousands

“Qatar rejects such double standards. International law must be upheld in all circumstances. It must be applied to all, and there must be accountability”.

Al-Qahtani added that Israel had implemented an “apartheid regime” to maintain the “domination of Jewish Israelis over Palestinians”.

He also said the occupation is “illegal” due to it violating the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination.

The court has the “clear mandate and indeed the responsibility to remedy this unacceptable situation. The credibility of the international legal order depends on your opinion, and the stakes cannot be higher.”

Qatar, the United States and Egypt are currently mediating negotiations for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas to stop the current war, which is taking a devastating toll on Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip.

Over the past week, the ICJ has been hearing the opinion of more than 50 countries on the legal implications of Israel’s occupation ahead of the court issuing a nonbinding opinion.

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The 15-judge panel has been asked to review Israel’s “occupation, settlement and annexation, … including measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and from its adoption of related discriminatory legislation and measures”.

But Qatar echoed similar statements from several countries in calling out Israel’s policy as a breach of international law, including [South Africa](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/20/israels-apartheid-must-end-south-africa-says-at-icj-hearing), which also referred to the occupation as “apartheid”.

Representatives from several other countries, including Pakistan, Norway, Indonesia and the United Kingdom, spoke at Friday’s hearing.

Pakistani Minister for Law and Justice Ahmed Irfan Aslam said that while Israel had tried to make its occupation of the Palestinian territories irreversible, history has shown that change is possible, referring to the withdrawal of French settlers from Algeria in 1962.

He added that a two-state solution “must be the basis for peace”.

Norway’s representative said developments on the ground “give reason to ask whether the occupation is turning

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, who said she left the G20 meeting in Brazil to address the ICJ personally, stated: “I stand before you to defend justice against a blatant violation of international humanitarian law that is being committed by Israel.”

Marsudi added that Israel’s “unlawful occupation” should not be normalised or recognised, all actions that stop the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination “shall be unlawful” and it is clear that its “apartheid regime” is in breach of international law.

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The British representative was the only person to divert from what other countries had said on Friday and instead aligned with the [US](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/21/us-tells-icj-israel-should-not-be-ordered-to-immediately-end-occupation), who called on the court to reject issuing an advisory opinion.

The representative said that while Israel’s occupation is illegal, it is a “bilateral dispute”, and issuing an opinion would affect the security framework led by the United Nations Security Council.

The hearings are, in part, a push by Palestinian officials to get international legal institutions to investigate Israel’s occupation, especially in light of the current war on Gaza.

During the past four months and after Hamas’s October 7 attacks in southern Israel, which killed 1,139 Israelis, Israel has conducted a military campaign in Gaza, which has resulted in the deaths of more than 29,000 Palestinians.

In the occupied West Bank, settler violence has increased, and world leaders have issued sanctions to try to penalise and curb the attacks.

Israel, which is not attending the hearing, has said the court proceedings could be harmful to achieving some kind of negotiated settlement.

What does ‘home’ mean?

After our house was bombed, I was no longer just a witness to the thousands of people fleeing their homes to find safety wherever they could.

We went to the United Nations shelter in the north of Gaza, my family and I gathering whatever would help us survive and becoming displaced like our countrypeople.

There are about 600,000 people in north Gaza grappling with loss amid deprivation, starvation and disease because they do not want to leave their land.

It breaks my heart, but I have to admit we’ve lost the sense of what “home” means.

Just finding the bare minimum space and shelter from the elements we need to rest has become a journey of heartache and pain, our miserable daily routine of looking around to see where we can possibly sleep.

My family – father, mother, sister, wife, and two-year-old son – and I are seeking relative refuge in the parking garage of a destroyed apartment building.

We dread looking at the weather in these winter conditions. All day, we’re trying to find the forecast, breathless, worried that rain would be expected that night.

On rainy nights, I take off my coat and wrap it around my baby, making it both a blanket and protection for him against the cold, with hope and prayer that it will be enough for his small body.

Survival rations

Beyond shelter is the struggle for food. I cannot recall the last proper meal my son had.

Wheat is nowhere to be found so we have been using animal feed-grade barley and corn to grind into flour for bread. Even these alternatives are scarce, but they are our only means to get through the day.

It’s not like there is the space and security to grow your own food either, with the bombs and intentional choking off of supplies, even water. The aid entering this besieged enclave is very limited and cannot cover our basic daily needs.

So we have had to try to survive for these past four months, with no incomes or livelihoods as the prices of essentials skyrocket, if you can find them at all.

As a result, starvation is beyond widespread in the north of Gaza. Babies, children, adults and the elderly all are suffering from the lack of food.

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An ounce of coffee used to be 10 shekels (about $2.75) and now it costs 120 shekels ($33); a litre of drinking water that cost a shekel (less than $0.30) is now 15 shekels ($4).

If you secure food, you still have to cook it and, with no cooking gas, people are combing the ruins to find anything they can burn for a cooking fire, exposing themselves to bombing at any time.

And so, when every hour of the day is spent either looking for food or a means to make it, we cannot always worry about staying safe.

Unrecorded deaths

Medical services in north Gaza have been nearly inoperable since the beginning of the ground invasion, and now there is little more than first aid services for the injured or those in need of intensive medical care.

Israel has arrested and killed hundreds of medical personnel, bombed hundreds of medical facilities of various sizes out of service or depleted their capacity with cuts of fuel and water.

For the little that remains functional, how would the wounded get there when at least 122 ambulances have been targeted and bombed? Then comes the danger of the streets: air strikes, soldiers kidnapping Palestinians or shooting them dead, and the mountains of rubble across Gaza.

Even basic medications like antibiotics and painkillers have been scarce for the thousands suffering injuries from Israeli attacks, and so they get infections and respiratory diseases.

People need to understand that the number of Palestinians killed in this aggression is much higher than what is being reported. Palestinians dying from kidney failure, from cancer, from disease, from a lack of prenatal care – all of these are not being recorded.

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People could have been helped had there been enough equipment and medicine. People can be saved, but there seems to be little intent to save them.

I report through my phone when I manage battery and access to the internet or phone service – an endeavour more difficult than ever in north Gaza.

Banks, post offices, transportation and telecommunications all do not work.

The list is endless. How can I capture or explain to the world, the ones that even read our words, that what is being endured is not only painful but avoidable?

Our calls for support are not for abstract words of diplomatic solidarity, but for urgent action that helps us feel human in the eyes of the world.

With every passing hour, fewer and fewer Palestinians in Gaza can appeal to the world. Every day brings more death, and the rest of us remain, trying to fight off death.

In closing

I do not write of the struggle we are living to engender sorrow. Had sorrow moved people, we wouldn’t be where we are now.

I outline our struggle because, at this point, we have either already been killed or are in the process of being killed slowly.

We are appealing to the healthy ones, the ones with a bed to sleep on, the ones whose voices can be heard outside this slaughterhouse.

I write to equip you with the knowledge of what humanity is undergoing. We the Palestinians of Gaza are being starved, are sleeping on the streets with no cover from air strikes.

We are being denied our humanity by an army that continues to inflict some of the most painful and inhumane practices of war we know in our modern day.

It’s time for the world to defy the abuses, to give regard to human life, to keep it simple and basic, like the needs we require to maintain breath.

For more than four months now, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other Western countries have been staunchly supporting Israel’s war on Gaza. As of now, the Israeli army has killed more than 28,000 Palestinians, including more than 12,000 children.

On January 26, the International Court of Justice ruled that “at least some of the acts and omissions alleged by South Africa to have been committed by Israel in Gaza appear to be capable of falling within the provisions of the [Genocide] Convention,” and that South Africa’s claim that Israel is committing genocidal acts is “plausible”. Nevertheless, the West continued to stand by Israel.

Then when Israel alleged that employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) were linked to Hamas, the US, the UK, Germany, and more than a dozen other countries suspended their funding, as Palestinians in Gaza faced starvation.

Despite Western complicity in actions the world’s top court is recognising as genocidal, the West still assigns itself all manner of superiority in civilised societal behaviour. Western countries still honour themselves as “the good guys

“I got in trouble many times for saying you don’t have to be a Jew to be a Zionist, and I am a Zionist. I make no apologies for that. That’s a reality,” President Joe Biden said in [a speech at a private campaign reception](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/12/05/remarks-by-president-biden-at-a-campaign-reception-weston-ma-2/) in Massachusetts in early December, when the death toll in Gaza already stood at 16,200. “We’ve [Americans] never thought anything is beyond our capacity, from curing cancer this time around to everything we’ve ever done. I really mean it,” he added.

It takes a special kind of narcissism for a world leader to declare himself a 50-year-long adherent to a white supremacist ideology that excuses apartheid, settler-colonialism, and genocide and then to turn to the greatness of the US and all its “possibilities”, as if the US has only been sprinkling pixie dust around the world and not [intervening with brutal military and economic power](https://now.tufts.edu/2023/10/16/us-foreign-policy-increasingly-relies-military-interventions) over the past 130 years.

But the US president is not alone in his self-delusion. At the Conservative Friends of Israel gathering in London last month, UK Prime Minister [Rishi Sunak showed unwavering support](https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/uk-will-always-stand-by-right-of-israel-to-defend-itself-sunak-tells-cfi-event-yhq1cgkg) for Israeli attacks on Gaza and the West Bank. “There is a horrific irony in Israel, of all countries being accused of genocide,” Sunak said, labelling South Africa’s case against Israel “completely unjustified”.

The “horrific irony” is that Israel, as a Western ally, cannot be accused of genocide because it is one of “the good guys”. The “bad guys” can only be non-Western (really, non-white) nations, such as South Africa.

Biden, Sunak et al still believe that as the leaders of the developed world, they are making understandable rational choices when they are fighting wars and killing people in the name of self-defence or under the guise of fighting “terrorism”.

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Despite the protest of tens of millions people around the world and the deaths of tens of thousands of Palestinians, the razing of Gaza and other crimes against humanity, the disregard for the ongoing war in [Sudan](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/sudan-civil-war-children-unicef-rsf-rcna130738) and the conflict in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](https://www.thenation.com/article/world/congo-war-elections-tshisekedi/), Western leaders still believe [Western capitalism and democratic institutions](https://www.forbes.com/sites/saleemali/2024/01/26/angolas-mineral-axis-with-america/?sh=66085e277ce6) will save the world.

In his book [The Clash of Civilizations (1996)](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Clash_of_Civilizations_and_the_Remak/Iq75qmi3Og8C?hl=en&gbpv=1), the late political scientist Samuel Huntington warned about the dangers of the Western delusion that the rest of the world should embrace its purported values. “The survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal,” he wrote.

But what Huntington didn’t understand about the West’s quest for a one-world civilisation is that today’s resentments toward it didn’t start in the post-Cold War era of the 1990s. They are a response to the trail of death, destruction, and devouring of resources that Westerners have left behind ever since [Christopher Columbus](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/why-some-celebrate-indigenous-peoples-day-not-columbus-day) made his way to the Western Hemisphere and [Vasco da Gama](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/oct/12/africa-slaves-erased-from-history-modern-world) found a route around Africa to South Asia, both in the 1490s.

The rest of the world has been the West’s source of plunder, first through the pillage of gold, silver, and gems from newly invaded lands, then through the enslavement of millions of Indigenous, African, and Asian peoples, and finally through the conquest of the old empires of the East.

This belief in Western civilisation as superior and righteous because of its whiteness is so ingrained in its culture that young people in the West grow up without anyone in their lives ever questioning it. That is, until someone like me as a history professor comes along and confronts this fundamental belief.

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In my many years of teaching history, my own students have often gotten into it with me over my supposition that “Western civilisation” is a contradictory term.

“But the Aztecs practiced human sacrifice!” one student yelped, while a calmer student, with a raised hand, said, “It’s unfortunate that atrocities happened to the natives, but it’s insulting to compare what the Spanish did to what happened to Rome.”

That was the strong pushback I received from a few students in one of my world history courses a few years back when I spoke of the [barbarity of the Spanish conquests](https://www.npr.org/2021/09/15/1034745716/atrocities-of-conquistadores-take-shape-in-new-history-by-mexican-born-author) of the Aztecs and the Inca in the 16th century and the similarities between those invasions and the Vandal and Visigoth tribes who helped end the Western Roman Empire.

I pointed out the achievements of the civilisations destroyed and the conquistadors and the Spanish priests [burning nearly all Mayan writings](https://www.theyucatantimes.com/2019/11/maya-codices-burned-by-the-inquisition-in-1562/), desecrating Mexica, Mayan, and Inca temples, and forcing the population into slavery and Christianity.

I have also endured vitriol from students unwilling to even consider the possibility that the US and the West, having engaged in barbaric behaviour with their own populations and across the globe, might do so in the near future.

“It isn’t possible, because…no civilised society wants it happening to them,” one student said years ago. “Americans would never take up arms against the government, especially with our military, it isn’t rational. We wouldn’t be stupid enough to make this mistake again. Our military would crush any insurrection,” is what another student blurted out in the past year, despite evidence of the opposite with the insurrection at the US Capitol Building on January 6, 2021.

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Some students were too deep in the belief of the West as a positive force to consider the apocalypse it visited upon 60 million Indigenous people, [wiping out up to 90 percent of the population within 100 years](https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2019/02/13/how-colonization-of-the-americas-killed-90-percent-of-their-indigenous-people-and-changed-the-climate) of Columbus’s first contact.

We couldn’t even discuss the other genocides wrought in the name of empire, colonialism, and capitalism: [the 165 million South Asians](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/12/2/how-british-colonial-policy-killed-100-million-indians) the British starved, murdered, or worked to death between 1880 and 1920; or the [estimated 10 million Congolese](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53017188) who Belgians exterminated; or the genocide of [up to 100,000 Herero and Nama](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/feb/03/namibia-genocide-victims-herero-nama-germany-reparations) people by German forces in Namibia between 1904 and 1908.

My students’ belief in Western rationality remained strong even when the carnage of World Wars I and II was brought up. In those conflicts, [as many as 90 million civilians and service members](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2014/dec/09/-sp-myth-of-the-good-war) were killed – among them more than 200,000 annihilated in the US nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Western narcissism is exactly why my students have difficulty accepting that Western civilisation contradicts itself at every turn. As the late post-colonial scholar Edward Said wrote in Orientalism (1978), “It can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made [Western civilisation] hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures.”

This belief in Western superiority means always being on the right side of history, even though there are plenty of examples of Western irrationality, barbarism, and brutality in its interventions in the Middle East and the rest of the world. Western narcissism means the US and West will only lift a finger to support the Palestinians if forced to by the world and by their own citizens.

[That roughly half of Americans ages 18-29 believe that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/24/americans-believe-israel-committing-genocide-poll?ref=upstract.com) is encouraging, but by itself not enough to end US and Western complicity in Israel’s crimes.

On February 8, Israeli settlers attacked Palestinian shepherds who were out grazing their herds in the Sadet a-Tha’leh community, near Hebron in the occupied West Bank. They expelled the Palestinians from the pasture and used drones to scare their livestock. As a result, the shepherds suffered severe losses as many of their terrified animals had miscarriages and stillbirths in the middle of lambing season.

The incident is not unique and it is part of what human rights defenders are describing as “economic warfare by settlers which leads to displacement”.

What happened at Sadet a-Tha’leh is one of 561 incidents of Israeli settler attacks against the Palestinians, which the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recorded between October 7 and February 20. As of January 17, settlers have killed at least eight Palestinians and injured 111, per OCHA’s database. Repeated waves of violence by settlers, often backed by the army, have led to the displacement of 1,208 Palestinians, including 586 children, across 198 households.

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While humanitarian and human rights organisations tend to register these [violent acts](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/1/27/like-a-mafia-israeli-settlers-forces-squeeze-palestinian-shepherds-out) as separate incidents, they constitute systematic brutality unleashed by extremist settlers onto the Palestinian population of the occupied West Bank in parallel to the plausibly genocidal acts carried out by the Israeli army in Gaza.

Supported by the Israeli security forces and aided and abetted by the government, settler violence is a central part of the Israeli state’s policy and plan to ethnically cleanse the occupied Palestinian territory in order to establish full sovereignty over it and enable settlement expansion – despite settlements being illegal under international law.

The settlement enterprise: Unlawful in its entirety

Settlements are a range of state-sponsored (or largely state-tolerated, in the case of more informal outposts and “farms”) urban colonies built for Israelis in the occupied West Bank and Golan Heights.

All Israeli settlements are illegal under international law, as they violate Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which Israel has ratified. Furthermore, settlement expansion plans are often used as a way to consolidate Israel’s de facto annexation of occupied territory, in contravention of the prohibition of territorial conquest through force set out in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.

Despite the clarity of international law on the matter, supported by the 2016 UN Security Council resolution not vetoed by the United States, Israel has provided the political conditions and economic incentives, as well as infrastructural support, for the growth of 279 settlements in the West Bank in which some 700,000 settlers reside.

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The [imprint of settlements](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/1/27/like-a-mafia-israeli-settlers-forces-squeeze-palestinian-shepherds-out) extends beyond walled urban areas into the surrounding countryside, where vulnerable Palestinian families live in constant fear of attacks against their homes, the herds they depend on to make a living, and their lives in general.

In some of the 16 Palestinian communities forcibly transferred since October 7, such as Khirbet Zanuta in the South Hebron Hills, settlers have already fenced off land, effectively controlling it for their own use, and preventing the Palestinian communities from returning.

Settler violence as state violence

The political positions of extremist settlers, at the heart of which is the desire to rid the occupied West Bank of Palestinians, have entered Israeli mainstream politics.

After high-profile incidents of settler violence, government officials have embraced and expressed support for such acts. Government ministers have openly [incited](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/1/israel-arrests-settlers-after-anti-palestinian-pogrom) settlers to commit violent acts against Palestinians. Last year, for example, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called for the Palestinian town of Huwara to be [wiped out](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/1/israel-arrests-settlers-after-anti-palestinian-pogrom).

Settlers enjoy not only political backing but also military support. In the past two decades, the deployment of Israeli security forces to the West Bank to help “secure” the illegal Israeli settlements has expanded. In addition, so-called “territorial defence units” comprised of settlers have been created, trained and armed by the Israeli military.

For years, armed settlers have attacked Palestinians under the protection and with the participation of Israeli security forces.

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Since October 7, many army units have been deployed to the Gaza front, which has given the settler territorial defence units an even more prominent role in establishing control over occupied land. The line between the security forces and armed settlers has been increasingly blurred, especially under the leadership of Israel’s minister of national security, Itamar Ben-Gvir. In recent months, he has ordered the distribution of thousands of firearms and other combat equipment to settlers.

Although perpetrated by private citizens, settler violence in occupied Palestine can only be understood as state violence. The applicable international law, including the Articles on the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, confirms that a range of conducts committed by non-state actors, such as Israeli armed settlers, may be attributed to the state.

Prominent human rights organisation B’Tselem has described settler violence as a form of state violence, through which Israel can “have it both ways”. It can claim that this is violence carried out by private individuals – a few “bad apples” among the settlers – and deny the role of its own security forces, all while benefiting from its consequences – the expulsion of Palestinians from their land.

Abandoning the duty to protect

Under international law, Israel as the occupying power has the obligation to protect the Palestinian population. Nonetheless, settler violence takes place openly and in total disregard of the laws of war and human rights.

The fact that Israeli security forces have accompanied and protected settlers on their violent rampages clearly indicates they actively ignore legal responsibilities towards the occupied population.

The lack of accountability for settler violence in Israeli courts – military or civilian – demonstrates that the Israeli authorities are unwilling to put an end to impunity. Already in 2013, a UN fact-finding mission reported that “the identities of settlers who are responsible for violence and intimidation are known to the Israeli authorities, yet these acts continue with impunity”.

A more recent survey by a human rights NGO found that between 2005 and 2023 the Israeli police closed 93.7 percent of investigation files concerning Israelis who harmed Palestinians and their property in the occupied West Bank. Since the current government took office in December 2022, 57.5 percent of Palestinian victims of Israeli crime chose not to file a complaint given [a lack of trust](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/12/6/west-bank-family-sees-no-hope-of-justice-in-settler-killings) in the system.

Settler violence has been adopted by the Israeli state as a tool to accelerate the pace of Palestinian displacement. Once key portions of occupied Palestine are cleansed of the Indigenous Palestinian communities, then the settlement enterprise can proceed unabated and unopposed and annexation can also take place.

Given settlement activities are a recognised violation of international law, the international community cannot acquiesce to settler violence that drives Palestinians from their land to facilitate settlement expansion.

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There are pending investigations about the situation in Palestine at the International Criminal Court (ICC). ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan has confirmed that his office is accelerating investigations in relation to settler violence, stressing that “Israel has a fundamental responsibility as an occupying power” to investigate and prosecute these crimes and prevent their reoccurrence and ensure justice.

In our view, ICC’s investigations might have deterrent effects only if they covered the role of the Israeli authorities in enabling this violence, but also the illegality of settlements. The “transfer of civilians” by the occupying power is indeed one of the most documented alleged war crimes in Israel.

We also find the recent sanctions against individual violent settlers imposed by [the US](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/1/us-imposes-sanctions-on-four-israeli-settlers-over-west-bank), the UK, [France](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/13/france-sanctions-28-israeli-settlers-over-west-bank-violence) and other states short-sighted. By targeting individuals, but not the state, Western powers continue to give Israel a free pass when it comes to violating the rights of Palestinian civilians living under Israeli occupation.

Instead, the international community must clearly and without hesitation ascribe settler violence to the Israeli state, and hold its officials to account in the appropriate international forums for not taking decisive action to prevent it, stop it, and reverse its effects.

In the wake of the landmark International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling that Israel is plausibly engaged in a genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza, all states that are party to the Genocide Convention now have a legal obligation to take material steps to put an end to Israel’s genocidal acts in the besieged Strip.

In this context, the decision by many Western nations to withdraw funding to UNRWA, the UN’s main humanitarian agency for Palestinian refugees, over unsubstantiated “terror” allegations made by Israel, is not only perplexing – the very opposite of what the court legally obliged them to do – but also highly abhorrent as starving Palestinians face a deepening famine and deadly disease outbreaks in besieged Gaza.

The real aim of Israel’s lobbying efforts to undermine UNRWA is the liquidation of the Palestinian identity and the right of return of the Palestinian people that the UN agency has come to embody.

If the Western states, and especially the United States, continue to bow down to Israel’s genocidal demands they will only add further weight to the accusations that they are complicit in its genocide in Gaza.

What is at stake today is not only the future of millions of Palestinians and the very viability of the Israeli state, but the stability of an entire region, and the future of the rules-based world order.

Unabated, Israel’s assault on Gaza, with the unconditional backing of the West, risks a regional conflagration further inflaming conflicts  from Yemen to Iraq and Syria, and paving the way for an unprecedented surge in terrorism across the globe.

Today, there is mounting anger towards Western powers not only in the Arab world, but across the Global South, for their perceived complicity in Israel’s massacres of Palestinian civilians. Terrorist organisations like ISIL and al-Qaeda could not have asked for a better environment to regroup and mount new attacks on the West, as the global majority now views the West solidly as an enabler of the ongoing genocide of an occupied and oppressed Indigenous people. There is every reason to expect such terror groups, or brand new ones like them, to take advantage of this moment and launch attacks against Western populations and their allies and supporters across the globe.

The future of the entire rules-based world order – and international law itself – is also very much at risk. The stark contrast between the West’s response to the war on Ukraine and the war on Gaza, has convinced many that international law applies to the West’s enemies, like Russia, alone. With the West demonstrating clearly that it considers itself and its allies, in this case, Israel, as being beyond the constraints of the law, there has been an immense loss of trust in international institutions like the United Nations. Indeed, the UN not only found itself completely powerless to stop Israel’s blatant violations of international law and attacks on Palestinian civilians, but could not even hold it to account for its outbursts against its secretary-general and targeting of UN staff in Gaza.

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Given the global majority’s strong opposition to the continuation of Israel’s war on Gaza, and the expressed position in favour of a two-state solution of the vast majority of the UN member states, including the permanent five at the Security Council, there is only one way to give another life to the rules-based world order, bring stability to the Middle East, and prevent the dawn of a new era of terror across the globe: ending the occupation of Palestine.

This is also the only feasible way forward for Israel. After Hamas’s October 7 attack, as is evident in the erratic actions of its far-right government and the desperate acts of extreme violence it unleashed on the Palestinians, Israel has lost all confidence in its deterrence capabilities in the region. Israelis are feeling more vulnerable and exposed today than ever before. Many of its citizens have lost trust in the ability of the state of Israel to ensure their security, and are questioning the state’s viability in the region.

Only the end of the illegal occupation, supported by a settlement in which the Arab states assure Israel that it is indeed a part of the region, and can exist among them in peace and prosper, would allow Israel to regain a sense of security and permanence.

Clearly, the longest ongoing occupation in recent history must end – and quickly.  However, given the current gridlock and the total devastation of Gaza, the first step towards ending occupation should be to bring the Palestinian people – who have now been identified by ICJ as a unique “group” – under international protection.

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This interim arrangement must be put in place under the auspices of the UN – whose involvement would restore the legitimacy of the rules-based order, for a period of three to five years, until a fully functional and independent Palestinian state can be realised.

During this period of international protection, an independent tsar, appointed by the UN with the approval of the global community, must lead the process and be responsible for day-to-day governance, with guidance and support from a special council made out of individuals representing all Palestinian factions, including Hamas.

There would likely be serious objections to the inclusion of an official Hamas representative into this set-up, but it should be possible to include in the council a non-member who is acceptable to the group, and can represent its interests. The inclusion of Hamas in any peace process is crucial as no sustainable settlement can be achieved without acknowledging the concerns and expectations of the group that has led Palestinian armed struggle against occupation for many years.

Given the West’s undeniable pro-Israel bias, the countries that have shown care and consideration for the rights and wellbeing of the Palestinians, and respect for international law, throughout this latest conflict, such as South Africa, Turkey, and Brazil, should be part of the international protection coalition. This coalition should also ensure the security and territorial integrity of Jordan and Egypt.

Security enforcement in the Palestinian territories during this transitional period under international protection could follow a hybrid model – a local police force supported by an international force.

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The responsibility of shepherding such a proposal via the Security Council must fall on the United Kingdom and France given their historic responsibility in the creation of the State of Israel and subjugation of the Palestinian people.

The rebuilding of Gaza, which has been reduced to rubble in the past four months, will inevitably be part of the mandate in the interim international protection period. Countries that are directly responsible for the destruction, Israel, the US and Germany among others, should provide the bulk of the required financial resources, keeping in mind that the total rebuilding cost will be less than 20 percent of what the US has promised Israel in terms of additional military support to guarantee its security.

Alongside the formation of an inclusive interim council, a series of immediate steps must be undertaken by the international community to help restore Palestinians’ faith in the international community and the feasibility of its protection.

First, the ICJ’s interim ruling must be supported, and its recommendations implemented in full, by all the world’s nations. This means the killing must stop, captives on both sides should be released, the siege should end, adequate aid and basic services should reach all Palestinians in Gaza immediately. Meanwhile, an independent review of the West’s military support for Israel should be launched and they should be held to account for their complicity in genocidal acts. It must also be made abundantly clear to Israel’s far-right government that ethnically cleansing Gaza or the West Bank is not an option. All the hostages, on both sides, must be released.

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Second, the international community must make it clear to Israel that it cannot infringe on the territorial integrity of Gaza by occupying any part of the territory, establishing a so-called “buffer zone” within it or dividing it into smaller settlements.

Third, the international community must unanimously call for an immediate and unconditional cessation of all illegal construction and land-grabbing activities in the West Bank and demand accountability for the violence and aggression perpetrated by Israeli settlers against the Palestinians. World’s nations must insist on Israel decommissioning all the settlers outposts in the West Bank, and obviating any such intentions in the Gaza Strip.

Fourth, Jordan’s custodianship of the Al-Aqsa Mosque must be maintained and sanctity must be restored to all Christian and Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem.

Finally, to ensure that the Palestinian people can live freely and with dignity under the governance of their own elected representatives, the international community should officially recognise a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital and commit to ensuring the swift implementation of the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals in post conflict Palestine.

This promise can kick start the formation of a Palestinian social security/support system –  something which will be desperately needed the day after.

Representatives for Palestine have called for an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories and the system of apartheid enforced by Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki and Palestine’s United Nations envoy Riyad Mansour, along with several academic and legal experts, represented Palestine at the hearings that began in The Hague on Monday and will last through February 26.

The case, which is separate from the [genocide case by South Africa against Israel](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/16/icj-demands-implementation-of-gaza-measures-but-no-new-action-on-rafah) for its ongoing deadly war on Gaza, is to determine the legal consequences of Israel’s decades-long occupation of Palestinian territories.

In December 2022, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) [passed a resolution](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/31/un-seeks-icj-opinion-on-israels-illegal-occupation-of-palestine) calling on the ICJ to give an advisory or nonbinding opinion on Israel’s 57-year occupation of Palestinian territories. It received 87 votes in favour, with the United States being among 26 to vote no.

Reporting from the Hague, Al Jazeera’s Bernard Smith said there are two questions that all submissions will have to address.

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“The first is what are the legal consequences of the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel and preventing the Palestinians from their self-determination by prolonging the occupation, settlement building and annexation of the Palestinian territories,”“And then the second question is how those policies affect the legal status of the occupation and what are the legal consequences that arise for all states, not just Israel.”

At the hearing on Monday, Mansour said Israel must bear the consequences of actions that run counter to international law, not be rewarded for them. He described tearfully how international law has failed to protect Palestinian children.

“We call on you to confirm that the Israeli presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is illegal and that its occupation must come to an immediate, complete and unconditional end,” he said.

“Without accountability, there is no justice; and without justice, there can be no peace.”

Palestine’s representatives, including Namira Negm, elaborated in detail how Israel’s policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territories [amount to apartheid](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/27/accusing-israel-of-apartheid-is-not-anti-semitic-holocaust-historian).

Amnesty International also issued a statement on Monday saying Israel must end its “brutal” occupation of Palestine “to stop fuelling apartheid and systematic human rights violations”.

Marwan Bishara, Al Jazeera’s senior political analyst, says the ICJ is not judging whether the occupied Palestinian territories are occupied, since that is already determined by UN Security Council resolutions, but whether Israel wants to turn prolonged occupation into de facto annexation.“Everything about this occupation looks permanent,” he said, adding that this is demonstrated by the spreading of Israeli settlements.

Palestinian lawyer Muhammed Dahleh said the hearings are extremely important as the Palestinians have been trying for decades to use international law and international diplomacy to bring attention to their cause to no avail.

This addition now of the advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice might mean that actually many countries in the world will have a legal basis to deal with the Israeli occupation and maybe even the Israeli state and the Israeli government in a different way,” Dahleh told Al Jazeera from occupied East Jerusalem.

After the last hearing is held on February 26, the judges are expected to take several months to deliberate before issuing an advisory opinion.

This is the second time the ICJ, upon a request from the UNGA, has been asked for an advisory opinion related to the occupied Palestinian territory.

In July 2004, the World Court found that [Israel’s separation wall](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2020/7/8/in-pictures-israels-illegal-separation-wall-still-divides) in the occupied West Bank violated international law and should be torn down. The wall still stands to this day.

Israel is not taking part in this week’s hearings and reacted angrily to the 2022 UN request, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calling it “despicable” and “disgraceful”.Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated his intention to extend the military operation in an interview broadcast late on Saturday. “We’re going to do it,” he declared and said that the plans are being worked on.The statement comes despite international alarm over the potential for carnage. An estimated 1.4 million Palestinians are crammed into Rafah, and hemmed in by the border with Egypt, after being ordered by the Israeli military to evacuate their homes elsewhere in the Gaza Strip.

The United States, Israel’s main backer, has warned against the plan to expand the ground assault into the city, which has for months been subject to almost daily aerial bombardments.

At least 25 Palestinians have been killed in overnight strikes on Rafah, according to Al Jazeera journalists on the ground, as the Israeli army has been [ramping up its attacks](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/9/israel-ramps-up-deadly-attacks-on-gazas-rafah-despite-us-un-warnings) this week. Over 28,000 Palestinians have now been killed since the start of the war on Gaza on October 7.Nowhere to go

Netanyahu said in the interview with US outlet ABC News that he agrees with Washington that civilians need to be evacuated from Rafah before any ground invasion.

“We’re going to do it while providing safe passage for the civilian population so they can leave,” he said, according to published extracts of the interview.

However, it’ is unclear where such a large number of people, who are pressed up against the border with Egypt and sheltering in makeshift tents, can go.

When asked, Netanyahu would only say they are “working out a detailed plan”.

“The areas that we’ve cleared north of Rafah are – there are plenty of areas there,” he said.

“Those who say that under no circumstances should we enter Rafah, are basically saying ‘lose the war, keep Hamas there’,” he said.

Reporting from Rafah, Al Jazeera’s Tareq Abu Azzoum said desperate Palestinians in the area feel they have no choices left.

“We need to remember that the majority of injured people and displaced people have been transferred to Rafah in order to be away from Israeli operations,”

Tensions with Egypt

Egypt has fiercely opposed the plan, which threatens to displace hundreds of thousands of Palestinians into its Sinai Peninsula.

It is also remaining highly cautious of increased Israeli military activity near its borders. Cairo has warned that its decades-old peace treaty with Israel could face jeopardy if Israel deploys troops on its border.

Israeli Transportation Minister Miri Regev said that the Israeli government takes Egypt’s sensitivity regarding the military operation in Rafah seriously and that the two sides will be able to reach an agreement.

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Mamoun Abu Nowar, a retired general of the Jordanian air force, told Al Jazeera that Hamas has deep tunnels in the area, some of which run through Egypt.

“In order to control these tunnels,” he continued, “they have to work very hard, to cut these command posts or destroy them so [Hamas] loses this command as a whole, but this would be a very very difficult fight, it would take months.”

‘Recipe for disaster’

International warnings against an invasion of Rafah continue to roll in.

The European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, in a post on X late on Saturday, backed [warnings by the bloc’s member states](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/8/israel-escalates-rafah-bombardment-as-us-warns-of-a-disaster) that an invasion of Rafah “would lead to an unspeakable humanitarian catastrophe and grave tensions with Egypt”.

Regional leaders are also sounding the alarm. Jasem Mohamed Albudaiwi, secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), said an attack on Rafah would further destabilise the region and harm Palestinians.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said on Sunday that there is a sense of growing anxiety and panic in Rafah.

“A military offensive in the middle of these completely exposed, vulnerable people is a recipe for disaster. I am almost becoming wordless,”

Family members found Hind’s body along with those of her uncle and aunt and their three children near a roundabout in the city’s Tal al-Hawa suburb, the Palestinian news agency Wafa reported.

Another of Hind’s uncles, Sameeh Hamadeh, said the car was [peppered with bullet holes](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/2/7/looking-for-a-pennys-worth-of-hope-amid-the-genocide-in-gaza).

“The occupation deliberately targeted the ambulance upon its arrival at the scene, where it was found just metres away from the vehicle containing the trapped child Hind,” said the PRCS statement.

“Despite prior coordination to allow the ambulance to reach the location to rescue the child, Hind, the occupation deliberately targeted the Palestine Red Crescent ambulance crew.”

Earlier this month, the PRCS published an audio file in which Hind could be heard pleading on the phone with a member of the rescue team. All members of her family are believed to have been killed before her, leaving her terrified in the car with the dead bodies of her loved ones.

“I’m so scared, please come. Please call someone to come and take me,” she was heard crying desperately in the call that PRCS said lasted three hours in an effort to calm the frightened child.

The Israeli army had earlier said it was not aware of the incident.

The PRCS had started a count of the number of hours since it lost contact with Hind and the crew in trying to attract attention to the plight of Palestinian healthcare workers, who persist under constant attacks by the Israeli army.

“They are shooting at us. The tank is next to us,” Layan said in a recording released at the time.

Then a barrage of shooting was heard, followed by screams, before the line cut out.

The plight of Hind, revealed in the harrowing audio clips, underlined the impossible conditions for civilians in the face of Israel’s four-month assault on Gaza, which many governments have termed a “genocide”.

Israel’s military has killed nearly 28,000 people – mostly women and children – since October 7 when Hamas fighters attacked Israel, killing more than 1,100 people and taking 253 captives, according to Israeli tallies.

As with many previous Israeli air raids, each attack reportedly killed multiple members of three families, including a total of 10 children, the youngest of whom was only three months old.

This came hours after Netanyahu said he had ordered the military to plan for the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of forcibly displaced Palestinians from Rafah in preparation for a ground invasion to accompany the air attacks.

Netanyahu did not provide details or a timeline, but his announcement only exacerbated widespread panic among over half of the Gaza Strip’s 2.3 million population who are now packed into Rafah. Many of them had been displaced several times before as a result of [Israel’s war on Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/2/10/israels-war-on-gaza-live-death-toll-nears-28000-as-rafah-assault-looms).

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The Israeli leader has said clearing Rafah of the purported four Hamas battalions who are in the area would be necessary on his path to “total victory” over the group.

Reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, Al Jazeera’s Rory Challands said, “At the same time, he said any massive army operation in Rafah can’t take place without the evacuation of civilians from the combat zone. He’s told the military and security establishment to come up with plans that do both.”

“This is causing immense concern around the world. We’ve had the United States saying it can’t condone any operation there that doesn’t put in place a proper humanitarian plan. We’ve got the United Nations saying any forced displacement of the 1.4 million people there is out of line,” he said.

Washington and other allies, as well as rights organisations, [have warned Israel](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/9/israel-ramps-up-deadly-attacks-on-gazas-rafah-despite-us-un-warnings) that invading Rafah would lead to “disaster” and the United Nations has continued to express concern over devastating consequences for civilians.

“Where are they supposed to go? How are they supposed to stay safe?”

Meanwhile, intense fighting continues to rage in areas across Gaza, with Khan Younis in the south still a main focus of Israeli ground and air attacks.

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The area’s largest medical facility, Nasser Hospital, is still under siege by Israeli forces who [have killed dozens in the surrounding areas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/9/israeli-snipers-kill-21-civilians-outside-gazas-besieged-nasser-hospital) using among other things sniper fire and attack drones.

About 300 overexerted medical personnel, 450 patients and some 10,000 displaced people are believed to be sheltering in the hospital, unable to leave because of Israeli fire and lack of safety elsewhere.

Israel’s invasion of Gaza has killed at least about 28,000 Palestinians, most of them women and children, with thousands more missing, likely remaining under rubble.

A new round of talks aimed at securing a truce with Hamas were set to open on Thursday in Egypt after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel will not end the war and will push on until “total victory” over the Palestinian group.Visiting United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken insisted on Wednesday that he still saw “[space for agreement](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/7/blinken-says-a-lot-of-work-remains-on-israel-hamas-truce-talks) to be reached” and was meeting on Thursday in Tel Aviv with Israel’s war cabinet members Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot to discuss the release of captives being held in Gaza.

“We are on the way to an absolute victory,” Netanyahu said on Wednesday, adding that the operation would last months, not years. “There is no other solution.”

Israeli air strikes overnight on Rafah – which Israel had once declared a safe zone for displaced Palestinians – killed 14 people, including five children. “What people are experiencing in the southern part of the Gaza Strip is a surge in attacks from air, land and sea.”being uprooted from their home farther north, said she is afraid of what’s to come. “The children are scared all the time, and if we want to leave Rafah, we don’t know where to go. What will be our destiny and that of our children?”United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said a ground invasion of Rafah would “exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold regional consequences”.

‘Critical phase’

Al Jazeera’s Hashem Ahelbarra said the meeting in Egypt indicated that “we’re moving towards a critical phase of any potential agreement between Israel and Hamas” after senior Hamas leader Osama Hamdan said a delegation was going to Cairo.

“I think we have reached a point where we’re really talking about operational aspects of the agreement, and what is happening behind closed doors is a real, genuine push towards that,” Ahelbarra said.

The Muslim fasting month of Ramadan in March puts “political pressure on leaders in this part of the world”, he said, adding that if Israeli attacks continue then “I wouldn’t see a chance of any deal in the near future.”

Hamas had laid out a three-phase plan to unfold over four and a half months that would see the release of all captives in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, including senior fighters, and an end to the war.

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“While there are some clear non-starters in Hamas’s response, we do think it creates space for agreement to be reached, and we will work at that relentlessly,” Blinken told reporters after meeting Netanyahu to discuss the Hamas counterproposal to a truce plan drawn up by US and Israeli spy chiefs and delivered to the Palestinian group last week by Qatari and Egyptian mediators.

Reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, Al Jazeera’s Rory Challands said Blinken “came to get a deal and he didn’t get it”.

“He’s still going to try to bridge the huge gap between Israel and Hamas. He might be right – there might be a chance. But at the moment, he’s going back to Washington, DC, empty-handed,”

Rafah, a looming Israeli ground “operation”, and the impact on more than a million trapped civilians are top headlines.

But what is Rafah and what are the details around this announced Israeli “operation”?

What is Rafah?

Rafah straddles the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt.

On the Palestinian side, it is the name of Gaza’s southernmost governorate and its capital city, as well as of the crossing into Egypt’s Sinai. On the Egyptian side, it is a city in the North Sinai governorate.

Palestinian Rafah is 64sq km (25sq miles) and, as Israel assaulted Gaza these past four months, more and more people have been herded into it by Israeli forces who keep promising safety “further south” – which never materialised.

Approximately 1.4 million Palestinians have now been pushed into Rafah by relentless Israeli bombing that has killed nearly 30,000 Palestinians.

People are in dense clusters in the limited space not filled with debris or being bombed by Israel. Conditions are dire, with severe shortages.

What is the Israeli ‘operation’?Tel Aviv claims four Hamas brigades are present within Rafah, using their presence there to justify the ongoing attacks by air as well as a planned land assault.

Israel also claims plans for the evacuation of the city – to where is unclear – are being prepared, leaving those sheltering in Rafah paralysed.

Why is Egypt involved?

Because the trapped civilians are pressed up against the border with Egypt, analysts say it seems likely Israel wants to push them into Sinai.

This raises concerns over Egypt’s internal security and the prospect of having more than a million traumatised Palestinians forced into its territory.

What has Egypt done so far?

Egypt has reportedly moved 40 tanks and armoured personnel carriers to the Gaza border to halt any potential spillover from an Israeli land assault.

Egypt has warned that any Israeli ground assault on Rafah would have “disastrous consequences” and that Israel’s aim to force the Palestinians out of their land would threaten the 40-year-old Camp David peace accord between the two countries.

Cairo has beefed up border security since October 7.

Why don’t Palestinians want to leave Gaza?

Palestinians have faced mass displacement in the not-too-distant past: the Nakba.

In 1948, some 750,000 Palestinians were [ethnically cleansed from their homes and lands](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/23/the-nakba-did-not-start-or-end-in-1948) to make way for the establishment of the state of Israel.

Many in Gaza are the descendants of Nakba refugees and do not want to leave Palestine because they know it will be impossible to return – Israel won’t let them.

Arab countries, like Egypt, also object to any displacement as the Palestinian Right of Return has been a main demand since 1948.So, is it safe in Rafah for now?

No.

Israel is already killing more than 100 people a day in air attacks on Rafah.

Those who survive the attacks live in unspeakable conditions in tents that fill with water whenever it rains, or under whatever scraps they find to make a shelter.

Many Palestinians in Rafah have been displaced many times over and say they will not move again, no matter what. Like Jihan al-Hawajri who told US broadcaster PBS that she would stay in her tent, come what may.

“There is nowhere left… to flee to,” said Angelita Caredda, Middle East and North Africa director for the Norwegian Refugee Council.

What are conditions like in Rafah now?

Satellite images obtained by Al Jazeera show an area already at breaking point. Some 22,000 people are crowded into each of Rafah’s 64sq km.

Before the war, 275,000 people lived in those 64sq km, making Rafah one of the most densely populated parts of Gaza, itself among the world’s most overcrowded parts.

The displaced crowd into UNRWA facilities, hoping the agency that was set up to help them would be able to. But nearly 150 of UNRWA’s staff were killed in Israeli attacks, aid is being stopped by Israel, and Western governments withdrew funding when Israel alleged – with no proof yet – that 12 UNRWA staff participated in the October 7 attack.

Overcrowding has resulted in the spread of disease, with health officials reporting an outbreak of hepatitis A – which flourishes in close contact.

With isolating patients impossible, there is little hope of stopping this outbreak or others, like scabies and lice, worsened by a lack of showers or hygienic toilets.

What does Israel want?

When the October 7 attack happened – killing 1,139 people in Israel – and Palestinian armed fighters took 240 people into Gaza as captives, Israel’s declared aims were to return the captives and “eradicate Hamas”.

Since then, the narrative has shifted back and forth.

First claiming to only be targeting armed fighters, Israel soon imposed a complete starvation siege on Gaza, killing civilians with every passing minute.

Then, it became apparent that when Israel said “avoiding civilian casualties”, it meant its secret calculus with an increased “acceptable loss margin”, or the number of people it felt it could kill to eliminate one target.

A massive attack on Jabalia refugee camp in October killed 50 people to eliminate one “Hamas commander”, a designation Israel has not presented proof of.

It also started targeting hospitals, with a horrifying attack on al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City endangering more than 30 premature babies whose incubators stopped when Israel cut electricity. The declared aim to uncover “hidden Hamas command bunkers” under al-Shifa was never realised.

More followed as Israel surrounded one hospital after another, killing and starving people inside, to “unearth Hamas command centres”. None have been uncovered.

Will attacking Rafah help Israel achieve anything?

Not likely, as Israel’s claims about “dismantling terrorist battalions”, referring to armed Palestinian factions, appear as ephemeral as the claims of underground command centres.

It had declared Palestinian fighting factions “neutralised” in north Gaza, only to admit later that that was not the case.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been under pressure – including from the UK and the US – to call off the land assault but he insists this will be the operation to “dismantle Hamas”.

The US made its most pointed wartime criticism of Tel Aviv, saying Israel should “put civilians first and foremost”, but did not threaten to cut aid or support.

The EU and the UK have followed suit with the US.

“To conduct such an operation right now with no planning and little thought in an area” where one million people are sheltering “would be a disaster,” State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel said on Thursday.

He said Washington had “yet to see any evidence of serious planning for such an operation”.

Earlier, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that more than a million civilians were trapped in the city in southern Gaza.

“Half of Gaza’s population is now crammed into Rafah. They have nowhere to go,” he said.

Palestinians in Gaza are desperately hoping a ceasefire could arrive in time to head off the threatened Israeli assault on Rafah, hard against Gaza’s southern border fence and now home to more than a million people, many of them in makeshift tents.

Israeli planes bombed parts of the city on Thursday morning, residents said, killing at least 14 people in attacks on two houses. Tanks also shelled some areas in eastern Rafah, intensifying the residents’ fears of an imminent ground assault.

Diplomatic efforts

The warnings come as diplomats sought to salvage ceasefire talks after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a Hamas proposal.

In a sign that the diplomacy was not over, a Hamas delegation led by senior official Khalil Al-Hayya arrived in Cairo on Thursday for ceasefire talks with key mediators Egypt and Qatar.

Netanyahu said on Wednesday terms proposed by Hamas for a ceasefire were “delusional”, and pledged to fight on, saying victory was in reach and just months away.

Despite Israel’s rejection of the Hamas proposal, more talks are planned. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who met mediators this week on his fifth trip to the region since the start of the war, said he still saw room for negotiations.

Blinken also said that the civilian death toll was too high and reiterated that Israel’s operation should put civilians first.

“And that’s especially true in the case of Rafah, where there are somewhere between 1.2 and 1.4 million people, many of them displaced from other parts of Gaza,” he said.

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He said he had suggested some ways to minimise harm in talks with Israeli leaders, but gave no details. Blinken departed to return to the US on Thursday afternoon.

The Hamas delegation in Egypt is expected to meet officials including Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel, Egyptian security sources said.

Hamas proposed a ceasefire of four and a half months, during which all hostages would go free, Israel would withdraw its troops and an agreement would be reached on an end to the Israeli offensive. Its offer was a response to a proposal drawn up by US and Israeli spy chiefs with Qatar and Egypt, and delivered to Hamas last week.

28:00

Hamas says it will not agree to any deal that does not include an end to the offensive and Israeli withdrawal. Israel says it will not withdraw or stop fighting until Hamas is eradicated.

Israel began its large-scale military offensive after Hamas fighters killed 1,139 people and took 253 hostages in southern Israel on October 7, according to Israeli tallies.

Israel’s military said on Thursday that, during the past day, its troops had killed more than 20 fighters in Gaza’s main southern city Khan Younis, now the site of some of the war’s most intense fighting.

Gaza’s Health Ministry said at least 27,840 Palestinians have been confirmed killed, and more than 67,000 injured since the war began.

The Israeli bombardment continued in Khan Younis and Deir el-Balah in central Gaza, killing Palestinian television journalist, Nafez Abdel-Jawwad, and his son. At least 124 journalists and media representatives have been killed in the enclave so far, Gaza’s information ministry said.

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the main UN aid agency for Palestinians, UNRWA, said on X that the agency had not been permitted to bring food to areas where people are on the verge of famine.

On December 14, we, a group of students at Freie Universität Berlin, occupied a lecture hall in an act of solidarity with the Palestinian people. The occupation was the first of its kind in Germany. It was peaceful although a group of counterprotesters [tried to disrupt it](https://mondoweiss.net/2023/12/pro-palestinian-speech-is-now-effectively-banned-in-german-universities/).

The reaction of the university, however, was to call the police to clear the protesting students. Twenty of us were detained, including myself. Although both the [police](https://www.rbb24.de/panorama/beitrag/2023/12/auseinandersetzung-freie-universitaet-fu-berlin-palaestina-israel.html) and the university said there were no anti-Semitic attacks or discrimination at the protest, the latter tried to [justify](https://www.fu-berlin.de/presse/informationen/fup/2023/fup_23_300-stellungnahme-aktion-hoersaal/index.html) its actions in a subsequent statement with its policy of zero tolerance on anti-Semitism.

Last week, we received letters from the police notifying us that the university administration has pressed criminal charges against us for “trespassing”. Meanwhile, a petition has gathered more than 26,000 signatures calling for our expulsion. Federal Minister of Education Bettina Stark-Watzinger has also publicly called for the expulsion of “the most severe cases” while the Berlin Senate is planning to push through legislation to make such disciplinary action easier.

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The events of December 14 and the subsequent legal and media harassment we have faced are happening amid a societywide assault on anyone expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people in Germany. There has been a relentless campaign to harass, scare, intimidate, silence, fire, dismiss and defund people and organisations who have dared go against the German government’s and institutions’ staunch support for Israel.

At the heart of this vicious persecution is the nationwide guiltwashing – or the cover-up of authoritarian state policies through the pretense of addressing Germany’s historical guilt for the Holocaust.

The message of the guiltwashers is clear: Germany alone is exceptional in its stance against anti-Semitism. Germany alone is fit to judge anti-Semitism. Germany, in opposing the exceptionalism of the Nazi era, is today exceptional once again but, of course, in a different and supposedly progressive way.

The sheer lack of self-awareness would be amusing if it were not so tragic and if its consequences were not so disastrous. Various Jewish authors and scholars have repeatedly pointed out the anti-Semitic nature of this guiltwashing approach.

“We have a form of anti-Semitism … that is not even addressed as anti-Semitism, and it is the collective silencing of Jewish voices that do not abide by the dominant discourse in Germany,” Emilia Roig, a Jewish French scholar and writer, said at a December event in Berlin.

According to Jewish writer and researcher Emily Dische-Becker, a third of those who have been “cancelled” in Germany for alleged anti-Semitism (i.e. expressing solidarity with the Palestinians) have been Jews, including descendents of Holocaust survivors.

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Guiltwashing does not fundamentally care about the safety of Jews. Otherwise, it would not be pushing a discourse that is so recklessly increasing societal tensions at a time when hate crimes against Jews, Arabs and Muslims are spiking and when intercommunal solidarity is what is most necessary.

Indeed, guiltwashing is leaning in the direction of anti-Semitism – as well as anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia – because it operates on a superficial level and does not genuinely internalise the lessons of the past. It seeks to transpose anti-Semitism onto the Arab and Muslim communities to deny and cover up the persistence of German anti-Semitism in the social and political arena.

Guiltwashing does not allow Germans to take a principled stance against state terrorism, genocide and the systematic violation of human rights – something that should be the historical responsibility of any state, but especially so for the German state.

Instead, Germany has adopted a robotic, mindless, unidimensional reactive position. “Never again” is promoted in the narrowest sense – which is not altogether surprising considering the lack of education within Germany about its colonial past and other victim communities of the Nazi regime. It refuses to accept that never again should mean never again for genocide against any people.

Israeli government and military officials have repeatedly [made clear](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/1/14/intent-in-the-genocide-case-against-israel-is-not-hard-to-prove) their genocidal intentions openly and unabashedly. In any context, such repeated statements would be seen as the type of rhetoric that have typically accompanied historical episodes of genocide.

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And yet German officials and public figures continue to ignore them. They have also disregarded the ruling of the International Court of Justice that Israel is plausibly committing genocide, and the practical unanimity of human rights groups and most of the international community on the apartheid character of Israel and its serial historical violations of international law.

Guiltwashing does not only mean acting due to a national guilt pathology. It is also a power tool. It postures as regret, but it works to further an ideal of German exceptionalism in the world and provide a cover of legitimacy for the German desire to remain a world power.

Guiltwashing allows Germany to maintain an expansionist foreign policy that reflects a racist view of the world and involves continued support for Israel and other brutal regimes throughout the Middle East. Until recently, it also included close relations with authoritarian Russia, willingly making the German economy dependent on Russian gas through the now infamous Nord Stream 2 project while the Russian army and mercenaries committed war crimes in Syria.

Guiltwashing also allows Germany to cover up the increasing structural and institutional racism against various minority groups. It now easily dismisses criticisms of anti-Arab and Muslim discrimination with its supposed anti-Semitism agenda.

German exceptionalism appears to have merely substituted one form of racism for another, making use of the more permissive international environment towards that anti-Muslim and anti-Arab prejudice today. It has basically created a replacement victim community.

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A [recent display](https://twitter.com/ju_khatib/status/1757117576323182832) at a carnival in Cologne illustrated well the dynamics of this process. It featured a figure of a woman wearing a keffiyeh with the well-known anti-Semitic caricatured nose, holding two dogs with Palestinian flag leashes named “hate” and “violence”. The transposition of an anti-Semitic trope onto what in the German mind constitutes Palestinianness represents perfectly the racist essence of guiltwashing.

Meanwhile, in a shocking example of historical revisionism, Berlin schools are being told to distribute leaflets describing the Nakba of 1948 as a “myth” – despite even Israeli lawmakers [using the term](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/12/2/we-will-never-forget-reliving-the-pain-of-the-nakba-amid-israels-war).

Amid this societywide assault on international law, history, human decency and basic liberties, German academic institutions have done almost nothing. Although they should act as society’s moral conscience and oppose the current distorted, deeply pathological public discourse, they are shirking away from their responsibilities.

In meetings we have had with university officials, we have heard that speaking up would be too political or “polarised”, that it is beyond the mandate of academia and that the autonomy of universities is limited by their status as public institutions.

This appeasing stance is in sharp contrast to the historical lessons being taught at German universities about past failures of German institutions to push back against discourses of collective demonisation.

Until this state of affairs changes, the German state and institutions will continue to delude themselves that they are trying to atone for past sins. They will continue trying to escape responsibility for the consequences of that past by failing to recognise the multiple victimhoods which arose out of it.

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The space we claimed last month was fundamentally a plea for a basic human recognition of the atrocities being committed in Gaza. But it was also an attempt to try to shake Germany awake, to force it to open its eyes to the blatant reality unfolding before its eyes, to force it out of its self-centred pathology of guilt and to recognise the reality for what it is.

In this context, we should emphasise clearly: Germany owe reparations not only to the Jewish people, but to the Palestinian people as well.

In a historical moment of genocidal violence, we will not be deterred in our mission by vexatious legal complaints, threats, harassment, assault or libel. We will continue our struggle no matter the costs.The ministry’s update on Thursday comes amid a deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, on the brink of famine, as the Israeli military threatens a [ground invasion of Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/2/24/palestinians-cling-to-life-in-rafah-as-israel-threatens-gazas-last-refuge), where about 1.5 million people, most of them were displaced by the war, are sheltering.Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, head of the World Health Organization, called for a ceasefire on social media, saying the “horrific violence and suffering” must end. More than 70,000 Palestinians had been injured,Ignoring international condemnation, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [reiterated](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/2/25/israels-war-on-gaza-live-rafah-strikes-further-harming-aid-efforts-un) a few days ago that the campaign against Rafah, the main entry point for urgently needed supplies of food and medicine, “will happen”.

A captive-prisoner swap deal, being discussed as part of an Israel-Hamas truce negotiations mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States, would only “delay” an assault on the crowded city, he said.

Reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, Al Jazeera’s Willem Marx said: “If that area becomes the centre of the conflict, that would have a devastating impact yet again on the ability of aid agencies to move food into these population areas that need it so much.”

Citing the deteriorating conditions in Gaza, Samantha Power, head of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), said Israel needed to open more crossings so that “vitally needed humanitarian assistance can be dramatically surged”. “This is a matter of life and death,” Officials from the United Nations aid agencies have accused Israel of “systematically” blocking aid from reaching desperate Palestinians in Gaza, warning that at least [one-quarter of the enclave’s population](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/28/at-least-576000-people-in-gaza-one-step-away-from-famine-un-says) is a step away from famine.The Israeli military has also systematically attacked Palestinians waiting for whatever meagre supplies of food aid are available.

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On Thursday, it was reported that soldiers opened fire on civilians waiting for flour for their families in Gaza City, [killing at least 70 Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/29/dozens-killed-injured-by-israeli-fire-in-gaza-while-collecting-food-aid) in an attack described as a cold-blooded “massacre” by the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates.

On the same day, it was also reported that Israeli air raids and shelling had killed at least 30 people in separate attacks in Nuseirat, Bureij and Khan Younis refugee camps in Gaza.

Hospitals are buckling under the strain of coping with so many inpatients. Children have died “due to malnutrition, dehydration and widespread famine” at Gaza City’s al-Shifa hospital, said Health Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qudra, who called for “immediate action” from international organisations.

The ministry said of the 30,035 people killed so far in the conflict, more than 13,000 were children and 8,800 women. At least 70,457 people have been injured, of which more than 11,000 are in critical condition and need to be evacuated.

In the streets, famine is a reality for nearly all the besieged population while the smell of death is ever-present.With nearly no access to medical care, many are suffering from disease, while infection awaits tens of thousands of men, women and children injured by Israeli attacks.

Famine

Hunger has taken a heavy toll on everyone. With businesses and banking services either destroyed or unable to operate, there is no cash, no income and little to nothing to meet the cost of feeding their starving families.

With Gaza’s ability to produce its own food decimated by Israeli bombs, a hungry population looks for food from outside the Strip, provisions increasingly limited by Israel’s continuing blockade.

Agriculture is in ruins. Fertile areas such as Beit Hanoon, Beit Lahiya and Jabalia lie neglected, as winter rains, vital to farmers, fall unheeded. Poultry and livestock have also been destroyed, victims either directly or indirectly of the Israeli bombs.

Fish is a luxury lost to the coastal enclave’s population.

Famine is a growing reality. Few supplies are left and malnutrition is growing.

The international aid that does make it in can barely meet the needs of a hungry population, or prevent the situation from deteriorating.

Since the beginning of Israel’s ground offensive, many humanitarian agencies, like the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) have halted operations, meaning hundreds of thousands of people cannot access any aid.

The endless waves of bombing have destroyed Gaza’s infrastructure, razing or shuttering the factories producing and processing food.

About half the population of Gaza now faces daily shortages of bread, clean water and the basic ingredients for life.

In the east of Gaza, canned goods were once processed and bakeries seemed to stand on every street, they are now simply memories for the starving population.

As are meat and dairy. What food can be found is either extremely expensive or greatly reduced in quantity, often both.

The struggle extends beyond food. Water has become so scarce that contaminated drinking water has become the norm. As more people, especially children, consume polluted water, severe bacterial illnesses have thrived.

For those willing to risk falling buildings or bombs, firewood to boil water can be found, but cooking gas is a distant memory.

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Disease

With uncooked food common, parents, desperate to feed their starving children, feel they have no option but to give them raw food, despite the consequences of doing so.

Across the Strip, infrastructure and sewage systems have been destroyed, resulting in a free flow of sewage that contributes to growing respiratory problems as a population weakened by hunger keeps breathing. Added to that is the smell of the dead, decomposing bodies of people and animals lying scattered in the streets or under rubble, polluting the air and raising the risk of disease transmission.

Medical facilities in Gaza have nearly all been destroyed, leaving those injured by Israeli attacks isolated and those with more complex or chronic needs, such as prenatal care or treatments like dialysis, without proper care.

In and around Gaza City, there are only two functioning hospitals: al-Shifa Hospital and Ahli Arab Hospital. In addition to struggling with many of the same circumstances as the rest of the Strip, they struggle with the demands of hundreds of thousands of injured and sick people calling for help.

The outcome is predictable. Thousands are slowly dying.

Without electricity, large numbers of the injured, the sick, premature newborn babies and those lying in intensive care units (ICUs) must all depend on oxygen pumped by machines reliant on generators, whose fuel supply is uncertain.

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Everyone is at risk. Prenatal care units are out of service, increasing the risk of babies being born with health problems or complications.

Inevitably, as the bombing continues, the incidence of disease and the ever-present need for amputations rarely recedes.

All the while, the cold bites, affecting all.

Each day begins with a challenge of reaching its end.

In Gaza, sadly, that’s enough.

I wanted to be wrong, but it turns out that I was right.

Since early October, I have been sure that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has had one aim all along: to erase Gaza.

Spurred on by a rabid cabinet that believes that Palestinians are worthless “[vermin](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/16/the-language-being-used-to-describe-palestinians-is-genocidal)”, Netanyahu has done what I suspect he has always wanted to do: dispense with the incremental destruction of a people and a strip of land and, instead, engineer a genocide in Gaza with ruthless and oh so satisfying efficiency.

By now, this fact should be clear. That is the “victory” Netanyahu has and will continue to pursue until he has achieved it – to turn Gaza into dust and memory permanently.

There will be no “pause in fighting”, no “lasting” ceasefire, no truce, no end to the genocide because Netanyahu has no reason or incentive to stop.

And Netanyahu knows that no one inside or outside Israel is prepared, willing or able to stop him.

Hope has been extinguished.

Every day, Palestinians hope, in vain, that the horrors and outrages will end. Every day, we hope, in vain, for a faint sign that the murderous madness will end, that reason and diplomacy will prevail, that the captives – on both sides – will be reunited with their aching families.

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Hope is a fantasy, snuffed out by men and forces who thrive on causing chaos and despair in their “killing rage”.

Netanyahu may be unpopular. Still, what he is doing and how he is going about doing it in defiance of proportionate scale, decency, and international law has the overwhelming support of Israelis who, apparently, would also be content to see Gaza reduced to dust and memory – permanently.

[Polls](https://truthout.org/articles/polls-show-broad-support-in-israel-for-gazas-destruction-and-starvation/) show that most Israelis want Netanyahu to use more force, more “firepower” in Gaza and beyond. Damn decency, international law, and the mushrooming number of casualties day after dreadful day.

The pain and suffering of Palestinians is irrelevant. The right and duty of Israel to defend itself is the only thing that counts.

It’s hardly surprising then that polls show, as well, that despite the rampant hunger, disease, and desperate need, most Israelis want fellow Israelis to continue blocking trucks carrying food, water, and medicine from reaching Gaza until the Hamas-held captives are released.

Palestinians are expendable. Israelis are not.

As for the “future” of Gaza, 93 percent of Israelis reportedly agree with Netanyahu: the two-state “solution” is dead on arrival since all of the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River belongs to them. The intent is to have Israeli settlers take the place of Palestinians in Gaza. Another Nakba is already afoot – literally.

I am convinced most of Israel’s confederates abroad – whether they admit it publicly or not – also embrace these egregious beliefs and subscribe, wholeheartedly, to Netanyahu’s modus operandi and definition of “victory”.

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So, far from being “damaged” or “weakened”, Netanyahu has been emboldened as a “wartime” prime minister and by an “international community” that has encouraged him to do what he has done in Gaza and the occupied West Bank without remorse or restraint.

Netanyahu will survive as prime minister for as long as Israel goes about doing what it is doing in Gaza and perhaps longer. Ever the calculating Machiavellian, he has rebuffed predictions of his imminent political demise or forced exit by wishful-thinking columnists, “experts”, and former presidential candidates.

Again and again, the “international community” has said it is “concerned” by what their man in Tel Aviv is doing in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. Again and again, these expressions of “concern” have proven to be hollow bits of performative nonsense.

On reliable cue, US President Joe Biden described what Israel is doing in Gaza as being “over the top”.

“I’ve been pushing really hard, really hard, to get humanitarian assistance into Gaza. There are a lot of innocent people who are starving, a lot of innocent people who are in trouble and dying, and it’s gotta stop. Number one,” Biden told reporters earlier this week.

It won’t stop. How can it stop when [Biden and his complicit allies](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/30/biden-administration-bypasses-congress-on-weapon-sales-to-israel) in London, Paris, Berlin, and Ottawa keep arming Israel to the brim and refusing – even in the blatant face of Israel’s “over the top” onslaught and the deepening humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza – to demand an immediate ceasefire?

The calamitous [course was set when Biden](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/11/27/happily-joe-biden-is-finished) and the other presidents, chancellors, and prime ministers rushed to Tel Aviv in “solidarity” pilgrimages to “stand firmly” by Netanyahu’s side.

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It’s too late to apply the stock, talking-point-ephemeral brake since Netanyahu isn’t listening.

He isn’t abiding by the International Court of Justice’s [damning ruling](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/1/28/the-icj-ruling-was-a-legal-victory-at-the-cost-of-palestinian-lives) which called on the Israeli government to stop what it is doing in Gaza after South African lawyers and diplomats made a persuasive and “plausible” case that Palestinians are victims of genocide and Israel is the perpetrator.

Rafah is in Netanyahu’s crosshairs. The so-called “safe haven” and the more than a million Palestinians who have taken refuge there in tents and makeshift “homes” will endure the inevitable lethal consequences of the major Western powers’ unconditional backing of Israel.

Exhausted and petrified Palestinians, including mothers, wives, and their sons and daughters, will not be spared Israel’s wrath. Their already precarious lives hang on the precipice of Netanyahu’s – for the moment and only for the moment – [delayed designs](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/2/9/israels-war-on-gaza-live-fear-in-rafah-as-israel-prepares-ground-attack).

Biden et al may claim, at least publicly, to ask Israel to stop the looming carnage. Netanyahu will not be deterred by their empty, delivered-behind-a-lectern [“warnings”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/9/israel-ramps-up-deadly-attacks-on-gazas-rafah-despite-us-un-warnings). He is calling the geopolitical shots, not Biden et al.

While America was preoccupied with a football game on Sunday night, [Netanyahu gave Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/2/12/israels-war-on-gaza-live-israel-planning-rafah-assault-as-talks-continue) in Rafah a taste of the terror to come –  firing a shower of shells that killed and dismembered dozens of sleeping children, women and men.

Finally, a cocksure Netanyahu understands the value of patience. Biden looks and sounds like an old man who is poised to become yesterday’s man – gone, inconsequential and forgotten.

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The November presidential election approaches just on the horizon. Another doddering old man, Donald Trump, has a better than even chance of returning to the Oval Office.

If that happens, Trump will enshrine Israel’s licence to commit genocide without his predecessor’s meaningless rhetorical “reservations”.

Either way, America has morphed, in effect, into Israel’s proxy. The dynamic has shifted.

Israel will decide what will happen in Gaza today and tomorrow and America will salute in approval and help pay for the pleasure of doing its captain’s bidding – happily, willingly, and enthusiastically.

The British and American air strikes on Yemen since January 12, launched with support from Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands among others, demonstrate yet again how most Western nations value their money and profit much more than human life.

Israel’s devastating war on Gaza, the first livestreamed genocide in history, has claimed more than 27,000 Palestinian lives, many of them children, since October 7. Most of the Gaza Strip has been reduced to rubble and over a million people have been displaced due to relentless and seemingly indiscriminate Israeli bombardment. The near-total siege on the Strip, meanwhile, brought survivors to the brink of starvation and forced doctors to perform amputations without anaesthetics using unsterile tools. In the face of this undeniable humanitarian catastrophe, Western governments took no meaningful action. In fact, both US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak repeatedly made it clear that they will continue to unconditionally support Israel’s onslaught on Gaza and efforts to “eradicate Hamas” whatever the human cost may be for the Palestinians.

In the end, it was not the killing and maiming of tens of thousands of civilians, but a number of non-fatal attacks by Yemen’s Houthi fighters on commercial ships passing through the strategically important Bab al-Mandeb Strait that sprung Western nations into action. Clearly, the dollars and pounds lost to the rapid rise in shipping costs caused by the attacks proved more valuable to the leaders of “the free world” than rivers of Middle Eastern blood.

The Bab al-Mandeb Strait, which leads into the Red Sea and up to the Suez Canal, is one of the most crucial waterways for international trade.  It is estimated that 12 percent of all global trade, including most exports of petroleum and natural gas from the Gulf, passes through the Strait, amounting to $1 trillion of commerce per year.

Located east of the Mediterranean Sea, Israel relies on this trade route for [most of its goods](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/13/have-the-houthi-red-sea-attacks-hurt-israels-economy). The Houthis say it was this dependency that prompted them to start intercepting Israel-bound and Israeli-owned ships passing through Bab al-Mandeb. They said they will stop the attacks if Israel agrees to a ceasefire in Gaza, or at least allows sufficient humanitarian aid in.

The Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping, conducted in ways reminiscent of Hollywood action movies, have so far led to no loss of life among the civilian crews of targeted ships, but inflicted significant economic damage on Israel and its backers. It is estimated that since the start of Houthi attacks, Israel’s main port in Eilat saw an 85 percent drop in activity.

These attacks also caused some major shipping companies, including British Petroleum and Shell, to entirely suspend their operations in the Red Sea. The suspensions led to severe delays in goods deliveries as well as unprecedented increases in shipping costs. According to the latest available figures, typical shipping prices are 329 percent more expensive today than before the beginning of the disruption in this key shipping route in November.

The attacks also increased the popularity of Houthis both in Yemen and across the region, and led to the rebranding of the Iran-backed armed group as an honourable and noteworthy resistance force against Western imperial aggression.

Western nations could have, of course, avoided all this and saved many, many Palestinian lives, by simply compelling Israel to put a stop to its genocide in Gaza and end its occupation of Palestinian territories. Rather than upsetting Israel by telling it to stop killing Palestinians, however, the leaders of the West decided to embark on yet another bombing campaign against one of the poorest countries in the world.

With this move they showed not only that they do not care about mass murder when it is committed by one of their allies, but also that they value profit margins of Western commercial giants much more than Middle Eastern lives.

Of course, none of this is in any way surprising, or out of the ordinary.

After all, in capitalism,  human life – be it Palestinian, Yemeni, American or British – is just another commodity. Western governments function in a ruthless economic system where dystopian concepts like “value of a statistical life (VSL)” are normalised. VSL aims to calculate the amount of money that a society would realistically be willing to pay to save a human life. It assigns humans a monetary worth that goes on to inform government policy. If a certain lifesaving measure is deemed more expensive than the VSL of those it would save, then the policy is not implemented. For example, in 1975, the US Department of Transportation rejected a regulation to install safety bars at the rear of all trucks, which would have reduced the number of fatalities in collisions, because it deemed the cost of implementing the policy would exceed the VSL of those that would be saved as a result of it.

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If the US government is willing to allow American civilians going about their lives in the United States to die preventable deaths at the altar of capitalism, it is not surprising that it scrambled together an entire task force to protect commercial ships from an anti-West resistance group in the Red Sea.

Furthermore, while it is very rare for Western governments to take meaningful action – military or otherwise – to save human lives, and especially non-Western lives, it is very much part of their routine to wage war for economic gain. The 2003 Iraq war, for example, is largely accepted to be a war fought for “big oil”. The war killed more than a million Iraqis, and caused unprecedented instability that birthed further conflict and misery, but provided companies like the BP with profits of many billions.

Late last month, explaining his decision to attack Yemen alongside the US, Britain’s [Sunak claimed](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/jan/23/rishi-sunak-pressure-mps-commons-red-sea-yemen-airstrikes-houthis) “We cannot stand by and allow these attacks to go unchallenged. Inaction is also a choice”.

The hypocrisy in this sentence is staggering.

The British prime minister only acknowledged that inaction is indeed “also a choice” when Houthi fighters decided that they would take action, and hit the capitalist West where it hurts – in its wallet – to try and put an end to Israel’s relentless attacks on the Palestinians.

He has been very much content with inaction for four long months as Israel killed, injured, displaced and starved more than two million human beings in Gaza with complete impunity. In fact, he is still very much content with taking no action, other than a few empty statements and sending a little aid, to save Palestinian lives.

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The Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping have not been able to put an end to genocide, or deliver a lifeline to the Palestinians suffocating in Gaza. Nevertheless, they managed to expose the West’s priorities, and its seemingly inherent inability to recognise and respect the value of life, and especially that of the Palestinians.

In October 1973 – 50 years before the events of October 7, 2023 – war broke out in the Middle East. The Egyptian army launched Operation Badr, crossing the Suez Canal and capturing the Bar Lev Line, a fortified sand wall on the east bank of the canal.

Palestinian refugees were full of hope that their land would soon be liberated and they would return to the homes from which Israel had expelled them. That did not happen. Instead, after the end of the war, Arab leaders sued for peace with Israel.

A few months later, the Palestinian satirist Emile Habibi, published his novel The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptomist, a metaphorical critique of the Palestinian reality. The novel tells the story of Saeed, a Palestinian who lost his village in the Nakba of 1948. Amid the misery of dispossession and occupation, he wanders through the world with his head bowed in case he finds a shekel on the street to cheer him up.

I wake up every day trapped in the world of Saeed. The mass death in Gaza continues. Yet I must search for a penny on the ground, a signifier of better things to come. Could the January 26 ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) be that?

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On December 13, Al Satar Al Sharki, the eastern part of my city, Khan Younis was subject to a ground invasion by the Israeli army. The four children of my relative Alaa, a teacher at a United Nations school, along with her ex-husband, Musa, were caught in the middle.

During the attack, Israeli soldiers expelled the children from their home and arrested Musa along with all the teenage boys and men in the area. Musa’s mother, who was witness to this brutality, tried to call Alaa, but the soldiers took the phone. Since then, Alaa has heard nothing of her children – eight-year-old Yamin, six-year-old twins Kanan and Orkid and three-year-old Karmi. Are they ill, imprisoned, starving – or worse?

Alaa’s desperate attempts over the past 45 days to find her children through organisations like the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) were met with the usual cold rejection by the Israeli army. She reached out to journalists, local and social media, and now, she turns to anyone who will listen, walking in the streets of Rafah, turned into a concentration camp for more than one million people, looking for her children.

Her voice is a relentless cry of despair in the darkness. Each passing hour etches another year on her soul as she battles the waves of anguish, barely pausing to eat or sleep. Like all of Gaza, she has become a living ghost.

The ICJ ruling brought no relief to Alaa. The Israeli army still refuses to provide any information on the whereabouts of her children.

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“The State of Israel … must cease forthwith any acts and measures in breach of those obligations, including such acts or measures which would be capable of killing or continuing to kill Palestinians,” the court declared on January 26.

Israel denies that it is engaged in such acts. Yet on January 29, Israeli tanks opened fire in Gaza City on a car full of civilians, trying to flee to safety.

Fearing for their lives, they reached out to the PRCS, pleading for salvation. Fifteen-year-old Layan Hamadeh was on the phone with the PRCS when the tanks opened fire again. Screams can be heard in the recording of the call, then silence.

Only six-year-old Hind Rajab, Layan’s cousin, survived. She spoke on the phone with the PRCS, telling them that her uncle and aunt and her four cousins had all been killed and she herself was injured.

PRCS staff set out to find her, but communications were cut off. More than a week later, Hind’s fate and the fate of the PRCS rescue team remain unknown. [Her mother, Wissam](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/2/1/mother-of-6-year-old-missing-in-gaza-recounts-last-phone-calls), is living in hope that she will emerge alive. She is asking the same questions as Alaa is: Is Hind ill, injured, starving, imprisoned – or worse?

Throughout Gaza, people are starving. The besieged Nasser Medical Complex and al-Amal Hospital in Khan Younis are now under attack. Supplies of food, medications, oxygen tanks, water, and essentials for staff, patients and thousands of displaced people have run out. Even more distressing, news reports indicate that the army is breaking into these hospitals and forcing people to leave.

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In Gaza, the air is thick with sorrow. Every heartbeat is a testament to resilience in the face of unimaginable loss.

In Washington, the air is thick with betrayal. Every statement and every act by the US government, Palestinians believe, is a testament to brutality, cowardice and failure to uphold basic human values.

After the ICJ decision mandating Israel to stop its genocidal activities and ordering provisional measures, including ordering the Israeli authorities, as the occupying power, to ensure the delivery of basic services and essential humanitarian aid to civilians, nothing has changed. Genocide in Gaza continues.

I find myself walking, like Saeed, with my head bowed in the hope of finding a penny’s worth of hope.

Israeli authorities said the attacks are justified because Hamas operatives are hiding in the city. Israel has repeatedly stated that it does all it can to avoid civilian casualties despite the death toll in Gaza having surpassed 28,000 in only four months with many thousands more lost under the rubble and believed to be dead.

United States President Joe Biden has warned Israel against carrying out military attacks at the expense of civilian lives. He met with Jordan’s King Abdullah at the White House on Monday and stated: “A major military operation in Rafah should not proceed without a credible plan for ensuring the safety and support of more than one million people sheltering there.”

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Timeline of the attacks

* December 12: Attack on two houses belonging to the Harb family in al-Zuhour district killed 25 civilians, including 10 children.
* December 14: Attack on the house of Dr Abdallah Shehada in Brazil district killed 30 people, including 11 children.
* December 19: Attack on the Zu’rub family home in western Rafah killed 22, including 11 children.
* January 9: Attack on the home of the Nofa family in Tal as-Sultan district killed 18, including 10 children.

What does the Amnesty International report show?

Its investigation into Israel’s actions in Gaza is ongoing, but Amnesty International’s latest report shows evidence of possible war crimes in Rafah.

Its senior director of research, advocacy, policy and campaigns, Erika Guevara Rosas, said: “Entire families were wiped out in Israeli attacks even after they sought refuge in areas promoted as safe.”

Photographs, video recordings and satellite imagery have been taken from all four attack sites by Amnesty to verify destruction. The organisation has also interviewed 18 people – 14 survivors and four rescuers.

This investigation found no legitimate military targets that would warrant an attack of this scale, it said.

Amnesty said it had sent questions about the attacks to the Israeli authorities on January 19 and January 30 but received no response.

Has Israel carried out assaults on Rafah before?

Yes. In August 2014, Israel carried out a four-day air and ground attack on the city, in which 135 civilians, including 75 children, were killed. Amnesty International said Israel had violated international law that time as well.

That assault was launched in response to the capture and presumed killing of an Israeli soldier, Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, who was declared dead on August 2.

In 2015, Amnesty International and the investigative journalism unit, Forensic Architecture, released a report titled Black Friday: Carnage in Rafah during 2014 Israel/Gaza conflict. Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa director, Philip Luther, stated at the time: “There is strong evidence that Israeli forces committed war crimes in their relentless and massive bombardment of residential areas of Rafah in order to foil the capture of Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, displaying a shocking disregard for civilian lives.”

In its statement, Amnesty International called on the international community to support the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in examining allegations of war crimes “including those documented in this report”.

It added: “All states should oppose punitive measures against Palestine for joining the International Criminal Court or for submitting information on Israeli violations to the Court or taking other steps to activate international justice mechanisms.”

Is Israel trying to avoid civilian deaths as it claims?

Despite the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on January 22 ordering Israel to comply with the 1948 Genocide Convention, the rate of civilian casualties in Gaza has not abated.

The international community continues to put pressure on Israel to limit or avoid civilian casualties. Israel’s staunchest ally, the US, has also advised caution.Matthew Miller, spokesmen for the US Department of State, said: “We do not support any military campaign in Rafah going forward as long as they cannot properly account for the 1.1 million people, by some estimates, who are in Rafah today, some of whom have already been displaced, some of whom have been displaced multiple times.”

Egyptian officials have also made it clear that civilian casualties should be avoided at all costs.

ahead of a planned Israeli invasion of Rafah, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave an interview to ABC, a TV channel in the United States. He addressed warnings by Western officials, including Americans, that this would result in a high civilian death toll.

“We are going to do it while providing safe passage for the civilian population so they can leave,” Netanyahu said.

Asked by host Jonathan Karl where 1.4 million Palestinians are supposed to go, he responded: “The areas that we have cleared north of Rafah, there are plenty of areas there, but we are working out a detailed plan to do so.”

Netanyahu sounded unconvinced by his own words.

A day earlier, Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy spoke to London-based LBC radio and also sounded rather unconvincing. When asked by host Matt Frei four times where the Palestinians in Rafah are supposed to go, Levy could not respond. All he could muster was: “Well, there are open areas in the Gaza Strip. And one option is for UN agencies to work together with us on evacuating civilians to open areas.” The question where those open areas are remained unanswered.The reason why Netanyahu and Levy cannot respond to a simple question is because they both know the Israeli army does not intend to protect Palestinians, as it hasn’t up until now. They know that nowhere has been safe for Palestinians and nowhere will be safe for them when the invasion of Rafah starts. They also know that ultimately, Israel is aiming to expel the Palestinians from Gaza, not to keep them there.

No safe place in Gaza

Since the start of this Israeli war on Gaza, the Israeli government has upped the ante on misinformation. Nowhere has this been more evident than in claims that the Israeli army is creating “safe passage” for the people of Gaza or is trying to protect them.

The past four deadly months provide plenty of evidence.

First, Israel told the people of Gaza that the south would be safe. When they started evacuating, they were bombed on the way in their civilian convoys. They were also bombed when they arrived. When civilians were not bombed on “safe evacuation routes”, they were shot at by snipers or detained and forcibly disappeared.

When the Israeli army invaded the previous “safe zone” of Khan Younis, it told civilians to [stay put](https://twitter.com/QudsNen/status/1755594772981629098) in hospitals and shelters. Its [snipers](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/9/israeli-snipers-kill-21-civilians-outside-gazas-besieged-nasser-hospital) shot people trying to reach hospitals and shelters and then bombed them.

When the Israeli army told Palestinians to leave Khan Younis, it targeted them while they were fleeing.

Some Palestinians made it to Rafah, another “safe zone”, only to be told that it is no longer safe. Now people are being told to flee Rafah to “open areas”. Other “open areas”, such as Mawasi, where people were previously told to go have been repeatedly targeted.

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Throughout this process of telling people to evacuate only to kill them, the Israeli army and government kept making announcements in English and giving interviews to Western media claiming it was taking measures to “protect civilians”. Whether it was unsafe “evacuation routes” or confusing “[evacuation maps](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/12/4/fact-or-fiction-israeli-maps-and-ai-do-not-save-palestinian-lives)”, they did what they could to cover up the truth that there are no safe places in Gaza.

They continued to peddle the lie even after United Nations agencies and international organisations – such as Save the Children, Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF), Amnesty International, etc – all agreed there is no safe place in Gaza.

Even Western media – including The New Yorker, Time magazine and Deutsche Welle – started seeing through Israeli disinformation and reported the reality that there is no safe place in Gaza.

Should the same army that killed more than 28,000 Palestinians and destroyed or damaged more than 60 percent of homes in Gaza be trusted to offer “safe passage” now?

Schrodinger’s Hamas

In the past, as in this war, Israel has repeatedly blamed the killings of civilians on Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups. It has repeatedly claimed that Palestinian fighters and their commanders use the civilian population as “human shields”.

But these claims do not quite add up with the data that the Israeli military itself has released. In January, Israel claimed that it had killed 10,000 Palestinian fighters (9,000 in Gaza and 1,000 inside Israel), wounded 8,000, arrested 2,300 and eliminated two-thirds of Hamas’s regiments. It has also said it has “struck” 30,000 targets in Gaza.

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If the Israeli army – the most moral in the world per its own evaluation – “strikes” only military targets, one would have thought that at least 30,000 fighters would have been killed or wounded.

And if we go by Netanyahu’s claim that for one Palestinian civilian killed, one Palestinian fighter has been eliminated, then we get a death toll that the Israeli intelligence would reject. (The latter apparently has been using internally the Gaza Ministry of Health’s numbers, which the Israeli government repeatedly has called to question.)

In other words, Israeli army data confirm that it is striking civilian targets and Netanyahu is lying about the civilian-military death ratio in Gaza.

But there is another contradiction in the official Israeli narrative that these data are revealing.

Hamas, by Israeli estimates, had at least 30,000 fighters before the war. If we are to believe the Israeli army claims that it has cleared Hamas from the areas it has invaded in the Gaza Strip and that Rafah is the “last Hamas stronghold”, that means at least 10,000 were in Rafah in January when Palestinians were still being told this city was a safe zone.

If, as Israel likes to claim, Hamas uses human shields, then Israel is simply admitting that it is pushing the civilian population into areas where they will be targeted because Hamas is there.

It turns out, in this war on reality, that Israel can simultaneously say that they are evacuating civilians to safety while saying Hamas uses them as human shields. Somehow, Hamas is everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

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Beneath these lies is the formula for the real truth that Israel operates by: Where Hamas goes, civilians go, where civilians go, Hamas goes. To defeat Hamas, we must also remove civilians.

‘Nakba is safety’

It is no secret that the Israeli government has been planning and lobbying to have Palestinians expelled to the Sinai Peninsula. As early as late October, a document from Israel’s Ministry of Intelligence emerged in which the deportation of the Palestinian population of Gaza to Egyptian territory was clearly outlined.

Netanyahu was quick to dismiss the document as a “concept paper” and downplay its contents. But one has to wonder what he was thinking of when he stumbled on the words “plenty of areas” in the ABC interview. Could it be the real estate plans that are being drawn up for development of new Jewish settlements in eviscerated Gaza or the [conference](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/29/israeli-ministers-join-gathering-calling-for-rebuilding-settlements-in-gaza) his ministers attended calling for Israeli resettlement of the strip?

Over the past four months, more than two million Palestinians have been squeezed farther and farther south closer to Egypt. Meanwhile, the “safety” and “evacuation” rhetoric of the Israeli army and government has served as a convenient cover for where this is going.

Israel’s evacuation orders have been a performance for the international community to try to demonstrate that Israel is complying with its obligations under international law.

The same is true of their evacuation maps, their leaflet drops, the “precision” strikes, the “safe zones”. These all form part of the [“technologies of genocide”](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/1/6/safe-zones-israels-technologies-of-genocide) designed to make another Nakba easier for Israel and more palatable for Israel’s allies and the international community.

Indeed, they are part of the window dressing that helps US President Joe Biden trivialise Israel’s genocidal campaign as “a bit over the top”.

In the war on reality, truth falls victim to political ideology, and disinformation conflicts with other disinformation.

“War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.” Add to this quote from George Orwell’s classic 1984, “Nakba is safety”, for that is the reality that has been foisted upon Palestinians in Gaza.

Rafah was a designated “safe zone” and the last refuge for Palestinians forced to escape Israel’s attacks by land, air and sea across the rest of the enclave. An estimated 1.4 million Palestinians found some measure of security there in tents and makeshift shelters.

UN aid chief Martin Griffiths warned that Palestinians in [Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/11/what-is-happening-in-gazas-rafah-as-israel-threatens-to-attack) might be forced into Egypt if Israel launches its planned military operation against the border city.

“The possibility of a military operation in Rafah, with the possibility of the [border] crossing closing down, with the possibility of spillover … a sort of Egyptian nightmare … is one that is right before our eyes,” Griffiths told diplomats at the UN in Geneva on Thursday.

He said the notion that people in Gaza could evacuate to a safe place was an “illusion”.

“We must all hope that friends of Israel and those who care about Israel’s security give them good counsel at this moment,” Griffiths added.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated his goal on Wednesday to eradicate Hamas by all means, including a military operation in Rafah.

“We will fight until complete victory, and this includes a powerful action also in Rafah after we allow the civilian population to leave the battle zones,” he said.

Mirjana Spoljaric, the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), said the absence of a clear evacuation plan, including for the sick and elderly, would bring suffering to a new level.

“The suffering on both sides, the carnage we have seen since the seventh of October, will reach unimaginable depths if operations on Rafah are intensified the way they have been announced,” Spoljaric said.

As Israeli forces are also engaged in military operations in central and northern Gaza, any mass movement further north would be fraught with danger.

On Thursday, the Israeli army stormed the [Nasser Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/14/palestinians-flee-as-israel-orders-evacuation-of-besieged-nasser-hospital), the main medical facility in Khan Younis, southern Gaza.

The military described the attack as “precise and limited”, adding it was based on “credible information” that Hamas fighters were hiding in the facility and kept captives there. A spokesperson for Hamas denied the allegations, calling them “lies”.

“It is a continuation of the war of extermination, targeting hospitals and destroying civilian structures in the Gaza Strip, and the occupation continues to challenge international laws that make hospitals protected places,” Hamas said in a statement, adding that “the whole world is watching without any serious and effective action to stop it”.

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There was heavy tank and machinegun fire as troops entered the complex after ordering occupants to evacuate.

Reporting from Rafah, Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud said earlier that Israeli forces “bulldozed” the southern fence of the hospital on Thursday and moved to the main building, rounding up “doctors and nurses inside”.

“The Israeli military is preventing them from treating any of the many wounded. Right now, people are being attacked inside Nasser Hospital,” he said.

On Wednesday, Israel said it had opened a secure corridor for displaced people to leave the hospital but allowed doctors and patients to remain.

The medical charity Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF) said people ordered by Israel to evacuate faced an impossible choice to stay “and become a potential target”, or leave “into an apocalyptic landscape” of bombings.

Mohamad Elmasry, a professor at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, told Al Jazeera that Israel’s siege of the hospital and its plans to move into Rafah are all parts of the “same story” and Israel has been “seeking to make life unlivable for Palestinians”.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza said at least 28,663 people have been killed in Israel’s attacks since the start of the war, and at least 68,395 have been wounded. It said 87 Palestinians were killed and 104 wounded over the past 24 hours.

As the Group of 20 (G20) meets in Brazil this week, the reported death toll in the Gaza hostilities is nearing the 30,000 mark. I hope this gives the foreign ministers convening in Rio de Janeiro a reason to reflect on what their countries have or have not done to stop this.

To say that the war in Gaza is pitiless and is an example of utter humanitarian failure is not news. There is no need to restate the obvious. Instead, allow me – on behalf of my humanitarian colleagues – to warn you not just about today but what I fear for tomorrow.

What has been unfolding in Gaza for the past 138 days is unparalleled in its intensity, brutality and scope. Tens of thousands of people killed, injured or buried under the rubble. Entire neighbourhoods razed to the ground. Hundreds of thousands of people displaced, living in the most abject conditions even as winter sets in. Half a million people on the brink of famine. No access to the most basic needs: food, water, health care, latrines. An entire population is being stripped of its humanity.

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The atrocities befalling the people of Gaza – and the humanitarian tragedy they are enduring – are there for the world to see, documented by brave Palestinian journalists too many of them [have been killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/1/un-experts-condemn-disturbing-attacks-on-journalists-in-gaza) while doing so. No one can pretend not to know.

No one can pretend not to know either that humanitarian agencies are doing their best: Nearly 160 of our colleagues have been killed, yet our teams continue to deliver food, medical supplies and safe drinking water. We are doing everything we can, despite the security risks, the collapse of law and order, the access constraints and the personal tragedies. Despite the defunding of the largest UN organisation in Gaza. And despite the deliberate attempts to discredit us.

The humanitarian community which I represent has just released a plan outlining what we need to increase the flow of aid into and across Gaza. None of it is unreasonable: security guarantees; a better humanitarian notification system to reduce risks; telecommunication equipment; removal of unexploded ordnance; use of all possible entry points.

But although I have often said that hope is the currency of the humanitarian, I have little hope that the authorities will give us what we need to operate. I want nothing more than to be proven wrong.

We know without a shadow of a doubt that humanitarian agencies will be blamed – we are already being blamed – for the lack of aid in Gaza, despite the courage, commitment and sacrifice of all our teams there.

But make no mistake: The deprivations that the people of Gaza have been enduring are so severe that no amount of aid is enough.

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The obstacles we are facing every step of the way are so enormous that we can only provide the bare minimum.

The October 7 attacks on Israel are horrific – I have condemned them repeatedly and will continue to do so. But they cannot justify what is happening to every single child, woman and man in Gaza.

So my message to the G20 foreign ministers this week is clear: We have been pleading with Israel, as the occupying power in Gaza, to facilitate aid delivery – to little or no avail.

We have been calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages – to little or no avail.

We have been urging the parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law – to little or no avail.

We have been exhorting countries which have stopped funding UNRWA to reverse their decision – to little or no avail.

Today, we implore you, G20 members, to use your political leadership and influence to help end this war and save the people of Gaza. You have the power to make a difference. Use it.

Your silence and lack of action will only lead to more women and children thrown into the open graves of Gaza.

For many years, every time I travelled to Gaza to visit my family, I passed through the Rafah crossing, the border between the besieged Gaza Strip and Egypt. And every time I took a breath in the border city of Rafah, I was reminded of my sister Taghreed’s words:  “I am inhaling the scent of the history of my land.” Her eyes would glow with pride every time she talked of Rafah, and I share the sentiment.

The history of this corridor spans thousands of years, a testament to the rich history of Palestine and its people. For millennia, Rafah has been a resting place and a trade hub for caravans from across Palestine travelling towards the Sinai Peninsula and onwards to Egypt and Africa.

Today, a genocide is unfolding in this ancient, precious city. As I witness this genocide from afar and fear what the threatened Israeli invasion would mean for the hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians forced to take shelter there, I feel like I am one of those powerless souls who recognised what was happening in Srebrenia or the Warsaw Ghetto, tried to raise the alarm but couldn’t do anything to avert the tragedy as the world had already decided to turn a blind eye to the impending massacre of innocents.

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Since the beginning of this latest war on Gaza, every new phase in the Israeli onslaught has inflicted more suffering, pain and death on the civilian population. Displaced many times over, those who are now in Rafah have nowhere else to go. The invasion of Rafah would thus be the last, and the most deadly phase of this genocide – the first genocide in human history that has been broadcast live to the world.

Sadly, this is not the first time beautiful Rafah has become the background to crimes against humanity. The border city’s recent history is a wound kept open by constant violence. The majority of Rafah’s residents, like most cities in Gaza, are the descendants of those displaced during the 1948 Nakba while others are the survivors of a 1956 massacre and the many other Israeli aggressions that came after.

My 89-year-old aunt Rayya, a refugee from Barqa village, which was destroyed by Israel in 1948, has been witness to decades of massacres, violence and oppression in this city.

In 1956, during the tripartite aggression involving Britain, France and Israel, also known as the Suez Crisis, Israel occupied the Gaza Strip for about four months, perpetrating horrifying massacres in both Khan Younis and Rafah.

On November 2, when the Israeli military occupied Khan Younis and ordered males aged 16 and older to come out and present themselves at points across the city, my aunt was there visiting family. Then a 22-year-old newlywed, she witnessed the Israeli military line those men and boys up against walls and massacre them over the course of two days.

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My aunt eventually decided to leave the family home with her sister’s family in search of safety. They walked to the beach in Khan Younis and sought refuge under the trees. They ate anything they could find and dug holes in the ground to sleep, find clean water and use as a toilet. Despite the surrounding danger and the continuous sound of bombardment, Rayya, fearing for the safety of her husband, made the difficult decision to continue her journey on to Rafah.

Upon her arrival, Rayya realised that there had been yet more executions across Rafah. She could not find her husband anywhere. For days, she grappled with the harrowing uncertainty of his fate. Fortunately, her husband had survived that particular wave of violence. He later died during the occupation of Gaza in 1967, killed by the Israeli army while travelling along the beach from Khan Younis to Rafah.

After her husband’s murder, Rayya found herself alone, a single mother, tasked with raising five children in the hardship and destitution of the Rafah refugee camp.

In the 1970s, she was forced to seek employment in Israel’s agriculture sector, labouring in the fields collecting tomatoes to provide for her family.

During the first Intifada in 1987, Rayya lost an eye while trying to rescue her youngest son from the hands of Israeli soldiers. She was struck in the eye by the butt of a rifle while trying to prevent soldiers from taking her child.

At the beginning of the second Intifada in 2000, one of her grandchildren, 13-year-old Karam, was shot in the back of the head as he was running away from an Israeli army post after throwing stones at soldiers. The unconscious child was rushed to al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, but doctors said he had no possibility of survival beyond a few hours.

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Rayya and her daughter in law, Karam’s mother, were presented with an agonising choice: Stay at the hospital and accompany Karam in his final hours of life, or return to Rafah before checkpoints were closed to mourn his death at home with their loved ones. Uncertain whether they would be allowed to move between cities in the coming days, they eventually decided to go home without Karam’s body.

In 2004, Rafah was subjected to what Israel called Operation Rainbow, a cruelly ironic title for what was considered – at the time – the worst episode of violence the city had witnessed. The operation resulted in the destruction of hundreds of homes throughout Rafah. Rayya’s home was also partially demolished during this spate of violence. Then, during the 2014 war on Gaza, Rayya lost another grandson – a bright engineering student, recently engaged.

Today, 10 years later, Rayya is once again trying to survive military aggression in Rafah. I have not been able to contact her recently, but I fear she is once again displaced, hungry, cold and terrified, digging holes in the ground to find water or go to the toilet at the age of 89.

The story of my aunt Rayya – a story of suffering and perseverance – is the story of Rafah. Her story echoes the tragic stories of more than a million displaced Palestinians who have been forced to seek safety in the border city. But Rafah’s story is also one of international solidarity. Rachel Corrie, Tom Hurndall and James Miller all lost their lives at the hands of the Israeli military in Rafah while bravely taking a stand against Israel’s brutal occupation.

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Rafah is now the last refuge for Palestinians in Gaza amid a still unfolding genocide, and it is the place where the international community could and should take action to prevent another Warsaw or Srebrenica.

This is the moment for every member of the global civil society, everyone who believes in human rights, justice and freedom for all, to speak up against the deafening silence of their political leaders and take a stance for the long suffering Palestinian people.

As the threat of a catastrophic Israeli invasion looms on the horizon in Rafah, we cannot continue to ignore the plight of Palestinian refugees, displaced many times over, sick, hungry and forced to resist a blatant ethnic cleansing campaign with nothing but their fragile bodies.

No one can claim ignorance about what’s happening today in Rafah, in Gaza, across Palestine. The truth is evident in the testimonies of the children living through the genocide, in the work of brave journalists on the ground documenting their own slaughter, in the carefully researched and sourced reports of experts, academics, human rights defenders and international institutions. Rafah is the final opportunity for the international community to come together for peace and dignity in Palestine. It’s time for Rafah to finally be truly safe and prosper. It is time for lifelong refugees like my aunt Rayya to find permanent safety and security. It is time for a ceasefire, and a free Palestine.

Most people probably don’t know this, but Wikipedia has a page called “[List of Israeli assassinations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Israeli_assassinations)”. It begins in July 1956 and stretches over 68 years until today. The majority on the list are Palestinians; among them are famous Palestinian leaders including Ghassan Kanafani of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; Fatah’s Khalil Ibrahim al-Wazir – also known as Abu Jihad; Hamas’s Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s Fathi Shaqaqi.

When looking at the long list, it is impossible not to notice that the number of assassinations and assassination attempts Israel has carried out over the years has increased exponentially: from 14 in the 1970s to well over 150 in the first decade of the new millennium and 24 since January 2020.

I was reminded of this list when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called a news conference on July 13 to celebrate Israel’s attempt to kill Hamas’s military commander Mohammed Deif in Gaza. Israeli fighter jets and drones had just [hammered](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/7/13/israeli-air-raid-on-al-mawasi-kills-90-people-what-we-know-so-far) al-Mawasi camp, which now houses an estimated 80,000 displaced Palestinians living in densely populated tents.

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Within just a few minutes of the fusillade, the pilots had massacred at least 90 Palestinians, including scores of women and children, while injuring an additional 300 people. All of this occurred in an area Israel had previously designated a “[safe zone](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/7/8/gazas-safe-zone-of-horror)”. As gruesome images of dead bodies charred and shredded to pieces filled social media, reports surfaced that Israel had used several United States-made guided half-tonne bombs.

In his news conference at the Ministry of Defence headquarters in Tel Aviv just a few hours after this bloodbath, Netanyahu admitted that he was “not absolutely certain” that Deif had been killed but [maintained](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/7/13/israeli-air-raid-on-al-mawasi-kills-90-people-what-we-know-so-far) that “just the attempt to assassinate Hamas commanders delivers a message to the world, a message that Hamas’s days are numbered”.

Yet even a quick perusal of the “List of Israeli assassinations” makes clear that Netanyahu was speaking with a forked tongue. He knows all too well that Israel’s assassination of Hamas’s political leaders Sheik Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi or military leaders Yahya Ayyash and Salah Shehade have done very little to weaken the movement and may well have increased its following.

If anything, years and years of Israeli assassinations demonstrate that they are primarily used by Israeli leaders to pander to and rally their constituencies. Netanyahu’s recent news conference is no exception.

But as macabre as the Wikipedia list is, the names on it only tell a partial story.  That is because it fails to include the number of civilians killed during each and every successful and failed assassination attempt.

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For example, the July 13 strike was the eighth known attempt on Deif’s life, and it is difficult to calculate the total number of civilians Israel has killed in its scramble to assassinate him. The Wikipedia list fails to capture how the increase in assassinations has led to an exponential increase in civilian deaths.

This becomes clear when we compare Israel’s current assassination policy with its policy during the second Palestinian Intifada. When Israel assassinated the head of Hamas’s Qassam Brigades, Salah Shehade, in 2002, 15 people were killed, including Shehade, his wife, 15-year-old daughter, and eight other children.

After the strike, there was a public uproar in Israel at the loss of civilian lives, with 27 Israeli pilots signing a letter refusing to fly assassination sorties over Gaza. Almost a decade later, an Israeli commission of inquiry found that due to an “intelligence gathering failure”, commanders had not known that there were civilians present in the adjacent buildings at the time, and had they known they would have called off the attack.

The commission’s findings are in line with the laws of armed conflict, which allow, or at least tolerate, the killing of civilians not directly participating in hostilities so long as these killings are not “excessive” in relation to the “concrete and direct” military advantage that the belligerent expects to gain from the attack.

This rule, known as the principle of proportionality, is designed to ensure that the ends of a military operation justify the means by weighing the anticipated military advantage against the expected civilian harm.

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Today, however, we are light years away from the commission’s conclusions both with respect to the repertoires of violence Israel has adopted and the legal justifications it now provides.

First, Israel’s forms of war-making have changed dramatically since 2002. According to the Israeli organisation Breaking the Silence, which is made up of military veterans, two doctrines have guided the Israeli assaults on Gaza since 2008. The first is the “no casualties doctrine”, which stipulates that, for the sake of protecting Israeli soldiers, Palestinian civilians can be killed with impunity; the second doctrine recommends intentionally attacking civilian sites in order to deter Hamas.

These doctrines have unsurprisingly led to mass-casualty attacks, which, according to the laws of armed conflict, constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. As a consequence, Israel’s military lawyers have had to modify the way they interpret the laws of armed conflict so that they align with the new warfare strategies.

If two decades ago killing 14 civilians when assassinating a Hamas leader was considered disproportionate and thus a war crime by the Israeli commission of inquiry, in the first weeks after October 7, the military decided that for every junior Hamas operative, it was [permissible](https://www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/) to kill up to 15 or 20 civilians. If the target was a senior Hamas official, the military “authorised the killing of more than 100 civilians in the assassination of a single commander”.

This might seem egregious, but an officer in the International Law Department of the Israeli army was very candid about such changes in a 2009 interview for the newspaper Haaretz: “Our goal of military is not to fetter the army, but to give it the tools to win in a lawful manner.”

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The former head of the department, Colonel Daniel Reisner, also [publicly](https://www.haaretz.com/2009-01-29/ty-article/consent-and-advise/0000017f-e1a6-d9aa-afff-f9fe5e100000) stated this strategy was pursued through “a revision of international law”.

“If you do something for long enough, the world will accept it,” he said, “The whole of international law is now based on the notion that an act that is forbidden today becomes permissible if executed by enough countries.”

In other words, the way we calculate proportionality is not determined by some a priori moral edict but rather the norms and customs created by militaries as they adopt new and most often more lethal forms of war-making.

Again, Netanyahu knows this all too well. He has stated that he personally approved the al-Mawasi strike after receiving satisfactory information on the potential “collateral damage” and the type of ammunition to be used.

What is clear is that as Israel decimates Gaza and kills tens of thousands of people, it is also attempting to recreate the norms of war-making and significantly transform interpretations of the laws of armed conflict.

If Netanyahu and his government succeed in rendering Israel’s version of proportionality acceptable among other state actors, then the laws of armed conflict will end up justifying rather than preventing genocidal violence. Indeed, the very architecture of the entire international legal order is now in the balance.

For more than four months now, the world has been watching in shock as Israel has massacred, maimed, starved, tortured and humiliated the Palestinians of Gaza.

For us, the Palestinian refugees in the diaspora, witnessing this horror has been particularly poignant. Every story, every plea, all that unfolds resonates with the echoes of accounts we have heard for years from our parents, grandparents, neighbours and friends’ parents of what they had experienced during the Nakba of 1948, when they were ethnically cleansed from their homeland. Thus, every testimony we hear amplifies the weight of bearing witness beyond the immediate horrific scenes emanating daily from Gaza.

I grew up in the Baqa’a refugee camp in Jordan, where my mother and grandmother settled in 1970 after experiencing multiple displacements since the Nakba. Their ordeal began with expulsion from their home village, Iraq al-Manshiyya, 30km (18.6 miles) north of Gaza, in April 1949. Following a 10-month-long siege by the Jewish Haganah militia, people were ordered to “relocate temporarily” to an area near Hebron, now known as Arroub camp and were never allowed to return.

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Due to the events of the 1967 war, they were once again forced to move, this time to al-Karama camp in Jordan. In 1968, they were relocated to ash-Shuna camp near Zarqa city in Jordan before moving to Baqa’a two years later.

My generation was surrounded by people with vivid memories of pre-1948 life and the harrowing events of the Nakba from 1947 to 1949. These narratives have become a canvas upon which I try to comprehend the profound impacts of atrocities committed in Gaza against the Palestinians.

Conversations within the camp consistently harkened back to the past, with every aspect of daily life measured against the backdrop of pre-Nakba times. The elderly recounted their losses, their painful journeys of exile, the profound trauma they endured, and the continuing sense of injustice in their hearts.

For us, the younger generation, it was not just about hearing historical events; it was a visceral experience of living alongside those who directly witnessed and endured the atrocities of that tumultuous period. The weight of their memories, losses and continuing struggles shaped our understanding of identity and fuelled the quest for justice.

Certain stories became enduring narratives within the camp, readily retold and passed down through generations, especially those related to resistance. Yet, there were stories that surfaced rarely or were deliberately concealed, particularly from strangers and researchers who intermittently visited the camp seeking to document narratives.

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Among the concealed stories were those entailing the agonising experiences of forced starvation, instances of sexual violence perpetrated by the Jewish Haganah militia against both men and women, and the heart-wrenching narratives of mothers who, amid bombardment, left their children behind.

The latter stories, if resumed later by the fortunate reunion of parent and child, were recounted with a certain sense of pride for the strength displayed. For those who never knew the fate of their children and other loved ones, these stories were so painful that they were not spoken of in an attempt to hide the severe sense of loss and guilt.

Yet, it was the narratives of hunger that bore the most profound emotional weight. When recounted, these stories were often punctuated with the poignant expression, “I pray to God that these days are never relived or experienced by anyone, whether a friend or foe”.

Adding to the anguish in these stories was the underlying sense of shame. In a community once skilled in the art of food production, the recollection of starvation represented a dissonance – a stark departure from the strength and resourcefulness that defined their heritage.

The memory of forced starvation reflected not only physical deprivation but a profound departure from the self-sufficiency that had characterised their history. Planting wherever they went marked an important action for Palestinians, not only to prevent the recurrence of such suffering but also to restore a sense of dignity and self-sufficiency for a people that once thrived on its ability not only to produce sustenance but to treat food-making as an art.

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As I read reports from Gaza about people grappling with forced starvation – unable to secure flour for bread, struggling to prepare a decent meal to nourish their families, and losing children to hunger – the anguished look and expressions of my grandmother while recounting the desperate days of famine persistently come to mind.

The Haganah militia laid siege on her village from around June 1948 to April 1949. During this time, those who challenged the blockade and tried to bring supplies to the village were either killed or forcibly disappeared; one of them was my grandfather, who disappeared and was never heard from again.

Not only were there no supplies entering the village, but also the Haganah fighters deliberately destroyed food storages, slaughtered cows and sheep, and burned fields of wheat and orchards of grapes, apples and apricots. My memories of my grandmother’s face as she recounted these hardships become a window into the emotions that accompany the struggle for existence – the feelings of desperation and helplessness, and the crushing weight of responsibility to provide for loved ones.

Through these memories, I glimpse into the harsh reality faced by besieged Palestinians in Gaza, where the simple act of securing basic food staples has become a formidable challenge.

But as I reflect on my grandmother’s experiences, I cannot reduce them to her desperation; that would not do them justice. During the siege on her village, my grandmother played a pivotal role in resisting the starvation tactics of the Haganah militia.

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She led the fight against starvation by inventing new meals from whatever was available, a fact she proudly shared in her accounts. Through her experience of starvation and determined efforts to combat it, my grandmother’s story encapsulates not only the suffering of Palestinians in 1948 and the brutality that forced them to leave their homes but also the indomitable will to defy and overcome those adversities.

Much like my grandmother, Palestinians in Gaza are suffering and enduring brutality but they are also displaying their distinctive ability to resist Israel’s tactics of starvation, displacement and degradation.

As we navigate through the tragic stories coming out of Gaza, the life of a Palestinian unfolds as a paradox – a delicate equilibrium between enduring suffering and embodying steadfast resistance. This dual experience resonates with the beautiful verses in Mahmoud Darwish’s poem And We Love Life: “And we love life if we find a way to it. We dance in between martyrs and raise a minaret for violet or palm trees.”

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said in a statement on Monday that it had received information that Palestinian women and girls have “reportedly been arbitrarily executed in Gaza, often together with family members, including their children”.The UN experts said they were “shocked by reports of the deliberate targeting and extrajudicial killing of Palestinian women and children in places where they sought refuge, or while fleeing. Some of them were reportedly holding white pieces of cloth when they were killed by the Israeli army or affiliated forces.”

Israel launched an assault on Gaza after the Palestinian group Hamas led an attack on Israel on October 7, killing at least 1,139 people, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on official Israeli figures. Around 250 others were seized and taken to Gaza as hostages.

Israel has responded with a devastating bombardment and ground invasion that has displaced more than 80 percent of Gaza’s population and reduced much of the territory to ruins. More than 29,000 people have been killed in the Israeli assault, according to Palestinian authorities.

In the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, Israeli forces have intensified raids since October 7, killing hundreds of Palestinians and detaining thousands of others.

The UN experts expressed alarm over the arbitrary detention of hundreds of Palestinian women and girls including human rights defenders, journalists and humanitarian workers in Gaza and the West Bank.

Many have reportedly been subjected to inhuman treatment, denied menstrual pads, food and medicine and also suffering severe beatings, the OHCHR said. On at least one occasion, Palestinian women detained in Gaza were allegedly kept in a cage in the rain and cold, without food.

“We are particularly distressed by reports that Palestinian women and girls in detention have also been subjected to multiple forms of sexual assault, such as being stripped naked and searched by male Israeli army officers. At least two female Palestinian detainees were reportedly raped while others were reportedly threatened with rape and sexual violence,” the experts said.

They noted that photos of female detainees in degrading circumstances were also reportedly taken by the Israeli army and uploaded online.

An unknown number of Palestinian women and children, including girls, have reportedly gone missing after contact with the Israeli army in Gaza, the experts said.

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“There are disturbing reports of at least one female infant forcibly transferred by the Israeli army into Israel, and of children being separated from their parents, whose whereabouts remain unknown,” they said.

They called for an independent, impartial and effective investigation into the allegations and for Israel to cooperate.

“Taken together, these alleged acts may constitute grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and amount to serious crimes under international criminal law that could be prosecuted under the Rome Statute,” the experts said.

“Those responsible for these apparent crimes must be held accountable and victims and their families are entitled to full redress and justice.”

On Monday, Israel released 150 Palestinian prisoners detained during the war in the Gaza Strip. These prisoners, including two Palestine Red Crescent Society workers, said they suffered abuse during their 50 days in Israeli prison, according to a report by the Reuters news agency.Here’s more about Palestinian Prisoner’s Day and the situation of the prisoners in Israel.

What is Palestinian Prisoner’s Day?

The Palestinian National Council chose April 17 as Palestinian Prisoner’s Day in 1974 because it was the date that Mahmoud Bakr Hijazi was released in the first prisoner exchange between Israel and Palestine in 1971.

Hijazi, who had been serving a 30-year prison sentence on charges of trying to blow up the Nehusha Water Institute in central Israel in 1965, was released by Israel in exchange for a 59-year-old Israeli guard named Shmuel Rozenvasser.

How many Palestinians are in Israeli prisons and how are they treated?

In the occupied Palestinian territories, [one in every five](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/why-are-so-many-palestinian-prisoners-in-israeli-jails) Palestinians has been arrested and charged at some point. This rate is twice as high for Palestinian men as it is for women – two in every five men have been arrested and charged.There are 19 [prisons in Israel](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/why-are-so-many-palestinian-prisoners-in-israeli-jails) and one inside the occupied West Bank that hold Palestinian prisoners. Israel stopped allowing independent humanitarian organisations to visit Israeli prisons in October, so it is hard to know the numbers and conditions of people being held there.

As of Tuesday, about 9,500 Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank were in Israeli captivity, according to estimates from Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, a rights group based in the West Bank city of Ramallah that supports Palestinian prisoners. The organisation works with human rights groups and families of prisoners to gather information about the situation of the prisoners.

Palestinian prisoners who have been released have reported being [beaten](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/28/freed-palestinian-prisoners-report-physical-abuse-in-israeli-jails) and humiliated before and after the start of the war on Gaza on [October 7](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/21/october-7-forensic-analysis-shows-hamas-abuses-many-false-israeli-claims).

Prisoners released into Gaza on Monday have complained of ill-treatment in Israeli prisons, according to the Reuters report. Many of those released said they had been beaten while in custody and had not been provided with medical treatment.

“I went into jail with two legs, and I returned with one leg,” Sufian Abu Salah told Reuters by phone from a hospital in Gaza, adding that he had no medical history of chronic diseases.

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“I had inflammations in my leg, and they [the Israelis] refused to take me to hospital. A week later, the inflammations spread and became gangrene. They took me to hospital where I had the surgery,” said Abu Salah, adding that he had also been beaten by his Israeli captors.

Permission for family members of prisoners to visit them has been suspended since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Gaza and since December 2020 in the West Bank, according to HaMoked, a human rights NGO assisting Palestinians subjected to human rights violations under the Israeli occupation. HaMoked added that minors being held in prisons were allowed a 10-minute phone call to their families once every two weeks during 2020.

How many Palestinian prisoners are being held without charge?

About 3,660 Palestinians being held in Israel are under [administrative detention](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/29/jailed-without-charge-how-israel-holds-thousands-of-palestinian-prisoners), according to Addameer. An administrative detainee is someone held in prison without charge or trial.

Neither the administrative detainees, who include women and children, nor their lawyers are allowed to see the “secret evidence” that Israeli forces say form the basis for their arrests. These people have been arrested by the military for renewable periods of time, meaning the arrest duration is indefinite and could last for many years. The administrative detainees include 41 children and 12 women,

Why are Palestinian children held in Israeli prisons?

According to Addameer, 80 women and 200 children are currently being held in Israeli prisons.

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In 2016, Israel introduced a new law allowing children between the ages of 12 and 14 to be held criminally responsible, meaning they can be tried in court as adults and be given prison sentences. Previously, only those 14 or older could be sentenced to prison. Prison sentences cannot begin until the child reaches the age of 14, however [[PDF](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/dpal/dv/4d_dci-p_new_israeli/4d_dci-p_new_israelien.pdf)].

This new law, which was passed on August 2, 2016, by the Israeli Knesset, enables Israeli authorities “to imprison a minor convicted of serious crimes such as murder, attempted murder or manslaughter even if he or she is under the age of 14”, according to a Knesset statement at the time the law was introduced.

This change was made after [Ahmed Manasra](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/13/calls-grow-release-palestinian-prisoner-ahmad-manasra) was arrested in 2015 in occupied East Jerusalem at the age of 13. He was charged with attempted murder and sentenced to 12 years in prison after the new law had come into effect and, crucially, after his 14th birthday. Later, his sentence was commuted to nine years on appeal.

What sort of trials do Palestinians receive?

Controversially, Palestinian prisoners are tried and sentenced in military courts rather than civil courts.

International law permits Israel to use military courts in the territory that it occupies.

A dual legal system exists in Palestine, under which [Israeli settlers](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/6/who-are-israeli-settlers-and-why-do-they-live-on-palestinian-lands) living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are subject to Israeli civil law while Palestinians are subject to Israeli military law in [military courts](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/2/26/israels-military-courts-humiliating-charade-for-palestinians) run by Israeli soldiers and officers.

How long have some Palestinians been in Israeli captivity?

Some Palestinian prisoners have been held in Israeli prisons for more than three decades.

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These are people who were arrested before the [Oslo Accords](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/13/what-were-oslo-accords-israel-palestinians) were signed in 1993 between then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzakh Rabin, who was assassinated by an ultra-nationalist Israeli in 1995 who opposed the negotiations, and Yasser Arafat, the chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. These pre-Oslo prisoners are called “deans of prisoners” by Palestinians, according to the website of Samidoun, an international network of organisers and activists advocating for Palestinian prisoners.

Al Jazeera could not independently verify the current number of pre-Oslo prisoners in Israeli prisons.

On April 7, the prominent Palestinian prisoner, activist and novelist [Walid Daqqa](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/5/30/walid-daqqas-defiance-and-suffering-while-in-israeli-custody) died at Israel’s Shamir Medical Center. Daqqa had been arrested in 1968 for killing an Israeli soldier and remained in prison for 38 years before his death. He had been diagnosed with cancer in 2021. Despite pressure from rights groups to release Daqqa on medical grounds, Israel [refused to free](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/7/terminally-ill-palestinian-prisoner-walid-daqqa-dies-in-israeli-custody) him.

Prominent Palestinian leader [Marwan Barghouti](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/15/hold_hopes-diminish-that-pivotal-palestinian-leader-may-be-released) – who was the co-founder of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, also known as [Fatah](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/10/12/hamas-and-fatah-how-are-the-two-groups-different), the party that governs the West Bank – has been in prison for 22 years. In February, Israel’s far-right National Security Minister [Itamar Ben-Gvir](https://x.com/itamarbengvir/status/1757839215071523241?s=20), announced that Barghouti had been placed in solitary confinement in February.The proposed arms delivery includes about a thousand each of MK-82 500-pound (227kg) bombs and KMU-572 Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs) that turn unguided munitions into precision-guided bombs, The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday, citing unnamed US officials.The US is further considering sending FMU-139 bomb fuses, with the total shipment estimated to be worth tens of millions of dollars, which will be paid from US military aid to Israel.

The report cited an assessment of the proposed arms transfer drafted by the US embassy in Jerusalem as saying the Israeli government has requested “rapid acquisition of these items for the defence of Israel against continued and emerging regional threats”.

The assessment also [dismisses potential human rights concerns](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/29/beyond-maghazi-what-controversial-weapons-have-israel-used-in-gaza-war), saying “Israel takes effective action to prevent gross violations of human rights and to hold security forces responsible that violate those rights”. The administration of US President Joe Biden has so far [twice bypassed Congress](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/30/biden-administration-bypasses-congress-on-weapon-sales-to-israel) to urgently send bombs and other munitions to Israel amid the war that has killed more than 28,000 Palestinians, mostly children and women, and left tens of thousands more injured or missing.

According to the WSJ, the US has provided roughly 21,000 precision-guided munitions to Israel since the start of the war last October. It said the remaining weapons are enough to sustain 19 weeks of bombing Gaza, but that would shrink to days [if Israel also launches a full assault on Lebanon](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/14/whats-behind-israels-escalation-on-south-lebanon), where it has been engaged in border fighting with Hezbollah.

 Biden said he has repeatedly told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu there “has to be a temporary ceasefire” in Gaza during “extensive” conversations this week.

In the face of widespread [international condemnation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/15/world-leaders-warn-israel-against-catastrophic-rafah-ground-offensive), Israel has insisted it will soon launch a ground invasion of Rafah, the southernmost city in the Gaza Strip that borders Egypt. It is where an estimated 1.4 million of the enclave’s 2.3 million population has been forcibly displaced in Israeli attacks across Gaza in the four-month conflict.

While the Biden administration maintains that an Israeli incursion into the densely packed city would be a “disaster”, it has said that such an operation would not result in tangible consequences, such as a freeze in US weapons transfers.

Biden said he cautioned Netanyahu against moving forward with a military operation into Rafah without a “credible and executable plan” to protect Palestinians sheltering there.

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“I anticipate, I’m hoping, that the Israelis will not make any massive land invasion [of Rafah] in the meantime. So, my expectation, that’s not gonna happen,” Biden said.

Reporting from Washington, DC, Al Jazeera’s Kimberly Halkett said it was “unclear” if Netanyahu was listening Biden.

“Historically he has not, especially when it comes to the US cautioning about how to conduct the Israeli military campaign,” Halkett said.

Washington, some of Israel’s other allies, in addition to the United Nations and a slew of rights groups, have said an assault on Rafah given the dire humanitarian situation suffered by Palestinians in Gaza would prove catastrophic.

Netanyahu has ordered the military to draw up plans that would evacuate civilians, but top UN officials have said there is no feasible way of moving people from the area and that there is no safe place left in Gaza.

Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant said the country is “thoroughly planning” its ground invasion of Rafah, and Netanyahu promised early on Friday to reject “international dictates” on a long-term resolution of Israel’s conflict with the Palestinians.

Haniyeh said on Saturday the Palestinian group would not accept anything less than a complete cessation of hostilities, Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and “lifting of the unjust siege”.“It is clear so far that the occupation [Israel] continues to manoeuvre and procrastinate on the files of interest to our people, while its position revolves around the release of prisoners held by the resistance,” Haniyeh said.

He added that Israel must also free Palestinian prisoners serving long sentences in any upcoming swap deal.

In a speech delivered later on Saturday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Hamas’s demands “delusional”, and said that a new deal to release captives “does not appear very close”.

Meanwhile, Israeli forces carried out arrests in [Nasser Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/15/catastrophic-situation-at-gazas-nasser-hospital-amid-israeli-raid), Gaza’s largest functioning medical facility, health officials and the military said on Saturday, as air raids hit across the enclave.

“Occupation forces detained a large number of medical staff members inside Nasser Medical Complex, which they [Israel] turned into a military base,” said Gaza Health Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qudra.

Following Israel’s incursion into Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, which began on Thursday, [at least five patients died](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/16/at-least-five-people-dead-after-israeli-army-raid-on-nasser-hospital) after electricity was severed and oxygen supplies cut, Gaza’s Ministry of Health announced on Friday.

The Israeli military said it was hunting for fighters in Nasser and had so far arrested 100 suspects on the premises, killed fighters near the hospital and found weapons inside it.

Hamas has denied allegations that its fighters use medical facilities for cover. At least two released Israeli hostages have said they were held in Nasser, but Israel has failed to provide overwhelming evidence to back up previous accusations that hospitals have been used as Hamas command centres, or that captives have been held in hospitals.

Israel’s repeated attacks on hospitals have been described by human rights groups as “unlawful” with Human Rights Watch calling for them to be “[investigated as war crimes](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/14/israels-attacks-on-hospitals-should-be-investigated-as-war-crimes-hrw)”, and South Africa alleging at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague that attacks on Gaza’s healthcare system were evidence of “genocidal acts” committed by Israel.

The Israeli incursion into the hospital has raised alarm about patients, medical workers and displaced Palestinians sheltering there.

About 10,000 people were seeking shelter at the hospital earlier this week, but many left either in anticipation of the Israeli raid or because of Israeli orders to evacuate, the Gaza Health Ministry said.

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Israeli air raids hit central Gaza

Across the Gaza Strip, at least 83 people were killed in Israeli air raids since Friday, health officials said, including one person on Saturday in Rafah, an area that borders Egypt and which Israel now claims is Hamas’s last bastion.

The Palestinian Wafa news agency also reported on Saturday that Israeli air raids killed at least 44 Palestinian civilians including children and injured dozens more when their residential homes were bombed in central Gaza, according to local and medical sources.

A series of air raids hit Deir el-Balah in central Gaza, an area where displaced Palestinians are returning to since Israel intensified attacks on the southern city of Rafah.

Raids hit the east of the city, an area that has come under heavy bombardment over the past week, as well as the south. Ambulances were rushed to the scene to take casualties to the hospital.

“That was insane,” Hany Allouh, a 39-year-old father of two young children. “The rockets flew above us and caused an enormous explosion. They exploded one after the other, causing panic among the people in the streets.”

The Israeli military said its jets had killed numerous fighters in Gaza since Friday.

Across the border, air raid sirens warning of incoming rockets sounded in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon on Saturday.

‘Catastrophic’ consequences

In the face of widespread [international condemnation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/15/world-leaders-warn-israel-against-catastrophic-rafah-ground-offensive), Israel has insisted it will soon launch a ground invasion of Rafah. It is where an estimated 1.4 million of the enclave’s 2.3 million population has been forcibly displaced in Israeli attacks across Gaza in the four-month conflict.

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Netanyahu reiterated in his speech on Saturday that Israel would press ahead with its planned attack, even if a deal to release captives was reached.

But six humanitarian and human rights organisations have warned of the “catastrophic” consequences of an Israeli ground offensive in Rafah.

The joint statement was signed by the heads of Oxfam, Amnesty International, ActionAid, War Child, the Danish Refugee Council and Handicap International.

“If Israel launches its proposed ground offensive, thousands more civilians will be killed and the current trickle of humanitarian aid risks coming to a complete halt. If this military plan is not stopped immediately, the consequences will be catastrophic,” the statement said.

European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell also renewed calls for Israel to avoid taking military action in Rafah.

Such action would “worsen an already catastrophic humanitarian situation,” Borrell wrote on X.

On Friday, US President Joe Biden said he repeatedly told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu there “has to be a temporary ceasefire” in Gaza during “extensive” conversations this week.

Biden said he cautioned Netanyahu against moving forward with a military operation into Rafah without a “credible and executable plan” to protect Palestinians sheltering there.

Reporting from Washington, DC, Al Jazeera’s Kimberly Halkett said it was “unclear” if Netanyahu was listening to Biden.

“Historically, he has not, especially when it comes to the US cautioning about how to conduct the Israeli military campaign,” Halkett said.

For a very long time, many in the Western world have not engaged at all with the issues stemming from the occupation of Palestine. The occupation was in the news, every year or so, for a day or two, and then it would go again. It was too “complicated”, those who knew about the context – on either side – were too passionate. So many opted to remain neutral. Many more believed the smears against the Palestinian people.

However, the scale and severity of brutality that has defined the past six months of conflict has put an end to the widespread apathy towards the suffering of the Palestinian people. The wall-to-wall media coverage, thanks to fearless reporting from organisations like Al Jazeera and Palestinian journalists on the ground, has opened people’s eyes to the reality people in Gaza, and the rest of Palestine, have had to endure for generations.

At Action For Humanity, one of the leading NGOs working in Gaza and influencing policymakers in the United Kingdom, we have commissioned polling by YouGov and found that 56 percent of the UK are now in favour of halting arms exports to Israel. Only 17 percent are against and the rest are unsure.

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This is huge. We have been polling the public on conflicts like Syria and Yemen for years and never have the UK public not just been so aware of a conflict, but also feel so passionately about it.

Furthermore, when asked, 59 percent of the respondents said they felt Israel was committing human rights abuses in Gaza – almost three in five people and just 12 percent felt this was not the case.

And it’s worth noting this survey was conducted before the April 1 killing of World Central Kitchen aid workers – an atrocity which has horrified the world, even the UK and US governments. We now anticipate, due to the widespread condemnation of this event, that the number of people who realise what horrors are being committed and want no part of it, is higher.

Other polling by YouGov has [shown](https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/48675-british-attitudes-to-the-israel-gaza-conflict-february-2024-update) that, the longer this war on Gaza goes on, the more people are likely to support a ceasefire (from 59 percent in November to 66 percent in February), are more likely to think the attack on Gaza is not justified (from 44 percent in November to 45 percent in February) and are more likely to want peace talks (61 percent in November to 66 percent in February).

And this is a pattern we are seeing all across the Western world. In the United States, the biggest backer of Israel on the global stage, it is not just the administration in the White House that is struggling to attempt to justify the accelerating civilian death toll, the public too are showing disapproval. A CBS/YouGov poll found that in October 47 percent – almost half- of the US supported sending weapons to Israel, this month the number has plummeted to just 32 percent – less than a third, and that support for a ceasefire is growing.

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We believe that this is the case across the West and now that the overwhelming majority of the Western public are becoming more and more aware of the crimes against humanity that are being committed in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem, the more people are completely appalled. And even those who once felt the huge civilian death toll in Gaza were justified and realising in increasing numbers that nothing on this earth can justify what is happening.

However, sadly, the politicians of Western governments are completely out of step with their public’s mood. Not only is this morally reprehensible, but it is politically shortsighted.

The year 2024 has been called “the year of elections”, with at least 49 percent of the world voting at some point this year, politicians who do not realise their publics want them to stop facilitating and supporting human rights abuses in Gaza, face electoral defeat – even if they refuse to face their conscience.

Here in the UK, the Labour Party, which many believe will form the next government, have also been behind the public’s growing demand to stop arming Israel – even though our polling found that a huge 71 percent of those who intended to vote Labour at the next election believe the UK government should stop funding Israel.

For decades, Western states were able to support abuses against Palestinians with impunity due to public ignorance on the issue – due to people not paying attention to what’s happening, and buying into lies. This is now over, and the horrific way Israel conducted its war on Gaza is the reason why. Humanity, in all its forms, everywhere, is fundamentally good. Most humans, at their core, believe in peace and justice. They know that murdering innocents is wrong. Now the world is paying attention to Gaza, everyone can see what an unnatural, horrendous reality Palestinians are forced to endure, and they want no more of it.

Saleh Abou Ghanem heard Israeli warplanes buzzing in the sky from night until dawn.

They were bombing Rafah, the southern Gaza town near the Egyptian border where 1.4 million Palestinians have sought relative safety from relentless Israeli attacks. While Abou Ghanem survived the attacks, he learned that his aunt was killed in her home by an Israeli bomb.

“She was sleeping when she was martyred,” he told Al Jazeera.

Last week, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [reiterated his intention](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/11/israel-working-on-rafah-invasion-in-gaza-despite-international-alarm#:~:text=Israel%20is%20determined%20to%20advance,interview%20broadcast%20late%20on%20Saturday.) to expand military operations into Rafah. Two days later, Israel [launched](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/12/israel-strikes-rafah-says-two-captives-freed) a series of strikes that killed dozens of people.

Analysts believe Netanyahu’s stated plan is part of a broader plot to depopulate Gaza and extend his political survival, as many predict that he will be removed from his post after the war.

But world leaders have warned that a full-scale assault on Rafah is a “red line,” despite few threatening to punish Israel if it goes through with the offensive.

After being forcefully evacuated into Rafah, Palestinians have nowhere else to flee. Many fear that a military operation could lead to some of the worst violence in a war that has already killed more than 28,000 Palestinians following Hamas’s deadly attack on October 7, in which nearly 1,200 people were killed.

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“Some people have fled Rafah [since the recent attacks], but I don’t know where they went. There is nowhere to go. Where can anyone go?,” said Abou Ghanem, with resignation.

Depopulating Gaza

The looming military operation in Rafah intends to permanently displace hundreds of thousands of Palestinians over the border into Egypt, according to Omar Rahman, an expert on Israel-Palestine with the Middle East Council for Global Affairs think tank.

He told Al Jazeera that Israel’s war on Gaza has always been a much broader campaign against the Palestinian population and not just Hamas. He said that Israel’s plans to attack Rafah are further proof.

“The Israeli war machine is bearing down on Rafah with genocidal intent,” he said.

Haneen Rizk, an employee in Gaza with the UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides schooling, healthcare and other relief services to Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories and surrounding states, said that most people are just waiting to die.

She added that some families returned from Rafah to their homes and communities in central and northern Gaza. But with at least [70 percent of Gaza’s homes destroyed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/31/israeli-bombardment-destroyed-over-70-of-gaza-homes-media-office) or damaged, Rizk said that most people in Rafah have no alternative but to stay put.

“If Egypt opens the border … most people would leave,” she told Al Jazeera.

“But right now, it’s so expensive for anyone to try and afford to get into Egypt. It requires about $5,000 and so few people have that kind of money.”

Egypt has sealed its border with Gaza since October 7. But Rizk was referring to private bus companies that charge [hefty fees,](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/23/palestinians-paying-thousands-of-dollars-in-bribes-to-leave-gaza) which few in Gaza can afford, to transport Palestinians into Egypt.

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“Game of chicken”

Since early in the war, Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has publicly stated that he will not absorb Palestinian refugees out of concern that it would “end the Palestinian cause” and threaten Egypt’s national security. The Egyptian leader has called for a ceasefire to avert a humanitarian catastrophe that might complicate further his diplomatic relations with Israel.

“I call it a game of chicken,” said Rahman.

“The Israelis are hoping the Egyptians will concede by opening up the border [if pressured] and the Egyptians are hoping that they can buy enough time until Washington [ends] the war,” he told Al Jazeera.

Egypt may already be budging. Local rights groups have [reported](https://twitter.com/Sinaifhr/status/1757818082825851371) that Egypt is building a “buffer zone” in its Sinai region to absorb Palestinians expected to flee from Rafah. However, Egypt has not confirmed the reports.

CIA chief William Burns also [recently visited Egypt’s capital Cairo](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/2/13/israels-war-on-gaza-live-jordans-king-urges-ceasefire-in-biden-meeting) to discuss the possibility of a temporary truce that would allow Hamas and Israel to exchange captives.

Hamas captured about 240 Israelis during its attack on Israeli communities and military outposts on October 7, while Israel holds about [10,000 Palestinian prisoners](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/21/number-of-palestinian-prisoners-in-israel-doubles-to-10000-in-two-weeks) for “security related’ offences — although many have not even been charged. Netanyahu has insisted on rescuing Israelis in Gaza via military means, despite objections from captives’ families who are pleading for a deal.

Rahman believes that Netanyahu’s real motive is to maintain an occupation force in Gaza for a considerable period to prevent Palestinians from rebuilding their homes and to ensure that civilians live under constant fear. “Israel’s intention … is to keep the pressure on [Palestinians] to flee,” he said.

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Political ploy?

Netanyahu’s political survival is also tied to maintaining the war in Gaza, according to Mairav Zonszein, an expert on the Israel-Palestine conflict with the International Crisis Group, a think tank dedicated to conflict prevention and resolution.

Netanyahu’s popularity is low and many Israelis are calling for a national election after the war. Any national vote would likely remove Netanyahu from power, according to recent opinion polls.

As a result, Zonszein believes that Netanyahu may delay a full-scale military operation on Rafah to prolong the war.

“All of this talk about Rafah – and leveraging it for a hostage deal – is just a way for Netanyahu to bide more and more time,” she said.

Palestinians in Rafah hope Netanyahu is bluffing, but many believe that an onslaught is imminent. Abou Ghanem, who lost his aunt, said that he just wants his three young children – two girls and one boy – to survive.

“Children are dying every day … and we’re living like animals,” he told Al Jazeera. “Tell the world that we just want a ceasefire.”

Egypt is building a fortified buffer zone near its border with the Gaza Strip as fears mount of an imminent Israeli [ground invasion](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/11/israel-working-on-rafah-invasion-in-gaza-despite-international-alarm) of the southern city of Rafah, which could displace hundreds of thousands of Palestinians across the frontier, according to satellite images and media reports.

Footage from the site in the Sinai desert and satellite photos show that an area that could offer basic shelter to tens of thousands of Palestinians is being constructed with concrete walls being set up on the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing, the only non-Israeli-controlled crossing to and from Gaza.

The new compound is part of contingency plans if large numbers of Palestinians manage to cross into Egypt and could accommodate more than 100,000 people, The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday, citing Egyptian officials.

It is surrounded by concrete walls and far from any Egyptian settlements. Large numbers of tents have been delivered to the site, the report said.

Videos taken by the United Kingdom-based Sinai Foundation for Human Rights show trucks and bulldozers clearing debris from a plot of land of about 8sq miles (21sq km), according to The Washington Post, which obtained satellite images that show 2sq miles (5sq km) was cleared between February 6 and Wednesday.

Mohamed Abdelfadil Shousha, the governor of North Sinai, the Egyptian governorate that borders Gaza and Israel, has reportedly denied that Egypt is building a refugee camp along the border in case of an exodus by Palestinians forced by the Israeli military.

The Sinai Foundation, an activist organisation that has a monitoring team in northern Sinai, said in a report this week that the gated area will be surrounded by 7-metre-high (23ft-high) cement walls. The UN’s high commissioner for refugees said on Friday that a mass movement of people from Rafah into Egypt’s Sinai would be a disaster for Palestinians and prospects for peace in the Middle East.

“It would be a disaster for the Palestinians … a disaster for Egypt and a disaster for the future of peace,” Filippo Grandi told the Reuters news agency of Israel’s planned ground invasion of Rafah.

When asked whether Egyptian authorities had contacted the UNHCR about possible contingency plans he said: “The Egyptians said that people should be assisted inside Gaza and we are working on that.”

Israel has said it wants to [take over the Philadelphi Corridor](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/31/whats-the-philadelphi-corridor-border-zone-that-israel-wants-to-control), the fortified border area between Gaza and Egypt, to secure it. Egypt has threatened that this would jeopardise the peace treaty the two countries signed four decades ago.

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Cairo has emphasised that it does not want Palestinians to be displaced from their land by Israel, [comparing such a scenario to the 1948 Nakba](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/15/nakba-mapping-palestinian-villages-destroyed-by-israel-in-1948), the forced displacement of about 750,000 Palestinians from their homes in the war that led to Israel’s creation.

Tel Aviv’s insistence on going ahead with its planned attack on Rafah despite international pressure has been unshaken even though the area is where 1.4 million Palestinians are living, the vast majority of whom have been forcibly displaced – some multiple times – by Israeli bombardments and ground operations.

Palestinians displaced to Rafah are suffering from a lack of sufficient shelter, food, water and medicine, and the United Nations and human rights groups have warned that the [humanitarian disaster in the besieged enclave](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2024/2/15/is-the-starvation-of-civilians-being-used-by-israel-as-a-weapon-of-war) is rapidly worsening.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ordered the army to work on a plan of evacuation for more than half of the 2.3 million people of the Gaza Strip who are now crammed into Rafah, but has provided no detailed steps.

He has suggested Palestinians could be sent to areas north of Rafah that the Israeli military has already cleared through a ground invasion backed by bombings.

Avi Dichter, Israel’s minister of agriculture and rural development, has suggested areas west of Rafah and the bombed al-Mawasi refugee camp near the Mediterranean coast, [where many are already sheltering](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/1/22/palestinians-flee-khan-younis-as-israel-steps-up-ground-operation).

But UN humanitarian aid chief Martin Griffiths said on Thursday that it would be an “illusion” to believe that people in Gaza could be evacuated to a safe place. He also said it would be “a sort of Egyptian nightmare” if Palestinians were to be forced into Egypt.

The United States and a number of other key allies of Israel have said they [oppose a ground assault](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/15/world-leaders-warn-israel-against-catastrophic-rafah-ground-offensive) on Rafah, some warning it would be “catastrophic”.

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US President Joe Biden “has been clear that we do not support the forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza”, Reuters quoted a US Department of State spokesperson as saying on Friday. “The US is not funding camps in Egypt for displaced Palestinians.”

Israel on Wednesday pulled out of US- and Arab-mediated talks with Hamas because it said the Palestinian armed group has had “ludicrous demands” that have included Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza.

Netanyahu and the Israeli war cabinet have continued to push for “total victory” with the prime minister calling Rafah the “last bastion” of Hamas.

For weeks, the fiercest fighting in the Gaza Strip has been taking place [in Khan Younis](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/22/israel-batters-gazas-khan-younis-by-land-air-sea-in-bloodiest-bombing), also located in southern Gaza, with the Israeli military claiming its attacks are aimed at destroying Hamas battalions in the area.

Using shelling, sniper fire and drones, the Israeli army has also for weeks been laying siege to [Nasser Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/15/catastrophic-situation-at-gazas-nasser-hospital-amid-israeli-raid), the largest medical facility in the area, which has hundreds of patients and staff and has been a shelter for thousands of displaced Palestinians.

Dr Nahed Abu Taima, the hospital’s director, told Al Jazeera on Friday that Israeli forces were rounding up patients and civilians and had cut off electricity to the medical complex.

“We stand helpless, unable to provide any form of medical assistance to the patients inside the hospital or the victims flooding into the hospital every single minute,” he said.

Israel’s attacks on Gaza have killed at least 28,775 Palestinians and wounded 68,552 since October 7, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. Several thousand more are missing, presumably buried under rubble.

Israeli police said the attackers took advantage of slow-moving morning traffic on the central highway east of Jerusalem near the Maale Adumim settlement in the occupied West Bank and opened fire with automatic weapons at cars waiting near a checkpoint.

A police spokesperson said the gunmen were Palestinians but gave no further details. Police also said two gunmen were killed and a third was arrested.

In response to the attack, far-right Israeli Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir said freedom of movement for Palestinians should be restricted.

“Our right to life overrides the Palestinians’ freedom of movement,” he said, according to Israeli media reports.

“I will fight for barriers around the villages that will limit the freedom of movement of the residents of the Palestinian Authority.”

Palestinian armed group Hamas, which governs Gaza, said the attack was a “natural response to the [Israeli] occupation’s massacres and crimes in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank”.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich demanded the approval of a plan to build thousands of new illegal Israeli settlements in Maale Adumim and nearby areas in response to the shooting.

“The serious attack on Maale Adumim must have a decisive security response but also an answer from the settlements,” he wrote on X.

“Our enemies know that any harm to us will lead to more construction and more development and more of our control across the entire country.”

Tensions in the occupied West Bank have been exacerbated since Israel’s war on Gaza began on October 7 following  Hamas attacks that killed 1,139 people, according to Israeli figures.

Israeli air strikes and a ground offensive in Gaza since the attacks have killed more than 29,000 Palestinians and wounded close to 70,000 people, according to Palestinian health authorities, and has reduced much of the enclave to rubble.

Reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, Al Jazeera’s Willem Marx said the attack is an “indication of the frustration that many people inside the occupied West Bank and those facing challenges around access to the [Al-Aqsa Mosque](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/start-here/2023/2/1/why-al-aqsa-is-key-to-understanding-the-israeli-palestinian-confl) are feeling at this very, very fraught time”.

“This is something that reflects a period in history decades ago when these kinds of attacks were incredibly frequent in and around Jerusalem,” Marx said, adding that there have been “several similar incidents” recently in the West Bank and around illegal settlements.

The shooting “so close to Jerusalem at a busy time in the morning next to a major checkpoint where there’d be a huge security presence is an indication of that frustration”, Marx reported.

Last week, two people were killed by gunmen who police suspect to be Palestinians at a bus stop in southern Israel.

adding that it also shot down a “one-way attack unmanned aircraft system

an “imminent threat to merchant vessels and to the US Navy ships in the region”.“coalition forces are responding”.The ship “appeared to be headed from Map Ta Phut, Thailand, and headed in the direction of the Red Sea”, Ambrey said. “Merchant shipping is advised to stay clear of the vessel and proceed with caution.”US Department of State spokesperson Matthew Miller said the Houthis are “behaving like a terrorist organisation – attacking civilians, civilian shipping, and innocent mariners“This is piracy,” Miller said on Wednesday.

The Houthis say the strikes are a response to [Israel’s military operations](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-war-on-gaza/) in Gaza. Despite US-UK retaliatory strikes, they have promised to continue their campaign in solidarity with Palestinians until Israel stops the war.

Miller said their attacks on shipping vessels are “endangering an already fragile humanitarian situation” and “do nothing to help the Palestinians”.

The attacks have disrupted international commerce along a route that accounts for about 15 percent of the world’s shipping traffic. Several shipping companies have redirected their vessels around the southern tip of Africa, delaying delivery times and adding a further 3,000-3,500 nautical miles (5,500-6,500km) to their route.

“The Houthis’ attacks are driving up prices and causing delivery delays in critical humanitarian items, such as food and medicine in places where it’s needed most,” said Miller.

“This is adversely affecting those in need of assistance around the world, including in Sudan, Ethiopia and in Yemen itself,” he added. “Many of the ships that the Houthis have attacked contained food, such as grain and corn, headed for those countries.”

On Tuesday, Houthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdulsalam said on X: “What the world is impatiently waiting for is not the militarisation of the Red Sea, but rather an urgent and comprehensive declaration of a ceasefire in Gaza, for humanitarian reasons that are clear to anyone.”

what it said was a cold-blooded “massacre”.The ministry said the attack was part of Israel’s ongoing “genocidal war”. It called on the international community to “urgently intervene” to forge a ceasefire as “the only way to protect civilians”.

People [had congregated](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/1/flour-massacre-how-gaza-food-killings-unfolded-and-israels-story-changed) at al-Rashid Street, where aid trucks carrying flour were believed to be on the way. Al Jazeera verified footage showing the bodies of dozens of killed and wounded Palestinians being carried onto trucks as no ambulances could reach the area

“We went to get flour. The Israeli army shot at us. There are many martyrs on the ground and until this moment we are withdrawing them. There is no first aid,” said one witness.

Reporting from the scene, Al Jazeera’s Ismail al-Ghoul said that after opening fire, Israeli tanks advanced and ran over many of the dead and injured bodies. “It is a massacre, on top of the starvation threatening citizens in Gaza,” he said.

The dead and wounded had been taken to four medical centres: al-Shifa, Kamal Adwan, Ahli and the Jordanian hospitals. Ambulances could not reach the area as the roads had been “totally destroyed”, said al-Ghoul.

“The numbers will rise. Hospitals are no longer able to accommodate the huge number of patients because they lack fuel, let alone medicine. Hospitals have also run out of blood.”

Reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, Al Jazeera’s Bernard Smith said the Israeli military “initially tried to pin the blame on the crowd” saying that dozens were hurt as a consequence of being crushed and trampled when aid trucks arrived.

“And then, after some pushing the Israelis went on to say that their troops felt threatened, that hundreds of troops approached their troops in a way they posed a threat to them so they responded by opening fire,” Smith added.

The United States has asked Israel to provide answers and ensure the safe delivery of aid to Gaza.

“We have been in touch with the Israeli government since early this morning and understand that an investigation is underway. We will be monitoring that investigation closely and pressing for answers,” State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

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‘Beyond words’

One Palestinian man told Quds News Network the military attack was a “crime”.

“I have been waiting since yesterday. At about 4:30 this morning, trucks started to come through. Once we approached the aid trucks, the Israeli tanks and warplanes started firing at us, as if it was a trap.

“To the Arab states I say, if you want to have us killed, why are you sending relief aid? If this continues, we do not want any aid delivered at all. Every convoy coming means another massacre.”

Jadallah al-Shafei, the head of the nurses’ department at al-Shifa Hospital, said that “the situation is beyond any words”, adding that “the hospital was flooded with dozens of dead bodies and hundreds of injured”.

“The majority of the victims suffered gunshots and shrapnel in the head and upper parts of their bodies. They were hit by direct artillery shelling, drone missiles and gun firing,” he told Al Jazeera.

Systematic attacks

The mass shooting was the latest instance of systematic attacks on hungry people waiting for scraps of food. Over the past few days, Palestinians gathered in large groups waiting for aid trucks on Salah al-Din Street near Gaza City have been shot at by Israeli forces, said Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Rafah in the enclave’s south.

Recently, a truck that was supposed to deliver aid to people in Gaza tragically turned into the truck carrying those injured and killed, he added.

With [aid agencies](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/26/no-aid-delivery-in-northern-gaza-since-more-than-a-month-unrwa) unable to deliver supplies to northern Gaza since January 23, many are taking a long trek towards the south by foot.

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Famine

On Wednesday, Carl Skau, deputy executive director of the World Food Programme (WFP), told the United Nations Security Council more than 500,000, or one in four people, were at risk of famine, with one in every six children below the age of two considered acutely malnourished.

“The risk of famine is being fuelled by the inability to bring critical food supplies into Gaza in sufficient quantities, and the almost impossible operating conditions faced by our staff on the ground,” he said.

He described dangerous conditions for WFP trucks trying to get food to the north earlier this month. “There were delays at checkpoints; they faced gunfire and other violence; food was looted along the way; and at their destination, they were overwhelmed by desperately hungry people,

“The gap is still wide. We have to discuss a lot of points with the mediators,”However, Naim said the Biden administration’s optimistic posture was not “related to the reality on the ground” and has more to do with domestic political considerations in a US election year.

“If the Americans want to be really optimistic, they have to end their game of double standards,” he said.

“They talk on one hand for stopping the aggression or for achieving a ceasefire and avoiding broadening the conflict into the region. But at the same time they are using the veto in the UN Security Council,” Naim said. “They are approving $14bn for Israel, they are securing Israel with more ammunitions.”

Naim had previously told Al Jazeera late on Tuesday that Hamas had not yet received an official truce proposal, but that meditators were working with the Israeli side to cement one.

While Hamas was willing to be flexible on some aspects of a potential deal, it would not do so at the expense of its “main, strategic goals”, Naim said.

He said the Palestinian group’s non-negotiable demands include: A final and total ceasefire, and not just a humanitarian pause; the total withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza; and freedom of movement for Palestinians within Gaza.

Naim said Hamas was willing to be flexible on the timing and sequencing of its demands, as long as the total ceasefire begins on day one of the implementation of any agreement.

‘Space for flexibility’

With regards to the exchange of prisoners and captives and plans for Gaza’s reconstruction, “there is some space for flexibility”, Naim added.

“Hamas has shown great flexibility from the beginning to achieve a ceasefire because we know every added day to this slaughter means 100 to 150 more Palestinian civilians killed,” the official said.

“People in the northern part of Gaza are dying because of starvation. We know exactly what this means. Our families are still there.”

Naim said Hamas is also seeking guarantors such as Egypt, Qatar, Turkey, the United Nations, the US and Russia to ensure and verify that any deal is upheld by Israel.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh said that the group was ready to continue fighting if necessary, even if it showed flexibility in its negotiations with Israel.

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Speaking from Beirut, he called on the Iran-led political and military coalition known as the “axis of resistance” to step up its support for Gaza through political leverage, money and weapons.

“It is the duty of the Arab and Islamic nations to take the initiative to break the starvation conspiracy in Gaza,” Haniyeh said, referring to what Palestinians say appears to be a deliberate policy by Israel to deny them food by blocking humanitarian aid from getting into Gaza.

Haniyeh added that Israel is committing the worst atrocities known to humanity, including the extermination and displacement of civilians, and that any flexibility shown in negotiating with Israel must be matched by his group’s willingness to defend the Palestinian people.

The Hamas leader called for Palestinians to march on Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem on the first day of Ramadan, which is likely to be on March 10, in protest at continued restrictions placed by Israel on access for Palestinians to the Muslim holy site.

“The siege of Al-Aqsa and the siege of Gaza are one and the same,”

“We managed to remove several bodies and rescue several wounded people but many more civilians – women and children are still under the rubble,“We have limited and scant resources. As this war enters its sixth month, there is no fuel to operate search and rescue equipment. We need heavy equipment to help rescue women and children from under the rubble but unfortunately, we do not have the ability to do so,“We have to use our hands and some light old equipment to rescue victims from under the rubble.”The attack spurred global outrage and led to the United States carrying out [airdrops of food aid into Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/2/us-airdrops-food-to-gaza-in-move-criticised-by-aid-organisations). Jordanian forces also took part in the operation.

Global efforts to end the conflict were continuing, meanwhile, with a senior US official saying a [framework for a six-week pause](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/2/us-says-israel-more-or-less-accepts-framework-deal-for-gaza-ceasefire) in fighting was in place.

The official told reporters that “the Israelis have more or less accepted it” and that “the onus right now is on Hamas”, the armed group that governs Gaza.

Israel’s deliberate targeting of hospitals across Gaza – considered a war crime under international law – undoubtedly contributed to this staggering death toll. At the time of writing, only [11 out of Gaza’s 35 hospitals](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) are partially functional.Israel has destroyed much more than Gaza’s hospitals. The targeting of laboratories, other health facilities, ambulances, doctors, nurses and patients, coupled with the blockade on lifesaving medical supplies, has put a wrecking ball through Gaza’s entire health system and left 2.2 million people with little access to healthcare at a time they are facing near constant, indiscriminate bombardment and the threat of famine. Since the beginning of the war, [at least 337 health workers have been killed](https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-109?_gl=1*162cbmi*_ga*ODMyMjM5Nzk4LjE3MDYxODEyNzk.*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTcwNjE4MTI3OS4xLjAuMTcwNjE4MTI3OS42MC4wLjA), including two of only four pathologists in Gaza.

People suffering from chronic illnesses are unable to access vital medicines, and disease is spreading at an unprecedented rate amid a sanitation crisis caused by a severe lack of access to clean water. The World Health Organization (WHO) has described the state of healthcare in Gaza as being “beyond words”.

Research published by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the United States and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in the United Kingdom suggests an escalation of the conflict could lead to nearly [86,000 excess deaths](https://gaza-projections.org/) over the next six months once the effects of war-induced disease, epidemics and malnutrition are accounted for. The report estimates that even if there is no escalation, and conditions remain as they are today, there will still be 66,720 excess deaths in Gaza over the next six months.

This is why, as activists, health workers and organisations working in the health sector for justice, equity, anti-racism and decolonisation, we are using our voices to speak up and urge as well as compel our colleagues and others, especially global health bodies and associations, to take action. As Israel uses healthcare, food and water as weapons of war, we know all too well – as organisations that have worked on issues of health justice and access to medicines for millions of people around the world – that it is imperative that we speak up and demand an end to impunity, and real action and consequences.

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So why target our call to the global health community? We feel that there has been a widespread lack of regard by many in this community for the unfolding health crisis in Gaza. As we also noted in the open letter we published this week, hardly any discussion on the current state of health services in Gaza has graced the pages of the 17 global health journals that currently fill the public space. Our research shows that a PubMed search on journal articles containing the words “Global Health”, “Gaza” and “health” published since October 2023 retrieved only two, published by The Lancet and the British Medical Journal, that featured any discussion about the ethical, human rights and professional challenges that arose from the current conflict.

So we ask: why have our universities, medical schools, professional associations and academic bodies remained silent? Save for a few, isolated public statements, the response from those who we expect to maintain the highest medical and scientific professional and ethical standards around the world has been a deafening silence.

While the American Medical Association (AMA) rightfully issued, in 2022, a very strong condemnation of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, an effort by some members to do the same for Israel’s war on Gaza in 2023 was [shut down](https://www.medpagetoday.com/meetingcoverage/ama/107302). And at this stage of the genocide, any continued silence will be judged as complicity.

This demonstrates blatant double standards that can only be explained by racist dehumanisation of the Palestinian people.

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A climate of virulent censorship, especially in the Global North, has also led to open victimisation of health workers and academics who dare to speak out in their personal capacity in defence of the rights of Palestinians and against racism. But we refuse to be silenced, and we call on the global health community at large to stand firm in the face of this intimidation.

We must call out Israel’s war crimes and unequivocally condemn the genocide that is under way in Gaza – and Israel’s long-standing medical apartheid in the occupied Palestinian territories – and support colleagues who are being targeted for speaking out about anti-Palestinian racism.

We must also pressure all governments to immediately resume and increase funding for the critical work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and other agencies helping Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere in occupied territory. We should refuse to collaborate with Israeli health institutions, universities, research councils, pharmaceutical companies and any organisations affiliated with the military in any form.

As health professionals and activists, we are obliged to speak out, both morally and professionally. We are also obliged to take whatever steps in our power to halt and prevent this genocide. To do anything less would be a complete dereliction of our duty to support and uphold the right – of everyone – to health.

0:54

In February, the ICJ ruled that Pretoria’s claims that Israel violated the genocide convention were not implausible and ordered emergency measures, including a call for Israel to halt any potential acts of genocide in Gaza.

Israel, which defended itself in the South Africa hearings, has denied allegations of genocide, citing “self-defence”, though experts have [questioned Israel’s “right to defence”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/17/does-israel-have-the-right-to-self-defence-in-gaza) as an occupying power. The case is continuing. Last week, Human Rights Watch said hampering the delivery of aid by Israel was [a violation of the January 26 ICJ order.](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/26/has-israel-complied-with-icj-order-in-gaza-genocide-case)

“The Israeli government is starving Gaza’s 2.3 million Palestinians, putting them in even more peril than before the World Court’s binding order,” Omar Shakir, Israel and Palestine director at Human Rights Watch, said on February 26.

Israel has also been criticised for targeting civilians, with [more than 80 percent of those killed being women and children](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/1/more-than-25000-women-and-children-killed-in-gaza-us-defence-secretary#:~:text=Speaking%20during%20a%20congressional%20hearing,%E2%80%9CIt%20is%20over%2025%2C000.%E2%80%9D). More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed and about 7,000 remain missing since Israel launched its brutal assault on October 7 in the wake of a deadly attack carried out by the Palestinian Hamas group.

Last month on the BBC’s flagship news programme, Newsnight, author and journalist Howard Eric Jacobson complained that Britain’s public broadcaster had been showing too many images of Palestinian suffering in Gaza. He added that in televising Palestinian suffering in this way, BBC [was](https://twitter.com/jrc1921/status/1758431191043133584) “taking a side” and that while it was “agonising to see what is happening…there are reasons for it”.

And this was hardly the first expression of this sentiment. A few weeks prior, a discussion was under way on the professional networking platform LinkedIn on whether there were “too many Israel/Palestine posts” on the site and whether this should change. Many responded that it should – they wanted people to stop talking about Palestinians being starved, bombed and buried under the rubble.

It may seem odd that people like Jacobson are acknowledging the massive levels of suffering in Gaza, but in the same breath demanding the world hears less about it.

But this is not at all surprising. Censorship has always been a necessary complement of genocide.

With the ongoing genocide in Gaza, efforts to silence those who have sought to raise the alarm have taken a variety of forms.

A lot has been said and written about Israel’s refusal to allow foreign journalists to enter freely into Gaza to cover the genocide and its targeted attacks on Palestinian journalists there who risk life and limb to show the world the reality of what is being done to their people. But even the journalists who are thousands of miles away from the Palestinian enclave have been punished for daring to talk about the genocide.

Last December, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) sacked presenter Antoinette Lattouf for re-sharing a Human Rights Watch (HRW) [post](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/16/high-profile-hosts-sacking-from-australian-broadcaster-sparks-outrage#:~:text=War%20on%20Gaza-,Strike%20threat%20over%20claim%20pro%2DIsraeli%20lobby%20forced%20out%20Australian,for%20expressing%20support%20for%20Palestinians.&text=Australia%27s%20national%20broadcaster%20is%20under,the%20sacking%20of%20a%20broadcaster) claiming that “Israel was using starvation as a weapon of war in Gaza”. The ABC had itself reported on the HRW claim, which has since been repeated by the United Nations. Lattouf, believed to be the first Arab-Australian woman to work as a reporter on commercial television, says she fears the ABC buckled under pressure from pro-Israel groups who had been accusing her of “anti-Semitism and bias” due to her support for Palestinian rights and criticism of Israel since she was first hired. She is suing the ABC for unfair dismissal.

Throughout this genocide, teachers and university professors across the world who tried to stand in solidarity with the Palestinians have also been silenced.  An Israeli teacher was fired from his job, arrested, and placed in solitary confinement for criticising the actions of Israel’s military. Meir Baruchin’s only “crime” was a Facebook post he made the day after Hamas’s attack on Israel that said: “Horrific images are pouring in from Gaza. Entire families were wiped out … Anyone who thinks this is justified because of what happened yesterday, should unfriend themselves. I ask everyone else to do everything possible to stop this madness. Stop it now. Not later, Now!!!”

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And earlier this month, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem suspended Law Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, who is a Palestinian citizen of Israel, for criticising Israel’s war on Gaza and Zionism in general.

The silencing of teachers and university lecturers has not been limited to Israel, either. In November in the United States, the University of Arizona (UA) “temporarily replaced” Assistant Professor Rebecca Lopez and Community Liaison Rebecca Zapien for facilitating a classroom discussion on Israel’s war on Gaza. Pro-Israel groups [claimed](https://twitter.com/IsraelWarRoom/status/1723703160441540860?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1723703160441540860%7Ctwgr%5E610e7ad3a3d27510ccbf60e470fc40f9321057d9%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.reuters.com%2Fworld%2Fus%2Fus-professors-suspended-probed-over-gaza-war-comments-2023-11-17%2F) that their lecture was “biased, antisemitic, blatantly false and terrorism-supporting”. Two first-grade teachers at a Los Angeles-area public charter school were also placed [on leave](https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-11-11/two-teachers-at-valley-village-charter-school-placed-on-leave-after-lesson-related-to-israel-hamas-war) after posting on social media about a lesson they taught on “the genocide in Palestine”.

Politicians and civil servants, in Israel and in countries backing Israel’s war on Gaza, are also not immune to such censorship.

In January, Ofer Cassif, a member of Israel’s Knesset from the left-wing Hadash-Ta’al party, announced his intention to join South Africa in its legal proceedings against Israel brought under the UN [Genocide Convention](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide-convention.shtml). In response to Cassif’s decision to support South Africa’s genocide case, 85 Israeli members of parliament (out of 120) accused him of “treason” and signed a petition to expel him from the Knesset.

On the other side of the world, in Canada, Sarah Jama, who is a member of the Provincial Parliament of Ontario, was forced to apologise for a [statement](https://twitter.com/SarahJama_/status/1711808190889746854) she made in the immediate aftermath of Hamas’s attack on Israel in October, where she called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and an end to Israel’s occupation and apartheid. Jama’s apology came after Ontario Premier Doug Ford [called](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/sarah-jama-gaza-statement-1.6992654) for her resignation.

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A manager of organisational performance and equity for the city of Evanston, Illinois in the US was also fired after he expressed his sympathies for Palestinians in Gaza on social media. In January, Liam Bird filed a [federal lawsuit](https://evanstonroundtable.com/2024/01/14/former-city-evanston-employee-lawsuit-palestinian-support/) against his former employer. The lawsuit also claims that senior city officials “‘choreographed’ public outrage toward Bird over a proposed resolution calling for a cease-fire in Gaza ahead of its introduction to the Equity and Empowerment Commission in November.

The efforts to censor and intimidate anyone and everyone who speaks up against Israel’s genocide in Gaza are undoubtedly distressing, but they are in no way surprising. A look at global history reveals that such silencing of critical voices has helped create a permissive environment for mass atrocities, and the worst atrocity of all, genocide, since at least a century.

In Slobodan Milosevic’s Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, [several measures](https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/serbia/Serbia99-02.htm) were implemented to suppress and censor all independent publications as well as television and radio stations that dared to speak up against, or even mention in a natural manner, the atrocities being committed by Serbs against Albanians, Bosniaks and Croats across the region. In 1998, five editors of independent newspapers were “charged with disseminating misinformation” because their publications referred to Albanians killed in Kosovo as “people” rather than “terrorists”.

When NATO eventually threatened to invade Kosovo to put an end to atrocities, the Serbian government doubled down on its determination to silence all dissenting voices. A member of Milosevic’s coalition said, “If we cannot grab all their [NATO] planes, we can grab those within our reach, like various Helsinki committees, and Quisling groups”. He added that those who were proven to have “participated in the service of foreign propaganda … shouldn’t expect anything good [from state authorities]”.

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Two decades after the Bosnian genocide, which was accompanied by the dark shadow of censorship throughout, authorities in China [launched](https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting) the “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism”, targeting Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. According to a Chinese official quoted by HRW, the purpose of the campaign against the Muslim minorities in the autonomous region was to “break their lineage, break their roots, break their connections, and break their origins”. Human rights organisations estimate that a million Turkic Muslims have been sent to “political education” camps, pretrial detention centres, and prisons since the beginning of the “operation”.

Here too censorship accompanied atrocities. The authorities shut the internet down across the region for months. They imprisoned Uighur website founders, writers and editors for crimes such as “splittism, leaking state secrets, and organising an illegal demonstration or endangering state security”. They also subjected the region to extreme levels of social media surveillance, deleting an estimated 25 percent of all social media comments. They also cracked down on pro-Uighur speech elsewhere in the country.

Censorship and suppression of free speech were also key characteristics of the Nazi Holocaust. This included the banning of Jewish literature, and the [systematic burning](https://global.oup.com/academic/product/harmful-and-undesirable-9780190275280) of “undesirable books” classified as “un-German” in a quest for “moral renewal”.

The Nazis closed down or took over all opposition newspapers in Germany early on in their tenure, and until the very end controlled every news item – about the Nazi party, its policies against Jews, and the war effort in general – that appeared in newspapers, on the radio and in newsreels. Germans were banned from listening to foreign radios, and only very limited – and highly curated and censored- information about the country and its war effort was allowed to be shared with the rest of the world. The party even controlled what German soldiers wrote home from various fronts across the world. The end result of this overwhelming censorship effort was that an overwhelming majority in the international community did not learn about the real extent of Nazi atrocities, and Jewish suffering in German-controlled territories, until after the end of World War II.

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Now, another genocide is under way in Gaza, and censorship is once again playing its part. In the era of camera phones and social media sites, it proved somewhat impossible for those committing and facilitating genocide to stop Palestinians from sharing their reality, and those around the world from raising their voices to support them.

But this is exactly why there are unrelenting efforts to silence and censor journalists, academics, politicians and activists standing with Palestine – efforts to ensure heart-wrenching images of pain and suffering from Gaza stop making their way to our screens.

And this is exactly why it is our collective responsibility to insert “Palestine” and “Palestinians” everywhere – every article, every artwork, every discussion. Our only chance of stopping this genocide is to learn from history, and continue speaking about Palestine.

The US, together with Jordan’s air force, “conducted a combined humanitarian assistance airdrop into Gaza … to provide essential relief to civilians affected by the ongoing conflict”The US, together with Jordan’s air force, “conducted a combined humanitarian assistance airdrop into Gaza … to provide essential relief to civilians affected by the ongoing conflict”The Biden administration is also considering shipping aid by sea from Cyprus, according to a US official.

Since Israel’s war began on October 7 following Hamas’s attack, Israel has barred the entry of food, water, medicine and other supplies, except for a tiny trickle of aid entering the south from Egypt at the Rafah crossing and Israel’s Karem Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) crossing.

‘The US is weak’

The US’s move has been criticised as inefficient and simply a public relations move by members of international aid organisations.

“The airdrops are symbolic and designed in ways to appease the domestic base,” Dave Harden, former USAID director to the West Bank, told Al Jazeera. “Really what needs to happen is more crossings [opening] and more trucks going in every day.”

“I think the United States is weak and that’s really disappointing to me,” Harden added. “The US has the ability to compel Israel to open up more aid and by not doing that we’re putting our assets and our people at risks and potentially creating more chaos in Gaza.”

UK-based charity Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) echoed Harden’s statement, telling Al Jazeera in a statement that the US, the UK and others should instead work to “ensure that Israel immediately opens all crossings into Gaza for aid.”

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Oxfam also blasted the Biden administration’s plans, labelling the effort an attempt to assuage the guilty consciences of US officials.

“While Palestinians in Gaza have been pushed to the absolute brink, dropping a paltry, symbolic amount of aid into Gaza with no plan for its safe distribution would not help and be deeply degrading to Palestinians,”

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry also criticised the US for acting as a “weak, marginal state” unable to secure aid to Palestinians.

US Senator Bernie Sanders, however, welcomed the US’s move.

“I applaud President Biden for understanding that there is a dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza,”

“Why not send food in through Karem Abu Salem?” Zweiri said. “There are 2,000 trucks waiting to get into Gaza” at border crossings, he said, while food and medicines pile up for months past their expiry dates.

“Why is the international community not putting enough effort into delivering aid in an organised manner?”

In the wee hours of May 8, police officers in Washington, DC violently cleared the pro-Palestine encampment at George Washington University (GW) with the help of pepper spray, arresting 33 people. University president Ellen Granberg had called the cops on what she claimed was an “unlawful” on-campus expression of solidarity with the victims of Israel’s current [genocide](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/) in the Gaza Strip, which has officially killed some 36,000 people in less than eight months, although this number is no doubt a grave underestimate.

Granberg denounced the encampment as “an illegal and potentially dangerous occupation of GW property” – an ironic choice of words, to say the least, given the context of the ongoing illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and the Israeli military’s decidedly dangerous behaviour. Now, the Israeli-Palestinian “conflict” – which is not so much a conflict as a psychopathic Israeli campaign to usurp other people’s property – is playing out in a battle for the landscape in the capital of the United States, [Israel’s BFF and devoted arms supplier](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/5/9/give-or-take-a-few-bombs-us-complicity-in-genocide-remains-ironclad).

I witnessed the aftermath of the police assault on the GW camp, as I had just arrived back in DC from self-imposed exile in Mexico for a brief visit with my mother. Having never excelled much at optimism, I had found it enormously heartening that the pro-justice narrative was [gaining ground](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/5/2/us-gaza-protests-calling-the-cops-on-free-speech) in a country pathologically disconnected from reality. Graffiti and placards in support of Palestine had proliferated across public and private space alike, and pasted onto the window of the #33 bus I found a priority mail envelope addressed “FROM: THE SEA; TO: THE RIVER” – a reference to the [Palestinian slogan](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/from-the-river-to-the-sea-what-does-the-palestinian-slogan-really-mean),“From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

I arrived at the GW encampment site around 8am on May 8 to find the area cordoned off and a battalion of sanitation workers systematically loading the camp’s contents into a garbage compactor truck: tents, prayer mats, backpacks, stuffed animals. A young Jewish man who had participated in the encampment turned up in a kippa and keffiyeh to watch the destruction, remarking drily as a table was heaved into the truck’s jaws: “Oh, that’s the table we had the Torah on.”

Granberg hardly had the final word, however, and on May 19 her speech at the GW commencement ceremony on Washington’s iconic National Mall was interrupted by students chanting demands that GW divest from Israel and cease funding genocide.

Four days before that, on May 15, I paid a visit to another epicentre of the showdown between Zionism and justice on this side of the Atlantic: [the Israeli embassy](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/1/in-washington-dc-celebrating-ramadan-protesting-israels-siege-of-gaza) in the northwest section of Washington. It was [Nakba Day](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/15/nakba-mapping-palestinian-villages-destroyed-by-israel-in-1948), the annual commemoration of the mass slaughter and dispossession of Palestinians that characterised the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 – and that set the stage for the next 76 years and counting.

Here was a concentrated battle for the landscape in the space of one city block. The embassy compound was saturated with Israeli flags, while the streets surrounding the building had been taken over by pro-Palestinian protesters and signage. One sign announced: “WELCOME TO KIBBUTZ ISRAEL”, with an addendum underneath: “SINCE THEY THINK SETTLEMENTS ARE COOL”. Indeed, what more symbolic way to protest a murderous occupying force than through a counter-occupation?

In addition to Palestinian flags, other visuals lining the street included invitations to “Honk 4 Palestine”, pictures of bloodied Palestinian babies and other carnage in Gaza, and a reminder of Israel’s [use of starvation](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-stream/2024/4/1/how-israel-is-using-starvation-as-a-weapon-of-war) as a weapon of war. A faux street sign read: “Genocide Street Northwest”. Directly in front of the embassy was a memorial to [Aaron Bushnell](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/2/26/suicide-vs-genocide-rest-in-power-aaron-bushnell), the 25-year-old active duty member of the US Air Force who self-immolated outside the compound on February 25 in what he warned was an “extreme act of protest – but compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonisers is not extreme at all”.

Bushnell’s literal self-sacrifice was what launched Kibbutz Israel, now three months old. On the day of my visit, a charming character emerged from the embassy and attempted to topple the memorial, after which he received a talking-to and then a handshake from the US Secret Service officers on duty. As he was whisked off in a black vehicle, he snarled through the open window at one of the female activists: “Whore.”

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Kibbutz Israel protesters and Israeli embassy personnel struggled for occupation of the auditory realm, as well, and protesters had erected a sign advising that there was a “noise demonstration” under way. Complimentary earplugs were offered along with the suggestion to “please cover your ears (and open your eyes/rise up against genocide)”.

To that end, protesters took turns shouting through megaphones in the direction of the embassy, while embassy staff intermittently blasted music from within the compound to drown them out. But if Israel’s diplomatic representatives in Washington can’t even deal with the ruckus made by a handful of people with megaphones, perhaps they should imagine how noisy it must be to live under apocalyptic Israeli military bombardment for nearly eight months.

Of course, the US political establishment in Washington remains firmly committed to the idea that genocide is “self-defence”, and continues to fling money and armaments at the Israeli military accordingly. And yet folks on the ground are finally opening their eyes, as the truth conquers new terrain in the nation’s capital and beyond – from the Potomac River to the Chesapeake Bay, you might say.

Or better yet: From sea to shining sea, Palestine will be free.

The first case, [Defense for Children International – Palestine v Biden](https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/palestinians-sue-biden-failure-prevent-genocide-seek-emergency) (“Defense for Children”), alleged that President Biden, his Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin have “actively abetted” the state of Israel to commit genocide in contravention of their responsibilities under the 1948 Genocide Convention. The lawsuit sought court orders mandating the administration to take all necessary steps to halt Israel’s attacks on Gaza, stop sending military aid, and cease its opposition to a ceasefire at the United Nations Security CouncilThe US provides $3.8bn annually in military aid to Israel, and Biden is currently seeking Senate approval to send an additional $14.1bn later this year.

In a January 31 written [decision](https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.cand.420793/gov.uscourts.cand.420793.91.0.pdf), US District Judge Jeffrey White of the Northern District of California quoted approvingly from the preliminary ruling issued the week before by the International Court of Justice in a [case brought against Israel by South Africa](https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20231228-app-01-00-en.pdf), which found Israel’s current conduct in Gaza may plausibly amount to genocide and ordered it to stop killing and wounding Palestinians.

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“The undisputed evidence before this Court comports with the finding of the ICJ and indicates that the current treatment of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip by the Israeli military may plausibly constitute a genocide in violation of international law,” wrote Judge White. He found that there was strong evidence that Israel’s “military siege in Gaza is intended to eradicate a whole people and therefore plausibly falls within the international prohibition against genocide…”

After hearing more than three hours of testimony by Palestinians, their relatives, a physician and advocates, Judge White called the evidence in the case “gut-wrenching” and implored “the Defendants to examine the results of their unflagging support of the military siege against the Palestinians in Gaza”.

Nevertheless, noting that under well-established legal standards, known as the political question doctrine, “foreign policy is constitutionally committed to the political branches of government, and disputes over foreign policy are considered non-justiciable political questions”, he ruled that the court has neither the competence nor the authority to decide on this matter.

The case was dismissed.

Just a few days later, however, another court case against the Biden administration relating to the same conflict and evidently concerning “non-justiciable political questions” received a completely different verdict.

US District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk in Amarillo, Texas rejected the Biden administration’s bid to dismiss a lawsuit, brought by Republican Representative Ronny Jackson and three others, that alleges President Biden and Secretary Blinken violated the 2018 Taylor Force Act (TFA) and put US visitors to Israel under increased risk of harm by providing economic aid to the West Bank and Gaza.

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TFA – named after a US veteran who was killed by a Palestinian attacker in Israel in 2017 and whose parents are among the plaintiffs in the case – is a federal law that prohibits the US government from giving economic aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) until it stops paying stipends to Palestinians convicted of “terrorism” and their family members.

The lawsuit, dubbed Jackson et al v Biden et al, claims that the TFA bars the US government from providing economic aid that would directly benefit the PA until it stops paying stipends. The Biden administration argues that the law does not bar all economic support for the West Bank and Gaza, but only restricts how money sent can be spent.

In the 2023 fiscal year, Congress provided $225m in such aid. In a [fact sheet](https://www.state.gov/u-s-support-for-the-palestinian-people/#:~:text=U.S.%20assistance%20for%20the%20Palestinian,particularly%20in%20the%20security%20sector.) issued on March 26, 2023, the US Department of State said that the aid is to help the “Palestinian people”, supporting the neediest households and providing water, sanitation and hygiene resources.

But the lawsuit alleges that the administration is “unlawfully laundering US taxpayer funds” by providing aid to non-governmental organisations that directly benefit the PA, in violation of the TFA.

In its efforts to get the case dismissed, the US Department of Justice argued that the plaintiffs lacked legal standing to sue because their claims of an increased risk of harm were “wholly conjectural”. The government further alleged that any risk of future harm was due to actions by others besides the US government, and contended that “dismissal was warranted to avoid entangling the courts in a high-level foreign policy matter”.

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Judge Kacsmaryk, however, ruled that the plaintiffs successfully demonstrated a “legitimate and warranted” fear of harm if the funding continues, and pointed to the October 7 attacks in Israel as substantiating evidence.

Ignoring the case’s obvious infringement of the “political question doctrine”, he allowed the lawsuit to move forward.

The political question doctrine, a cornerstone of constitutional law, restricts courts from addressing certain constitutional matters, even when other legal criteria like standing, ripeness, and mootness are met. It’s rooted in the principle that certain issues are best left to other branches of government or fall outside the judicial purview. A finding that a matter qualifies as a political question divests courts of jurisdiction, meaning they lack the power to rule on the matter.

Judge White rightly recognised this in the Defense for Children case, but Judge Kacsmaryk chose to ignore it in Jackson et al v Biden et al.

The political question doctrine remains a subject of debate among jurists, particularly regarding its origin, purpose, and application. Disagreements also persist on its scope and very legitimacy.

The debate on the issue is vast and multifaceted, but it is impossible to deny that the doctrine plays an important role in shaping the relationship between US courts and foreign affairs.

In the 1918 case of Oetjen v Central Leather Company, the [court wrote](https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/usrep/usrep246/usrep246297/usrep246297.pdf) that “[t]he conduct of the foreign relations of our government is committed by the Constitution to the executive and legislative – ‘the political’ – departments of the government, and the propriety of what may be done in the exercise of this political power is not subject to judicial inquiry or decision”.

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However, despite that sweeping statement, not every case or controversy that touches on foreign relations lies beyond judicial cognisance; rather, the court analyses each question on a case-by-case basis.

Even taking the case-by-case approach, it is difficult to deny that a dispute over the allocation of foreign aid – which is at the centre of Jackson et al v Biden et al – is clearly a political question that should be left with the administration. This is especially so given that the doctrine is commonly applied to shield the administration even from its treaty obligations arising under international law, as we saw in the Defense for Children case.

Like many legal observers in the US, I was not surprised by the dismissal of the Defense for Children case under the political question doctrine, but was caught off guard by Judge Kacsmaryk’s decision to allow  Jackson et al v Biden et al to move forward.

The contrasting application of the doctrine in these two politically charged cases – one seeking to prevent harm to Palestinians, and the other stop aid from reaching them – speaks to the inability of US courts, like many other US institutions, to maintain their independence and objectivity in issues relating to Israel-Palestine, and highlights once again the “Palestine exception”.

Another day, another tragedy in Gaza. At the time of writing, rescuers were pulling bodies out of the rubble after an Israeli air strike on a residential building in southern Gaza’s Rafah city. Meanwhile, a few miles away in Khan Younis, the grisly effort of digging up bodies buried in mass graves on the grounds of the Nasser Hospital continues. The Palestinian death toll is now more than 34,000 and 1.1 million people in Gaza are experiencing catastrophic levels of food insecurity.

The world is also on edge, as many fear a wider regional war after Iran sent a retaliatory barrage of drones and missiles into Israel, following Israel’s strike on the Iranian consular building in Damascus. Since then, Iran’s air defences [brought down three suspected Israeli drones](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/4/19/live-israel-launches-missile-attack-in-response-to-iran-assault) over the central city of Isfahan. Ignoring calls for caution from around the world, including its closest partner and protector – the United States, Israel remains determined to conduct a costly ground operation in Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of civilians are sheltering. Commentators and political figures have declared that Israel is a “liability” and that its leaders have “lost” their way.

Is it then not time to pronounce Israel a rogue state?

The “rogue state” label has a sordid history. It has long been weaponised against states considered antagonistic to Western political interests. The label had its heyday during the Clinton years, when it was used for countries that were viewed as unpredictable, obstinate and, all in all, unwilling to follow [international norms](https://theconversation.com/migrant-deaths-at-sea-the-real-blame-lies-with-policies-created-by-european-states-209606).

Eventually, the Clinton administration abandoned “rogue states” for the more [politically correct](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/replacing-the-rogue-rhetoric-a-new-label-opens-the-way-to-a-better-policy/) label “states of concern”. But as the US-led “war on terror” divided the world between the good and the bad, the “rouge states” label was once again revived by the Bush administration as a catch-all term for countries that constituted the “world of evil”.

Undoubtedly, this label helps the West’s self-perception as a “force for good” in the world. But it also provides justification for the contemptuous treatment and isolation of rogue states – presumably to prevent them from “wrecking public order, setting off wars, and subverting whole areas of the world”.

The irony now is that Israel, often considered a beachhead of Western interests in the Middle East, seems to exhibit all the familiar features of a rogue state.

Indeed, it has violated all international norms and laws throughout its genocidal war on Gaza.

For example, according to international humanitarian law, states and non-state groups engaged in an armed conflict are required to protect civilians, medical staff and humanitarian aid workers and ensure unrestricted passage of humanitarian aid.

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Israel has heeded none of these rules. We know that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians killed since October 7 have been civilians. This includes more than 14,000 children. Already back in January, Oxfam International [reported](https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/daily-death-rate-gaza-higher-any-other-major-21st-century-conflict-oxfam) that the daily death rate in Gaza was higher than all other major conflicts in the 21st century.

Israel’s tactics on the battlefield have been indefensible. Israeli forces have been insistent in their [targeting of medical facilities](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/2/14/israels-unrelenting-war-on-gaza-healthcare-requires-urgent-action) in Gaza. Throughout the campaign, Israel has conducted more than 900 strikes on healthcare facilities, killing at least 700 medical professionals. Currently, only 10 out of 36 hospitals are partly functional in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli authorities have claimed that hospitals in Gaza were being used as military bases by Hamas. This was the official justification for Israel’s two-week siege of al-Shifa Hospital, the enclave’s largest and most advanced medical facility.

When Israeli forces eventually withdrew from the complex, witnesses described dystopian scenes of “human heads eaten by crows, unidentified and decomposing body parts, and hundreds of corpses piled up and buried in mass graves”.

Israeli forces have similarly targeted aid workers. There was global outrage and condemnation in early April after seven workers from the food relief organisation [World Central Kitchen](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/2/what-is-world-central-kitchen-whose-team-was-attacked-by-israel-in-gaza) were killed in a “targeted Israeli strike”. But that attack was simply one of many. Gaza has been the most dangerous place for humanitarian workers for more than six months, and close to 200 workers have been killed thus far.

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Going against all rules and norms, Israel has also restricted aid flows into Gaza – this despite warnings from aid agencies that famine is imminent. In violation of Article 79 of the additional protocols of the Geneva Conventions that require that journalists be protected as civilians in a war zone, it has systematically attacked journalists and media personnel in Gaza, including their family members. In fact, 75 percent of all [journalist killings](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/15/nearly-75-of-journalists-killed-in-2023-died-in-israels-war-on-gaza-cpj) in 2023 were in Gaza as a consequence of Israel’s military campaign. Israeli forces have also reduced all Palestinian universities in Gaza to rubble.

Israel has also been eager to keep the battlefront open with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran, hoping that a regional war would force the direct involvement of the US and other Western allies. On the [Lebanese front](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2024/4/15/mapping-israel-lebanon-cross-border-attacks), Israel, Hezbollah and other armed factions exchanged 4,733 attacks from October 7, 2023 to March 15, 2024. Israel was responsible for 3,952 of these incidents. Alongside Hezbollah operatives, those attacks killed many civilians, including children, as well as journalists and medics.

When Israel carried out its strike on the Iranian mission in Damascus, it killed [Brigadier-General Mohammad Reza Zahedi](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/2/who-was-mohammad-reza-zahedi-the-iranian-general-assassinated-by-israel), a senior commander in Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Zahedi was the highest-ranking Iranian official to be assassinated since the US killing of Major-General Qassem Soleimani in 2020. Iran’s [retaliation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/18/iran-israel-potential-miscalculation-analysis) was also the first time that a foreign country had directly attacked Israel since 1991.

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Ironically, Iran – often treated in the West as a prototypical rogue state – has insisted on a restrained approach, declaring that the “matter can be deemed concluded”. But it has required some diplomatic wrangling to convince Israel to keep its response muted. Reportedly, US President Joe Biden has told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to simply “[take the win](https://thehill.com/video/biden-tells-netanyahu-%E2%80%98take-the-win%E2%80%99-and-do-not-escalate-after-thwarted-iran-attack-on-israel/9606905/)”, after Israel “thwarted” Iran’s attack. In exchange for a limited Israeli response, Biden has reportedly [greenlighted](https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel-at-war/artc-u-s-agrees-to-rafah-op-in-exchange-for-limited-response-to-iran-report) the Israeli ground invasion of Rafah, even though every actor in the region opposes the operation. Cairo has warned that the invasion of Rafah could even endanger the peace accord between Egypt and Israel.

Numbers do not lie either. That Israel is largely isolated was self-evident in the voting tally for the United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for a ceasefire back in December. While 153 countries voted for the resolution, only 10, including Israel and the US, voted against it. In the last UNSC vote on March 25, 2024, 14 out of 15 members voted in favour of the resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire. Notably, the US chose to abstain rather than do what it usually does – veto any resolution that seeks to restrain Israeli actions against Palestinians.

Israel is able to persist with its rogue conduct and obstinate circumvention of international laws, regulations, and norms because it has strong, all-season allies like the US in the West. But labelling Israel as a rogue actor and treating it as such, is an essential condition for any punitive actions the international community can take against a country that has violated the rights of Palestinians for 75 years with utmost impunity.

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With countries like Canada, the Netherlands, Japan, Spain, and Belgium suspending arms sales to Israel, it would seem that its rogue nature is gaining some recognition. Eventually, one would hope that supporting Israel would become too much of a liability, even for the US, and this would make way for Palestinian liberation

For two weeks now, American media has given plenty of airtime and front-page space to US humanitarian aid initiatives in Gaza. The United States Air Force has started participating in aid airdrops on Gaza, while US President Joe Biden announced plans to build a temporary floating dock in order to increase the supply of food and other essential goods to the 2.3 million Palestinians under Israeli siege and bombardment.

These initiatives may sound like a noble effort to save Palestinian lives, but the reality is very different. This is because the American plan is not a serious attempt by a credible and disinterested state to relieve Palestinian suffering. Rather, it is just another diversionary ruse, which – with the help of the media – has been deployed to cover up what really is a diplomatic band-aid for an Israeli-made famine and to divert attention away from the Israeli genocide the US itself has enabled.

The American government regularly uses its military abroad for spectacular feats that often have three common characteristics: they do not achieve their main aim, they mainly respond to domestic American political dictates, and they offer theatrical displays of America’s impressive power.

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Yet the power in action behind these mediagenic moves ultimately reflects Washington’s inability to conduct rigorous foreign policy that is anchored in global realities.

Indeed, the US could achieve its declared goals of saving Palestinian lives more quickly and at far less cost, if it forces Israel to stop its genocidal campaign in Gaza and allow normal levels of food and medical aid to flow into the territory. This is doable because without US arms, funds, and diplomatic protection, Israel could not carry on its aggression and siege.

Furthermore, many analysts also question the technical efficacy of the temporary pier because so many crucial dimensions remain unclear. Who will distribute the imported food, medicines, and basic life supplies? Can we expect these goods to reach all Palestinians in need, while Israel continues its campaign of bombing, assassinations, and scorched-earth attacks? Will the humanitarian imports only reach the centre and south of Gaza, as Israel continues to make northern Gaza an uninhabitable buffer zone along the southern Israel border?

And if Israel provides the security to protect the pier facility, will this represent a permanent Israeli armed presence in the middle of Gaza? Will Israel close all other border points and only use this new one? Could Israel quietly use the dock in the near future as an exit route for Palestinians forced out of Gaza?

If security for food shipments by road is not guaranteed across all of Gaza, will lawless conditions allow gangs and organised criminal groups to resume their recent theft of some aid trucks and selling the contents for profit? Will Israel and the US compel some hapless and desperate Palestinians who get contracts to deliver food and medicine into becoming local accomplices who cement Israel’s long-term control of Gaza – just as the shameless “South Lebanon Army” did in the 1980s before it fled for its soulless life when Hezbollah and other Lebanese resistance groups liberated the south?

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Apart from the lack of clarity on effectiveness and feasibility, this plan sets a dangerous precedent: America has directly and enthusiastically supported Israel’s genocide by starvation for five months, and then in month six, it steps in with emergency humanitarian action. This relieves Israel of its legal responsibility to protect civilians under its belligerent control, and may shield it from being held accountable for its war crimes.

The US will probably continue deploying the same diversionary tactics in the coming months while also extending its military support for its ally, which in the first five months of the war amounted to more than 100 deadly weapons transfers carried out without congressional approval.

The mainstream media in the US and other Western states will play a crucial role in promoting this show in the weeks and months ahead, as it has already done. It will relay the American and Israeli official announcements without much scrutiny, conveniently forgetting the many American and Israeli pronouncements in the last five months that later proved false.

Then we will see regular television and video reports of how the military does its magic – in the desert, in the sea, in the air, anywhere that entertainment producers and directors can shape a failed foreign policy into a spectacle of genuine technological awe alongside the false human caring.

Some American and British journalists will open their reports by noting that in this region where Jews “made the desert bloom” and God parted the waters for Moses and his people to find refuge, the Anglo-Americans today miraculously turn the sea into a source of salvation from starvation.

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But in the end, the deployment of the US military to carry out a “humanitarian” mission in Gaza will remain a captivating but delusional display, much like the ones we saw in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Indeed, not only has the US-Israel combine used starvation as an instrument of war and a negotiating tactic, but it has also tried to cover up this grotesque show by launching the dazzling spectacle of the US military’s astounding global reach and capabilities.

What is the alternative? A more logical and less expensive way forward was laid out by the European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell at the United Nations Security Council earlier this month. Borrell made clear that Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war and blocking humanitarian land routes, which are the only effective way to deliver aid to Gaza.

According to him, countering Israel’s deadly tactics should start with the UN Security Council unanimously adopting a resolution endorsing a two-state solution, and “defining the general principles which might lead to this result”. He maintained this could pave the way for a permanent resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian and the wider Arab-Israeli conflicts.

It could also, I would add, end the clown shows of razzle-dazzle entertainment, hocus-pocus illusions, and now-you-see-them-now-you-don’t war crimes that emanate from Tel Aviv and Washington, and propel the Palestine-Israel conflict into its second gruesome century.

Over the past five months, a lot has been said and written on the British media’s coverage of  Israel’s war on Gaza. Experts, journalists and activists, [including myself](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/11/3/covering-gaza-dehumanisation-of-an-entire-population), have argued in numerous articles and interviews that the British media exhibits certain biases in its coverage of this war, and the broader issue of Israel-Palestine.

In [a new report](https://cfmm.org.uk/resources/publication/cfmm-report-media-bias-gaza-2023-24/), based on the largest statistical analysis of the media coverage of the atrocities committed in Israel on October 7, and Israel’s genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people in the first month of the war, the Muslim Council of Britain’s Centre of Media Monitoring (CfMM) laid out the empirical evidence for these observations and concerns.

Looking at some 180,000 video clips from seven United Kingdom broadcasters and three international broadcasters, as well as about 26,000 news articles from 28 British media websites, CfMM has assessed whether the UK media have reliably informed the public on the conflict and shared the positions of all concerned parties responsibly.

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In line with the findings of smaller-scale studies conducted thus far, it found that Israeli narratives, voices and grievances were favoured over Palestinian voices, narratives and grievances in the coverage. “Israel’s rights” were insistently emphasised, often resulting in the exclusion and erasure of the rights of the Palestinians. Emotive language was consistently used for Israeli victims of violence, but not as much for the Palestinians. Representatives and supporters of Israel were allowed to dehumanise Palestinians on air, with no considerable pushback from news presenters and talk show hosts.

Analysing the coverage under six themes – contextualisation, language, framing, claims, the undermining of Palestinian sources and the misrepresentation of pro-Palestinian protesters – the research found that many news outlets have opted to present news from an Israeli perspective, often with significant lapses in basic fact-checking and verification.

Remarkably, the analysis unveiled that Palestinian symbols, such as the Palestinian flag, were overwhelmingly “used to illustrate stories on anti-Semitism”. It also exposed the many Islamophobic aspects of the coverage, such as the framing of pro-Palestine protests and support as inherently dangerous and akin to “a terror threat” often because of the Muslim presence among them.

The report revealed that the Islamophobic trope of “Islam being an anti-Semitic religion” was repeatedly presented – by editors, analysts and columnists alike – as the driving force behind the growing opposition to Israel and its treatment of Palestinians. This led to the misrepresentation of the 75-year conflict in Israel-Palestine as a “religious war” between Muslims and Jews, rather than a matter of oppression and occupation.

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The report determined that pro-Palestinian voices and Palestinian activists have repeatedly been misrepresented by many British media outlets since the beginning of the conflict. It found that the right-wing media has been particularly hostile towards pro-Palestinian voices, “framing them as supporters of terrorism and anti-Semites as well as being hostile to British values”.

The analysis also unearthed many instances of misinformation through deliberate omission. The context of decades-long Israeli oppression of Palestinian people and occupation of Palestinian territory was absent from most of the coverage. The coverage was framed in a way that implied the conflict started on October 7. The report showed how some reportage on the ongoing war failed to even mention that the West Bank is Palestinian territory occupied by Israel, and that, according to international law, Gaza has also been effectively under Israeli occupation prior to October 7 – despite the absence of a military presence on the ground since 2005.

There were also many instances of apparent “mistakes” and misinformation being given a pass on British TV screens, as long as they reaffirmed Israeli narratives. In one instance, a defence analyst claimed on TV that “the West Bank is occupied by Palestinians”. Despite such a claim not having any basis in international law, or any current or historic reality on the ground, the presenter did not correct him or seek clarification.

Misleading use of imagery in some newspapers is another failure identified in the analysis.

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For instance, distressing images depicting the flames and extensive destruction caused by Israeli air strikes on Gaza were paired with headlines referencing the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel on October 7. In one case, a horrifying image of frightened, injured Palestinian children in Gaza was juxtaposed with a headline about “mutilated babies in Israel”.

Using misleading imagery, omitting facts, allowing guests to spread misinformation without challenge and sharing unverified information as fact are examples of irresponsible and unethical journalism. And such acts could have grave consequences.

Misinformation and disinformation breeds hate speech, which can result in harm being inflicted on innocent individuals. Misrepresentation of the current conflict as a “religious war” between Jews and Muslims, coupled with the dehumanisation of Palestinians and vilification of their supporters around the world as terrorists or “terrorist-adjacent” has exacerbated anti-Muslim, anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian sentiments.

As a result, hate directed towards British Muslims has manifested itself on the streets and screens across the UK. According to Tell Mama, the leading hate crime monitoring agency on measuring anti-Muslim hate in the UK, between October 2023 and February 2024, there were more than 2,000 anti-Muslim hate cases in the UK – a shocking 335 percent increase compared with the same period in the previous year.

Research conducted by UK NGOs More in Common and the Together Coalition since the beginning of the war in Gaza, published on March 3,  highlighted the prevalence of anti-Muslim sentiment in the country. Among those who responded to the survey, 21 percent – one in five – said they have a “very negative” or “somewhat negative” view of Muslims.

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Media’s false labelling of pro-Palestinian protesters as “terror threats”, “pro-Hamas”, “extremists” and “opposing to British values” undoubtedly contributed to this unprecedented rise in anti-Muslim hate and prejudice in the country.

Indeed, anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments many British Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims are currently faced with in their schools, universities and places of work could – at least in part – be tied to the predominantly one-sided coverage of the war on Gaza detailed in the CfMM report.

The negative labelling of pro-Palestinian protesters as “anti-British” and “anti-Western” merely due to their support for Palestinian rights and self-determination leads to the unjust tarnishing of entire communities. It feeds into existing prejudices and could flame interreligious and inter-communal tensions and even violence.

Alongside the harm caused to Muslim, Arab and Palestinian Britons, the bias expressed by the media in the coverage of this conflict also harms Palestinians in Palestine and the wellbeing of the wider region.

The report’s findings imply that numerous journalists and commentators in Britain have knowingly or unknowingly aided a propaganda campaign aimed at providing false legitimacy for Israel’s relentless assault on Gaza – an assault that, according to the International Court of Justice, could plausibly amount to genocide.

The point of the CfMM report, and this article, of course, is not to make unfair generalisations about a diverse, rich media landscape and tar all UK journalists with the same brush. Many journalists in Britain and on the ground in Israel-Palestine have produced balanced and informative journalism about the Gaza war for British media and examples of this are also included in the CfMM report.

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But the report, and the many problems and shortcomings that it highlights, should be seen by those working in the British media and covering this war as a wakeup call. They should treat this extensive report and its findings as a valuable learning tool and reassess their output on Israel-Palestine according to the just and meaningful criticisms laid out within it.

The extent of the tragedy still unfolding today in Palestine, and the demonstrable impact it has had on intercommunal relations here in Britain, necessitate every journalist contributing to the coverage of this war to think carefully about what they are communicating to the public, and take extra steps to uphold the values and principles that define the profession.

A week ago, US President Joe Biden claimed that a “ceasefire” deal in Gaza was imminent and could take effect as soon as March 4. “My national security adviser tells me we are close,” he told reporters while eating ice cream in New York City.

But ice cream or not, Biden’s actual position was not nearly that sweet. A subsequent statement by a senior Biden administration official claimed Israel had “basically accepted” a proposal for a temporary pause in fighting. But as of March 4, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Mossad director were still refusing to send a delegation to Cairo, where talks with Hamas were under way.

The Biden administration’s eagerness to claim victory in its search for some kind of temporary truce indicates how much it is feeling the heat of the rising global and domestic pressure demanding an immediate ceasefire, an end to the Israeli genocide, an end to the threat of a new escalation against refugee-packed Rafah, and an end to the siege of Gaza and immediate unhindered provision of massive levels of humanitarian aid.

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Despite Washington’s vain hopes for March 4 and the unofficial goal of a ceasefire by the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan on March 10, the deal remains elusive. Media reports indicate Biden is telling the Qatari and Egyptian leaders that he is putting pressure on Israel to agree to a truce and a captives swap.

But his claim of pressuring Israel is undermined by the continuing [US vetoes](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/20/us-vetoes-another-un-security-council-resolution-urging-gaza-war-ceasefire) of ceasefire resolutions at the United Nations Security Council, most recently on February 20, as well as the continuing flow of United States weapons and money to Israel to enable its assault.

The vetoed resolution, introduced by Algeria on behalf of the Arab Group, demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and deplored all attacks against civilians. It specifically rejected the “forced displacement of the Palestinian civilian population, including women and children” and called unconditionally for unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza and the “urgent, continuous and sufficient provision of humanitarian assistance at scale”.

Significantly, the text referenced the January order of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that found Israel to be plausibly committing or preparing to commit genocide in Gaza, and imposed a set of provisional measures requiring Israel to stop its practices.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Biden’s ambassador to the UN, cast the sole veto against the Algerian resolution, and instead put forward an alternative US text, claiming it also supported a ceasefire.

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But the proposed US language does not call for an immediate or permanent ceasefire or an end to Israeli genocide; it does not prevent an attack on Rafah or end the Israeli siege. The proposed US resolution is not designed to end the murderous Israeli war against Gaza – nor is the deal that is currently being negotiated in Cairo.

To the contrary, the provisions of the US draft resolution reflect the true intentions of the Biden administration vis-a-vis its continuing support of Israel, and reveal the limitations of the truce it is trying to orchestrate.

While the US draft resolution does use the dreaded word “ceasefire” – which had been prohibited in the White House for months – it does not call for an immediate halt in the bombing, only “as soon as practicable”, with no indication of when that might be. It does not call for a permanent ceasefire either, leaving Israel free to resume its genocidal bombing – presumably with continuing US support.

Virtually everything the US draft calls for is undercut by what is left out. The demand for “lifting all barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance at scale” in Gaza certainly sounds appropriately robust. But that’s only until you realise that the text’s failure to challenge or even name the principal barrier to aid getting in – Israel’s bombardment – means that this is not a serious plan to end Israel’s deadly siege.

It should not surprise anyone that “the Biden administration is not planning to punish Israel if it launches a military campaign in Rafah without ensuring civilian safety” – as Politico reported – despite claiming it wants a credible plan to ensure Palestinian safety. No one in the Biden administration has even hinted at imposing consequences for Israel’s constant rejection of the insipid appeals for restraint – such as conditioning aid on human rights standards (as required by US law) or cutting US military aid altogether. That’s what real pressure would look like.

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A more accurate picture of Washington’s approach to Israel’s war against Gaza is the continuing US pipeline of weapons to make Israel’s murderous assault on Gaza more effective, more efficient, and more deadly.

According to the Wall Street Journal, the “Biden administration is preparing to send bombs and other weapons to Israel that would add to its military arsenal even as the US pushes for a ceasefire in Gaza.” The arms the US intends to hand over to the Israeli army include MK-82 bombs, KMU-572 Joint Direct Attack Munitions and FMU-139 bomb fuses, worth tens of millions of dollars.  It is more than likely that the administration will do another end run around US Congress to send the weapons without relying on congressional approval, as it did on at least [two occasions](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/30/biden-administration-bypasses-congress-on-weapon-sales-to-israel) last December.

Whatever the language of Washington’s proposed UN Security Council resolution and likely the possible temporary truce deal as well, the words of National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby continue to resonate as a better reflection of the Biden administration’s policy: “We’re going to continue to support Israel… and we’re going to continue to make sure they have the tools and the capabilities to do that.”

As we approach the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the brutal war on Gaza has entered its sixth month. The assault on Gaza has killed more than 30,000 Palestinians, including 13,000 children. Aid delivery to the north of Gaza is being restricted, resulting in the starvation of many more.

Worse still is the Israeli threat to launch a ground operation in Rafah during Ramadan, where more than 1.5 million people are crammed in, many displaced from other parts of Gaza. What was previously a “safe zone” declared by the Israeli army, is now a densely populated refugee camp. Rafah has a surface area of around 63 square kilometres (24sq miles). The average population density is now more than [22,200 people per square kilometre](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/15/thursday-briefing-inside-israels-plans-for-rafah-and-the-threat-to-refugees-there) (57,276 per square mile). That is twice the density of New York City.

Attacking Rafah would be a bloodbath. The entire world – even the United States – has warned against the operation, but, according to rhetoric from Israeli government officials, there seems little chance the attack on Rafah will not be carried out.

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The start of Ramadan, which would usually be a time of celebration, love and dedication to Allah (SWT), has now been turned into a date to fear for the Palestinians of Gaza. For more than five months, they have been deprived of food, water, medicine, and their homes. Now, they will also be deprived of a peaceful celebration of their holy month.

If true to the threat made, the invasion begins during Ramadan, it will be the end of Gaza’s humanitarian crisis and the start of its humanitarian disaster.

For us on the outside, watching this catastrophe unfold has been extremely painful. Many have felt helpless in the face of Palestinian suffering, but we can and should do something about it.

Giving to charity is a key pillar of Islam all year round, but in Ramadan, we Muslims give even more. This emulates Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) who was especially generous during the holy month and we believe the blessings for those who donate are multiplied significantly.

This year, this Ramadan, it is essential that every person – Muslim or non-Muslim – gives every penny they can to help the people of Gaza. Families all across the Gaza Strip, especially in the north, are experiencing famine. The UN’s hunger monitoring agency, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, has [confirmed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/21/entire-gaza-population-facing-hunger-crisis-famine-risk-un-backed-report), “This is the highest share of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity that the IPC initiative has ever classified for any given area or country.”

Muslims are required to fast during Ramadan. However, the conflict means that when the time comes to break fast, many Palestinians in Gaza will have nothing to eat or drink. Since October, parents have routinely been choosing to go without food and water, so their children can eat.

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Even if the assault on Rafah does not happen – and let us pray that it does not – Ramadan will be a time of great need for the people of Gaza. The death toll is rising by the hundreds every day, the healthcare system is collapsing due to the endless bombardment. The number of children orphaned has exceeded 17,000. Access to clean water is becoming a luxury, creating an environment that is ripe for waterborne diseases.

And amid all of this suffering, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the largest relief agency operating in Gaza, has been smeared and, as a result, defunded by its biggest donors, despite there being [not a shred of evidence](https://www.channel4.com/news/israels-evidence-of-unrwa-hamas-allegations-examined) to support the accusations levelled at it.

It is imperative for people of all faiths and none to give to aid organisations working in Gaza today, tomorrow and throughout Ramadan. Your generosity is needed to feed the fasting and the starving. Your charity is needed to give clean water to those who need it to live and to purify themselves before prayer. Your acts of giving will bring hope to those who have had everything taken from them.

Despite the many challenges, there are organisations that are doing their utmost to help the people of Gaza. They are actively working to overcome the restrictions imposed on the delivery of aid, pressuring the international community to do whatever it takes to get the lifesaving assistance to the people who need it.

Donating to aid organisations won’t address the cause of Palestinian pain and misery, but it can help hold back the tide. It is an act of solidarity.

This Ramadan, many are facing difficult economic circumstances and are worried about the cost-of-living crisis. But this is an unprecedented time; the people of Gaza need our help. Amid the greatest suffering being inflicted on a population in most of our lifetimes, we must all give like Muslims.

 “Death to the Arabs” and “May your village burn” at the so-called “Flag March”.The demonstrators danced and waved Israeli flags throughout the city.

The Jerusalem Waqf, the Islamic authority that oversees the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, said more than 1,100 Israelis encroached on the site, known to Muslims as al-Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary) and to Jews as Temple Mount.

The AFP news agency published photos of Israeli demonstrators assaulting a Palestinian journalist in the Old City. Several Israeli outlets reported that Haaretz reporter Nir Hasson was also attacked.

“Almost as soon as the ultranationalist people arrived into occupied East Jerusalem, they started attacking Palestinians. Young kids were attacking older Palestinians – we’ve seen pictures of that,”“They were attacking shops; they were running into the shops. The Israeli police simply lost control. In fact, what they did was they asked the Palestinians to simply shutter their shops because they couldn’t control these people.”

According to Israeli media reports, Israel deployed 3,000 police officers to the march and urged demonstrators to “avoid any physical or verbal violence”.

AFP footage showed demonstrators holding signs rebuking the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the top United Nations court, which [has ordered Israel](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/24/icj-orders-israel-to-halt-its-offensive-on-rafah-gaza-in-new-ruling) to halt its assault in Rafah.

“The ICJ is corrupt, working with Hamas,”

Far-right Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir attended the march and called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to “be strong” in an implicit criticism of a proposal for a [truce deal](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/4/pressure-for-truce-deal-rises-as-israel-reports-four-gaza-captives-killed#:~:text=The%20three%2Dphase%20plan%20includes,a%20roadmap%20for%20its%20reconstruction.) to halt the war on Gaza.

“The Damascus Gate is ours. The Temple Mount is ours. And God willing complete victory is ours,” Ben-Gvir said, according to Times of Israel, referring to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound – the third-holiest site in Islam.

Israel captured East Jerusalem during the 1967 war and subsequently annexed it in 1980 in a move not recognised by the international community

The second Intifada, the Palestinian uprising that saw years of protests and violent attacks, started in 2000 after Israeli politician Ariel Sharon made a visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Hamas also cited Israeli violations at Al-Aqsa as one of the main reasons for its “Al-Aqsa Floods” attack against Israel on October 7, when fighters from Hamas led an attack that killed at least 1,139 people, mostly civilians, and seized about 250 others as captives.

On Wednesday, Hamas decried the Israeli parade in Jerusalem, calling it a “blatant aggression” against Arabs and Muslims.

Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh said the parade “re-asserts that Jerusalem is the core of the conflict”.

“Our people will not rest until the occupation is gone and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital,”

“ended with a standstill” and that it was unclear what would happen next.

“The Israelis say they are waiting for Hamas’s response, while Hamas says they are awaiting for Israel’s response,” she said, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem

“Mediators in the middle are trying to bridge these gaps trying to find a solution between both sides, but it seems that there are sticking points that just can’t seem to be resolved.”

Hamas has refused to release all of the estimated 100 hostages it holds, and the remains of about 30 more, unless Israel ends its offensive, withdraws from Gaza and releases a large number of Palestinian prisoners, including fighters serving life sentences.and a “complete withdrawal” of Israeli forces.

“The security and safety of our people will be achieved only by a permanent ceasefire, the end of the aggression and the withdrawal from every inch of the Gaza Strip,” Hamdan told reporters in Beirut.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has publicly rejected those demands and repeatedly pledged to continue the war until Hamas is dismantled and all the captives are returned. Israel did not send a delegation to the latest round of talks.

Meanwhile, Israel wants Hamas to hand over a list of captives who are alive, as well as the captive-to-prisoner ratio it seeks in any release deal.

Senior Hamas leader Bassem Naim told the AFP news agency on Monday that the group did not know “who among [the captives] are alive or dead, killed because of strikes or hunger”, and that the captives were being held by numerous groups in multiple places.

“So there are two completely different perspectives and two different sticking points here on what the other side is not willing to compromise on,” Salhut said.

At US-Qatar Strategic Dialogue talks on Tuesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Hamas to accept the ceasefire plan.

“It is on Hamas to make decisions about whether it is prepared to engage in that ceasefire,”

“Qatar, the United States and our partners will be always persistent to make sure that this deal happens,” said Al Thani, standing next to Blinken.

With the latest round of discussions having come to an end, Hamas has presented a proposal that mediators will discuss with Israel in the coming days, two Egyptian officials said, according to The Associated Press news agency.

At least 1,139 people were killed and about 250 captives were taken in Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel on October 7. More than 100 captives were released during a weeklong ceasefire in November.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive on Gaza has killed more than 30,000 people, mostly women and children, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry.

The nearly five months of fighting have left much of Gaza in ruins and created a worsening humanitarian catastrophe, with many, especially in the devastated northern region, scrambling for food to survive.

“My administration’s support for Israel’s security is rock solid and unwavering,” Biden say“I just got off the phone — the third call with Prime Minister Netanyahu. And I told him if the United States experienced what Israel is experiencing, our response would be swift, decisive and overwhelming,” he says.

October 12, 2023: Secretary of State Antony Blinken travels to Israel to voice support for the country.

“If you’ll permit me a personal aside, I come before you not only as the United States secretary of state but also as a Jew,” he tells Netanyahu.

October 16, 2023: Biden [warns Israel](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/16/biden-weighs-israel-visit-after-netanyahu-extends-invite-amid-gaza-war) against establishing a permanent military presence in Gaza.

“I think it’d be a big mistake,” he tells CBS News.

October 18, 2023: After the US sends [aircraft carriers](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/a-message-why-is-biden-dispatching-a-us-strike-group-during-gaza-war) to the eastern Mediterranean Sea, Biden again warns parties in the region to not enter the war.

“My message to any state or any other hostile actor thinking about attacking Israel remains the same as it was a week ago: Don’t. Don’t. Don’t,” he says during a visit to Israel.

October 25, 2023: [Biden questions](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/appalling-why-has-biden-cast-doubt-on-the-palestinian-death-count) the mounting Palestinian death toll.

“I have no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people are killed. I’m sure innocents have been killed, and it’s the price of waging a war,” he says.

October 26, 2023: White House national security spokesperson John Kirby acknowledges that there have been a large number of civilian casualties and predicts that more innocent people will be hurt in the conflict.

“That’s what war is. It’s brutal. It’s ugly. It’s messy,” Kirby tells reporters.

November 3, 2023: Blinken calls for [humanitarian pauses](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/4/whats-behind-antony-blinkens-call-for-humanitarian-pauses-in-gaza) to allow more aid into Gaza and enable the release of Israeli captives.

“We believe that each of these efforts would be facilitated by humanitarian pauses,” he says.

November 8, 2023: Senior State Department official Barbara Leaf says the Palestinian Authority should rule post-war Gaza.

“Whatever its shortcomings, it is the government for the Palestinians in the West Bank. We do believe that ultimately Palestinian voices and aspirations have to be at the centrepiece of [post-conflict governance](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/11/8/israel-hamas-war-live-humanitarian-aid-targeted-amid-gaza-bombardment) and security in Gaza,” she tells US lawmakers on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

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November 15, 2023: Washington abstains on a UN Security Council resolution calling for “urgent and extended humanitarian pauses”, with Thomas-Greenfield decrying the council’s failure to condemn Hamas.

“What are they afraid of? Let’s be crystal clear: Hamas set this conflict in motion,” she said.

November 21, 2023: Biden welcomes a deal for a four-day pause in the fighting.

“I appreciate the commitment that Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government have made in supporting an extended pause to ensure this deal can be fully carried out and to ensure the provision of additional humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of innocent Palestinian families in Gaza,” the US president says in a statement.

October 18, 2023: The [US vetoes](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/18/us-vetoes-un-resolution-calling-for-humanitarian-pause-in-israel-hamas-war) a United Nations Security Council proposal that would have called for a humanitarian pause in the fighting.

“We are on the ground doing the hard work of diplomacy. We believe we need to let that diplomacy play out,” US ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield says after the vote.

December 8, 2023: The State Department bypasses Congress to deliver thousands of tank shells to Israel on an emergency basis.

“We want to make sure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself against Hamas,” Blinken says.

December 8, 2023: The [US vetoes](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/antonio-guterres-urges-un-security-council-to-push-for-gaza-ceasefire) a UN Security Council measure that would have urged an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire”.

“The resolution retains a call for an unconditional ceasefire. This is not only unrealistic but dangerous; it will simply leave Hamas in place,” US diplomat Robert Wood says.

December 12, 2023: Biden accuses Israel of indiscriminate bombardment in Gaza, a war crime.

“They’re starting to lose that support by the [indiscriminate bombing](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/biden-warns-israel-losing-support-over-indiscriminate-gaza-bombing#:~:text=US%20President%20Joe%20Biden%20has,more%20than%20the%20United%20States.) that takes place,” he says of Israel.

December 13, 2023: The White House downplays Biden’s comments on the bombing of Gaza.

“Israel will do exactly what they say they’re doing, which is to continue to go after the terrorist leaders and to do so in a way that minimises civilian harm,” Kirby says.

December 22, 2023: The US abstains on a UN Security Council resolution that called on all parties involved to “allow, facilitate and enable” the delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Thomas-Greenfield calls the vote “a glimmer of hope amongst a sea of unimaginable suffering” but again rebukes the council for not condemning Hamas.

January 3: Despite its warnings against expanding the conflict, the White House appears to welcome the assassination of Hamas official [Saleh al-Arouri](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/3/who-was-saleh-al-arouri-the-hamas-leader-killed-in-beirut) in Beirut.

“Israel, as I’ve said before, has a right and responsibility to go after the threat that Hamas poses, which means they have a right and a responsibility to go after the leadership of Hamas,” Kirby says.

January 9: In Israel again, Blinken says he urged the protection of Palestinian civilians.

“I pressed on the absolute imperative to do more to protect civilians and make sure that humanitarian assistance is getting into the hands of those who need it and bring back the hostages — Americans, Israelis, and others,” [Blinken](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/1/8/israel-war-on-gaza-world-must-look-says-wael-dahdouh-as-son-killed) says in a social media post.

January 11: Biden authorises [military attacks](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/11/any-us-attack-on-yemens-houthis-will-not-go-without) against Yemen’s Houthi rebels, who had been targeting shipping lanes in the Red Sea in an effort, they say, to bring an end to the war on Gaza.

“These strikes are in direct response to unprecedented Houthi attacks against international maritime vessels in the Red Sea — including the use of anti-ship ballistic missiles for the first time in history,” Biden says in a statement that fails to mention the war on Gaza.

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January 18: The US president acknowledges strikes against Houthis are not deterring the Yemeni group.

“Are they stopping the Houthis? No. Are they going to continue? Yes,” Biden tells reporters.

January 19: After Netanyahu openly rejects the establishment of a Palestinian state, Biden says a two-state solution is possible with the Israeli prime minister in power.

“I think we’ll be able to work something out,” the US president tells reporters.

January 22: The White House says the US is still opposed to a ceasefire and only supports pauses in the fighting.

“We still support pauses in the fighting to get hostages out. We don’t support a general ceasefire, which is usually put in place in the expectation that you’re going to end a conflict,” Kirby says.

February 1: US says it is prioritising a truce deal between Israel and Hamas that would see the release of Israeli captives in Gaza.

“We have pursued this pause intensively, and we have made clear it’s a priority of the United States,”

February 8: Biden appears to criticise Israel’s offensive in Gaza.

“I’m of the view, as you know, that the conduct of the response in Gaza Strip has been over the top,” he says.

February 15: The White House warns Israel against attacking the crowded southern [city of Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/2/24/palestinians-cling-to-life-in-rafah-as-israel-threatens-gazas-last-refuge) in Gaza without a plan to protect civilians.

“Without that credible plan, a major operation in Rafah would be a disaster,” Kirby says.

February 20: US [vetoes another](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/20/us-vetoes-another-un-security-council-resolution-urging-gaza-war-ceasefire) UN Security Council ceasefire resolution.

“Proceeding with a vote today was wishful and irresponsible,” Thomas-Greenfield says, arguing that the US is pursuing its own negotiations to secure a truce deal.

February 26: Biden says a truce deal is imminent.

“My national security adviser tells me that we’re close. We’re close. We’re not done yet,” he tells reporters.

February 28: The White House says Biden is working around the clock to secure a truce deal.

“The president, obviously, and his team has been working 24/7 for some time now to get to a ceasefire,” White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre says.

February 29: The White House reasserts support for Israel after Israeli troops [opened fire](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/29/heinous-deadly-israeli-attack-on-gaza-aid-seekers-condemned) on Palestinian aid seekers in Gaza City, killing at least 112 people as they approached trucks carrying humanitarian deliveries.

“They are a close ally that will remain a close ally. They are in the throes of an existential battle – an existential threat to their existence from Hamas — and we’re going to continue to support them in that process,” White House spokeswoman Olivia Dalton tells reporters.

March 2: Harris calls for an immediate truce to stop the fighting.

“Given the immense scale of suffering in Gaza, there must be an immediate ceasefire for at least six weeks as is what is currently on the table,” she said.

March 5: Harris stresses support for Israel in talks with Israeli war cabinet member [Benny Gantz](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/5/harris-stresses-us-support-for-israel-gaza-truce-in-talks-with-gantz), who visited Washington, DC. “She reiterated US support for Israel’s right to defend itself in the face of ongoing Hamas terrorist threats, and underscored our unwavering commitment to Israel’s security,” the White House says in a statement.

“Hamas’s delegation left Cairo this morning for consultation with the leadership of the movement, with negotiations and efforts continuing to stop the aggression, return the displaced and bring in relief aid to our people,Senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri said Israel had been “thwarting” efforts to conclude a ceasefire mediated by Qatar and Egypt during four days of talks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo.

Abu Zuhri said Israel was rejecting Hamas’s demands to end its offensive in the enclave, withdraw its forces, and ensure freedom of entry for aid and the return of displaced people.

There was no immediate comment from Israel.

Israel did not send a delegation to these recent negotiations, during which representatives from Hamas, Qatar and Egypt tried this week to secure [a 40-day ceasefire](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/5/gaza-ceasefire-talks-fail-to-make-breakthrough-with-ramadan-approaching) in time for Ramadan, which begins early next week.The agreement would see captives being held by Hamas and other Palestinian groups in Gaza be exchanged for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

Reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, Al Jazeera’s Hamdah Salhut said: “This round of talks has concluded with no substantial answer or solution for [a] ceasefire or pause in the fighting.”

“It is worth mentioning that the Israelis themselves chose not to send their own delegation to Cairo for this round of talks because they were hoping to receive a list of names of all of the captives who are alive and currently being held in Gaza,” Salhut said.

Hamas said meeting this Israeli demand is impossible without a ceasefire because captives are scattered across the warzone. According to Salhut, there were reports indicating there would be another round of talks next week.

At least 1,139 people were killed and about 250 captives were taken in Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel on October 7. More than 100 captives were released during a weeklong ceasefire in November.

Hamas pledged to continue the negotiations, but officials in the Palestinian armed group said a ceasefire must be in place before captives are freed, Israeli forces must leave Gaza and all Gaza residents must be able to return to the homes they have fled.

Despite earlier comments that the negotiations were at an impasse, the United States said on Wednesday that a truce was still possible.

“We continue to believe that obstacles are not insurmountable and a deal can be reached, … so we’re going to continue to push for one,” US Department of State spokesperson Matthew Miller said in Washington, DC.

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The Ministry of Health in Gaza said the number of Palestinians confirmed killed in Israel’s war has surpassed 30,800. It reported 83 deaths within the latest 24-hour reporting period alone, and witnesses said Israeli bombardments continued in Khan Younis and Rafah in southern Gaza as well as in areas in central part of the strip.

Reporting from Rafah, Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud said on Thursday that Israel has returned 47 bodies that had been taken from a graveyard near Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis when its military stormed the compound last month.

The decomposed remains were buried in Tal as-Sultan in the western part of Rafah.

“This is a tragedy for the people who have already lost so much, and the desecration of graveyards and bodies is a violation under international law,”

“I’m really worried about possible provocation,” said Munir Nuseibah, a Palestinian human rights lawyer who lives in East Jerusalem. “We learned from the past that the more there is a police presence and police intervention in East Jerusalem during Ramadan, the more we will see [violent] confrontations.”History of violence

During Ramadan, tensions frequently mount around Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam. Palestinians from across the occupied West Bank yearn to pray in the mosque, yet Israeli police have traditionally obstructed access and attacked worshippers.

Last year, Palestinians resorted to barricading themselves inside the mosque to prevent Israeli police from interfering with [itikaf](https://www.newarab.com/news/palestinian-worshippers-barricade-themselves-inside-al-aqsa#:~:text=Palestinian%20worshippers%20barricade%20themselves%20inside%20Al%2DAqsa%20amid%20Israeli%20threat&text=The%20worshippers%20barricaded%20themselves%20inside,police%20from%20storming%20the%20mosque.), a religious practice that entails spending whole nights in prayer and worship in mosques.

But Israeli security managed to break through, firing stun grenades and tear gas and indiscriminately beating worshippers, including women and the elderly. At least 450 Palestinian men were arrested.

“There is nothing inherently violent about Al-Aqsa and certainly nothing inherently violent about Ramadan. It’s important to recall that because some people get the idea that this is all about Islam,” said Daniel Siedmann, a lawyer and resident of Jerusalem.

Palestinians attribute most of the violence to the provocative measures taken by Israeli authorities, which occupy the city and the holy site.

Israeli police often allow hundreds of Israeli Jews – who refer to Al-Aqsa Mosque as the Temple Mount – access to the holy site, which [violates the latest status-quo agreement](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/11/hldwhat-does-the-status-quo-mean-at-jerusalems-al-aqsa-mosque) that Israel, Jordan, Palestine and the United States affirmed in 2015.

The agreement stipulates that Al-Aqsa Mosque is a place of worship exclusively for Muslims, yet grants access to non-Muslims on specific days and hours. However, many fear that far-right Israeli ministers may try to provoke Palestinians by allowing Israelis into the mosque to taunt or clash with worshippers.

“There is caution and fear from everyone that Israeli settlers will try and provoke Palestinians. The Israeli government is against the Palestinian people,” said Rony, a 27-year-old Palestinian from occupied East Jerusalem.

A flashpoint?

Israeli police are controlled by Itamar Ben-Gvir, the far-right minister of national security. In February, he called for barring Palestinian residents in the West Bank from praying in the mosque during Ramadan.

Israeli officials later overrode his suggestion in an apparent attempt to maintain calm in Jerusalem, but did say they [would impose some restrictions](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/19/israel-to-restrict-access-to-jerusalems-al-aqsa-mosque-during-ramadan) on “security grounds”.

Seidmann said Ben-Gvir could still spark chaos, even if he is commanding officers outside the compound.

“Just because Ben-Gvir is not influencing what happens at the gates of Al-Aqsa doesn’t mean that he won’t cause problems 200 or 300 metres [220 to 330 yards] away from the mosque,” he told Al Jazeera.

Any violence against Palestinian worshippers in East Jerusalem or the rest of the occupied West Bank could trigger mass unrest, warns Ibrahim Matar, a Christian Palestinian from occupied East Jerusalem.

He said Al-Aqsa is symbolic for all Palestinians and recalled how the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat walked away from the heavily criticised peace process in 2000, in part because Israel insisted on maintaining sovereignty over the mosque.

Two months later, Israel’s then-[opposition leader Ariel Sharon stormed Al-Aqsa](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/28/palestinian-intifada-20-years-later-israeli-occupation-continues) with more than 1,000 heavily armed policemen and soldiers. The move led to outrage which culminated in the second Intifada, a Palestinian uprising against Israel’s occupation, that lasted for five years.

“Al-Aqsa could be a flashpoint for another war,”Under the shadow of war

Palestinian citizens of Israel and those in the occupied territory say the ongoing bloodshed in Gaza is hanging over everyone like a dark cloud.

US President Joe Biden has attempted to broker a truce in Gaza to retrieve Israeli captives still held by Hamas and calm tensions during Ramadan. But with [prospects for a ceasefire](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/10/biden-makes-contradictory-remarks-on-red-lines-for-israel-in-gaza) looking slim, Rony believes the war will affect the situation between Palestinians and Israelis in Jerusalem.

He said many Palestinians are “dying inside” from watching scenes of the devastating war on television and social media. He also fears that Israeli officials or ministers will exploit their anger by harassing Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

“Most of us feel like we are in a house prison. [We feel] like we have to stay at home to avoid being hit or harassed [during Ramadan],”

Matar agrees, adding that Gaza and Al-Aqsa have a symbiotic relationship. He recalled the short 11-day war between Hamas and Israel in 2021, which was triggered by Israel attacking worshippers in Al-Aqsa and evicting Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah, a neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. Similar unrest could unfold this Ramadan.

“If one part of Palestine is suffering, then every part of Palestine suffers,”

One of the tower’s 300 residents told the Reuters news agency that Israel gave them a 30-minute warning to flee the building at night.

“People were startled, running down the stairs, some fell, it was chaos. People left their belongings and money,” said Mohammad al-Nabrees, adding that among those who tripped down the stairs during the panicked evacuation was a friend’s pregnant wife.

A Rafah-based official with the Fatah party, which dominates the Palestinian Authority that has limited self-rule in the occupied West Bank, said he feared that hitting the Rafah tower was a sign of an imminent Israeli invasion.

“I’m hoping we don’t end up with real disagreements,” he said of the gradual assault on the city so far.

Thus far, Israel is attacking sections of the city, issuing evacuation orders to specific neighbourhoods before entering them.

“So far, Israel seems intent on carrying out a campaign on Rafah in the same, rather brutal, way it did in Khan Younis and Gaza City,” H A Hellyer, an authority on Middle East security at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Royal United Services Institute, said.

“There’s nothing to say that Israel won’t just proceed with smaller munitions, anyway, and the [Israeli military] has been attacking Rafah before and after Biden’s speech,” Hellyer said.

“To avoid embarrassing Joe Biden and his ‘red line’, however, the Israelis seem to be doing things more slowly, and with less reliance on massive weaponry, but the outcome is the same.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may also have concerns closer to home as he tries to navigate between warnings from international allies and the urging of far-right members of his cabinet, who are pressing for an assault on Rafah, irrespective of ceasefire talks elsewhere.

“My sense is that Netanyahu attaches far more importance to his government collapsing due to the far-right he’s included in his cabinet, than he does to losing Joe Biden’s support, which I still don’t see happening,” Hellyer said.

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Stockpiles

Israel’s bombardment of Gaza – and its killing of more than 35,000 Palestinians – has been underpinned by its US weapons supply.

A 10-year agreement, signed in 2016, allows for the export of military aid worth $3.3bn a year from 2018, plus a further $500m a year for air defence systems.

Congress approved a further $26bn in aid to Israel last month, including $5bn to bolster air defences, as well as the [“bundled” weapons shipments](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/18/the-west-is-giving-israel-weapons-while-discussing-delivering-aid-to-gaza) which fall beneath the threshold needed for congressional oversight.

It all means that while Israel’s actions have now been openly linked to the suspension of some weapons shipments, the overall partnership remains strong.

According to Senator Jim Risch, one of the senior Republicans sitting on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, millions in military aid has been earmarked for Israel, including joint direct attack munitions (JDAMS), used to convert “dumb” bombs into precision weapons.

Tank rounds, mortars and armoured tactical vehicles are all ready and awaiting approval before shipment.

“[T]his delay is likely to be more of a political signal to Israel to avoid the use of high-payload munitions that have driven devastating civilian harm in Gaza, rather than a move to impact the immediate operational situation in Gaza,” Ari Tolany, the director of the Security Assistance Monitor at the US-based Center for International Policy said.

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“We don’t have a good sense of what Israel has remaining in its stockpile publicly available.”

Despite the pause in the shipment of heavy weapons, an attack on Rafah is still likely and would inflict further horror on its traumatised population, many of whom have already been displaced several times, losing homes and family members, before seeking some respite in the city.

“They have more than enough of these weapons stockpiled to invade Rafah,” human rights lawyer and University of Illinois Professor Francis Boyle said.

“They have already invaded Rafah at the Philadelphi Corridor [a demilitarised zone between Egypt and Rafah]. Biden is basically disclaiming responsibility for what is shaping up to be a massacre along the lines of [the 1995 massacre of Bosniaks in] Srebrenica.”

With a ceasefire agreement seemingly in arm’s reach, it disappeared.

Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu maintained his rhetoric of continuing to fight until “Hamas is completely defeated in Gaza”, a goal long called out as unrealistic by parties on both sides.

He eventually also presented new demands: that Israel remain in the Philadelphi Corridor abutting Egypt’s Sinai, checkpoints be set up to “vet” people trying to go back to their homes in north Gaza, and that full lists be provided of all living captives Hamas intends to release.

Senior Israeli officials [said](https://www.timesofisrael.com/security-chiefs-negotiators-us-said-all-blaming-netanyahu-for-tanking-hostage-talks/) Netanyahu’s demands would sabotage the talks, and the mediators refused to pass them on to Hamas.

Egypt has refused Israel’s demand that it be allowed to remain in the Philadelpi Corridor, which would violate the Camp David Accords between the two.

Blinken’s rhetoric

The US proposal followed past drafts, sticking to a three-phase process that would release all captives in Gaza in exchange for prisoners held by Israel, achieving a “sustainable calm” to lead to a full ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, the reconstruction of the Strip, and the eventual opening of crossings.

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“We had a proposal that [US President Biden] laid out in late May which was fairly detailed and passed at the UN Security Council as a resolution [with] global support,” Matt Duss, the executive vice president at the Center for International Policy in Washington, DC, said.

“Yet, we’ve seen various rounds of new conditions added by Netanyahu who, despite Biden saying Israel supports it, made it very clear that he didn’t.”

Netanyahu was criticised by Israeli negotiators for undermining talks after a local broadcaster reported comments he made about Israel not leaving the Philadelphi or Netzarim Corridor – which the Israeli army created to separate north and south Gaza – “under any circumstances”.

US officials have been in the region trying to work out sticking points in recent days with a “[bridging proposal](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/20/explainer-what-does-the-bridging-ceasefire-proposal-consist-of)” that reportedly includes withdrawal plans.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, however, would not say if the proposal includes the Israeli army fully withdrawing from Gaza as earlier proposals mentioned. But he maintained his earlier assessment as to who was holding things up.

“In a very constructive meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu today, he confirmed to me that Israel supports the bridging proposal,” Blinken said to reporters after a two-and-a-half-hour meeting with Netanyahu on Monday. “The next important step is for Hamas to say ‘yes’.”

Blinken’s claims were rejected by Hamas, who maintained that they wanted to stick to the agreed-upon deal.

“The Israelis have retreated from issues included in Biden’s proposal. Netanyahu’s talk about agreeing to an updated proposal indicates that the US administration has failed to convince him to accept the previous agreement,” And while Blinken has held firm in public that Netanyahu agrees to the deal, Israeli media have reported things playing out differently behind the scenes.

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US backing Netanyahu ‘for inexplicable reasons’

The Biden administration’s continued support for Netanyahu, despite his reported obstinance, has left many analysts baffled.

“We’re in this surreal situation where both Hamas and Israeli security officials are saying Netanyahu is the one blocking Biden’s ceasefire proposal,” Mohamad Bazzi, director of Near Eastern Studies at New York University, told Al Jazeera.

“We also see that Netanyahu publicly rejected key elements of the ceasefire as Blinken has described the deal … but at same time both [US President Joseph] Biden and Blinken insist that Netanyahu supports the current deal and Hamas is the stumbling block.

“So we end up with the US administration covering for Netanyahu for inexplicable reasons.”

While Israel’s stated objective for the talks is retrieving captives held in Gaza, Netanyahu’s reported sabotage of talks has some questioning if he is genuinely interested in a deal.

Some 109 captives remain in Gaza, according to Israeli government estimates, and US officials believe half of them to still be alive.

Families who have loved ones missing in Gaza have been protesting regularly and calling on their government to save the captives.

“There’s a very strong argument that Netanyahu doesn’t want a ceasefire at this point,” Bazzi said. “In many ways, why should he when the US won’t impose any cost on him for being the biggest obstacle to a ceasefire?”

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‘Doomed’

Biden and his administration have criticised Netanyahu in the past.

In April, Biden said Netanyahu was [making a mistake](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/10/biden-israels-netanyahu-making-mistake-on-gaza) in his handling of the war in Gaza.

Then in early June, [Biden suggested Netanyahu was prolonging the war](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/4/biden-suggests-netanyahu-prolonging-israels-gaza-war-for-political-gains) for personal and political gain.

Despite the criticisms, the Biden administration has refused to condition their support of Netanyahu’s government.

“Biden has two very important levers, the primary being the holding or conditioning of military aid and the second is the political cover at the UN Security Council and other international bodies… and he doesn’t seem to use them.,” Bazzi said.

The failure to hold Netanyahu and Israel to account has led to questions over the US’s accountability over the destruction of Gaza.

“Biden is completely complicit in this war that wouldn’t have been possible in the first place, … without full US support and cover,” Gilbert Achcar, professor of development studies and international relations at SOAS University of London, said.

“These negotiations were doomed to fail from the start… it’s basically a waste of time,” Achcar said.

“The function is more for the Biden administration to try to show that it is doing something. But I think they know quite well that it’s leading nowhere because the gap between what Netanyahu wants and what Hamas requests is too wide to be overcome.”

The government media office in Gaza confirmed the casualties after the incident on Friday, lambasting the “useless” [airdrops](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/2/us-airdrops-food-to-gaza-in-move-criticised-by-aid-organisations) as “flashy propaganda rather than a humanitarian service” and calling for food to be allowed through land crossings.“We previously warned it poses a threat to the lives of citizens in the Gaza Strip and this is what happened today when the parcels fell on the citizens’ heads,” it said in a statement.

Reporting from Rafah, in southern Gaza, Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud said that people are experiencing “a tragedy” in the north of [Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/gaza/).

“Not only are they confronted with the lack of food and medical supplies, but as they wait for packages of food, they are either targeted by the Israeli military or killed by a non-functional parachute,” Mahmoud said.

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The United States military denied responsibility, with its Central Command saying: “We are aware of reports of civilians killed as a result of humanitarian airdrops. We express sympathies to the families of those who were killed. Contrary to some reports, this was not the result of US airdrops.”

The deaths occurred as [famine](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/26/no-aid-delivery-in-northern-gaza-since-more-than-a-month-unrwa) stalked the enclave, with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reporting last month that at least half a million, or one in four people in Gaza, face famine.

It highlighted the problem of getting desperately needed humanitarian relief into Gaza amid Israeli restrictions.

UNRWA, the largest UN agency in Gaza, says Israeli authorities have not allowed it to deliver supplies to the north of the strip since January 23.

On October 7, my morning began like any other, at least on the surface. As a surgical resident who takes great pride in his job, I did my rounds with patients amid the usual hustle and bustle of the hospital, and then scrubbed in to operate on an emergency case alongside one of my mentors.

When I felt the metal coldness of the scalpel in my hand, however, perhaps for the first time in my career, I did not feel a thrill. I did not experience the profound joy that normally comes with the opportunity to improve a person’s life on the operating table.

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My attending surgeon sensed something was amiss, and asked me what was wrong.

I shared with him the news I had received from my mother back home: the bombing had started. Gaza, my home, was under attack.

He listened, and tears started to form in his eyes. When I saw him, a non-Palestinian, share my pain, something cracked in me, and I broke down.  He hugged me and told me, “Your family will be OK. We are all with you.”

I really appreciated his solidarity, and the solidarity I have since received from many of my American colleagues. Today, I am the only Gaza-trained surgical resident in the United States, and it is not easy.

I am emotionally drained and engulfed in worry. Watching the assault on Gaza from a far, I feel helpless, broken.

I know it is an immense privilege to be working and training in the American system. However, since October 7, I feel as if my existence is divided between two completely different, disconnected worlds.

I spend my days worrying about and caring for my patients here in America. Will Mr Jones get shot again after being discharged? Did Ms Lopez’s insurance approve the surgery she needs?

But as I do my best to help them and their families, I simultaneously agonise about my family, my loved ones, and my struggling colleagues back home. How will my widowed, elderly mother be able to walk miles to safety, under intense bombardment, with her crippling arthritis – a condition that has largely been left untreated because Israel repeatedly refused to grant her an exit permit to seek treatment abroad?  Will she and my other relatives find food, shelter? When will I be able to hear their voices again?

My family in Gaza has been under intense Israeli bombardment since October 7. They’ve walked for miles from the now destroyed north Gaza to the south, moved from shelter to shelter at least six times, but could not find safety, because Israel’s air raids are sparing no place in Gaza, including areas designated “safe” by the Israeli military itself.  At one point, they sought refuge in the courtyard of al-Shifa Hospital, but eventually Israel attacked there, too – a war crime under international law. Our family home, the setting of my most cherished childhood memories, where we held my brother’s wedding and my father’s funeral, has also been destroyed.

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My family is now homeless. They are afforded no dignity and are forced to live in a makeshift tent, as my grandparents once did, after they were expelled from their village during the Nakba.

In 1948, my grandparents were pushed out of their village, Hammama, where they lived a peaceful, prosperous life side by side with their Jewish neighbours. After they were kicked out of their homes, their identity and their political rights were erased and they were made into permanent refugees. After this catastrophe, after this grave crime, my family somehow managed to build a new life from scratch in Gaza. But every bombing campaign, every attack on our home reignites the trans-generational trauma we acquired during the Nakba. And now, my family is once again displaced, in a tent, unrooted and uncertain about the future.

In this latest assault on Gaza, I lost many members of my extended family, including three cousins, to Israeli bombardment. Two other cousins were abducted for no reason. My surviving family members are living horrors that defy the imagination. The situation is especially traumatic for the children. My nephew Adam is now afraid of the dark and has developed night terrors and incontinence.

I have not been able to video chat with my family for over three months due to telecommunication difficulties. My brother managed to send me a picture of himself and my family members over a month ago, after managing to connect to an Egyptian phone service via roaming. Looking at the picture, I was aghast at how much weight they all had lost, almost skin on bone. In just a few weeks my mother’s face had also wrinkled, almost beyond recognition.

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Since October 7, more than 30,000 people – more than two-thirds of whom women and children – have been killed in Gaza. Some 70,000 others have been injured and at least 1.7 million people have been displaced.

Every day, I worry about my family, and I worry about my people. But as a surgeon, who knows well how healthcare is the main lifeline of any society, I also worry about Israel’s relentless, illegal attacks on Gaza’s healthcare system.

At the time of writing, only 12 out of Gaza’s 36 hospitals are partially functioning. My medical school, Islamic University of Gaza, has been [destroyed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/24/how-israel-has-destroyed-gazas-schools-and-universities), along side the only cancer treatment centre in the Strip. This means thousands of medical students will not be able to continue their studies in Gaza and cancer patients have lost their already limited access to cancer care for the foreseeable future.

The Israeli attacks on healthcare are not merely targeting infrastructure either. According to a recent report by The Healthcare Workers Watch – Palestine, more than 400 healthcare workers have been killed in Gaza since the beginning of the war.  These include the former dean of my medical school, Dr Omar Ferwana, and several mentees including Dr Israa Al-Ashqar, a very kind anaesthesiology resident, and Dr Ibtihal Al-Astal, an outstanding intern.

Furthermore, the Israeli military abducted at least 110 healthcare workers in Gaza. The families of these healthcare workers, who were abducted from their places of work, are unaware of their current whereabouts and do not even know whether they are dead or alive.

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I wanted to become a surgeon ever since I can remember. Not only just a surgeon, but one of the most skilled surgeons in all of Palestine. From an early age, I understood the burden of preventable death carried by all Palestinians living under occupation, and I wanted to do everything I can to help my people. I never wanted to go abroad and stay there, I never dreamed of using my surgical training to break free from the open-air prison we’ve all been confined to. My surgical training has always been part of my social contract with my people – my goal has always been to learn as much as I can, then return home to use that knowledge to help my people.

Since beginning my training in the United States, I had the opportunity to return home twice, to teach basic surgical skills and Advanced Trauma Life Support to medical students in Gaza. Now, as I helplessly watch from afar the attacks healthcare workers endure, I receive updates from these former students. They tell me about the inhumane conditions in which they are working, including the lack of essential medications like anaesthetics needed for amputations on children. They tell me about their colleagues who have been injured, killed, or abducted by the Israeli military.

It is difficult to express how painful it is to listen to their testimonies, and watch their suffering and the suffering of the people they try to treat under despicable conditions, from a far.

Thankfully, here in the US, I am surrounded by patients, families, students, co-residents, nurses and residents who recognise the ever-deepening struggles and suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza. They not only support me but also speak up against these injustices that they do not affect them personally. They work tirelessly to ensure targeted attacks on healthcare workers like those we’ve seen in Gaza does not become the norm. Many of them have called for a permanent ceasefire to stop the attacks on Palestine’s healthcare workers and infrastructure.

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Their moral clarity and fortitude give me strength and hope for the future.

And yet, sadly, are in the minority. The medical community at large has been utterly silent about, or even complicit in, the ongoing attacks on Palestinian healthcare. Several hospitals and academic institutes issued one-sided statements supporting the Israeli regime and censored their students and staff who spoke up against the genocide it is committing in Gaza and the West Bank.

This indifference breaks my heart, but does not break my resolve. As a Palestinian surgeon, my dream has always been to use my training and knowledge to build an independent and competent healthcare and eduction system in Palestine – one that would allow us to competently train our own physicians, respectfully treat our own patients, and help our nation prosper and reach its immense potential.

Despite the death and destruction we are now witnessing in Palestine, I have not given up on this dream. However, I know my dream cannot become reality without achieving justice and a long-lasting peace based on equity, dignity, and equal rights for all. For this, I call on the global medical community to join me in demanding a ceasefire and an end to the attacks on our colleagues, on hospitals and other medical facilities in Palestine. I know dreams can still become reality, but only we speak up in one voice against this assault on our profession.

The holy month of Ramadan has started. Muslims across the world are fasting, spending time with their families and dedicating themselves to prayer and worship. But for us, the Muslims of Gaza, this holy month is filled with heartbreak and mourning.

For more than five months now, we have endured massacres, disease, starvation and thirst at the hands of the Israeli army. Its violence and brutality have not stopped or lessened as Ramadan begins.

As many of us struggle to put food on the table to break fast or to find a safe place for prayer, the memories of past Ramadans keep us warm. Amid the buzzing of Israeli drones and the sound of explosions, I close my eyes and remember the splendour of Ramadan in Gaza.

The preparations for the holy month would always start early. Several weeks ahead of it, people would go out shopping for all the Ramadan necessities.

A favourite place to go would be the Old City and its traditional market, Al-Zawiya. There, all the traditional Ramadan food items could be found: sour pickles, the best dates, delicious olives, spices that filled the air with their aroma, thyme, dried apricot paste to make qamar al-din drinks, dried fruits, and various types of juices, with khoroub (carob) being the most popular.New clothes would also be a necessary purchase. Prayer gowns would be a popular choice, as would fancy dresses for the girls and sleek costumes for the boys.

Children would pull on parents’ hands and ask them to buy one of the colourful lanterns on display that read “hallou ya hallou, Ramadan Kareem ya hallou” (“dear, dear, Ramadan Kareem, dear”).The streets would be bustling with people, decorations would be going up, cheerful Ramadan songs would be played. The atmosphere of anticipation would be like no other.

Then on the eve of the first day of Ramadan, Gaza’s neighbourhoods would be filled with the sound of tarawih prayers. The kids would be out until late, playing in the streets, holding lanterns, chanting, singing, and setting off fireworks to mark the beginning of the holy month.

Families would come together to share al-suhur meal and pray al-fajr together. Then some may nap, others would go out for school and work. By the afternoon, all would be back home and it would be time to read the Holy Quran. Kids would read and memorise the verses at home or in mosques. Parents and grandparents would tell stories of prophets to children and grandchildren.

Then the time would come to prepare food for the iftar meal. The hour before sunset, the whole neighbourhood would be filled with the delicious smell of various foods. The kitchen in every home would be full of people working hard: one would be doing the maqlouba (a meat dish with rice and vegetables), another – the musakhan (a chicken dish), and still another – the mulukhiya (jute soup).

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Meanwhile, a neighbour may drop by and bring a platter full of the food his family had just made; he, of course, would not be allowed to go home empty-handed.

With sunset approaching, the iftar table would be laid and everyone would sit down. Soon the call from the mosques to break fast would come, accompanied by the melody of takbirat. Everyone would share the delicious food, chatting joyfully and laughing.

After iftar, men, women, and children would head to the mosques to pray tarawih together, the sounds of the Holy Quran and prayers permeating every part of Gaza. Then the most joyous time of the day would come for children, as moms prepare qatayf, a popular dessert that is only made during the holy month.

Once the qatayf is all gone, families would go visit each other or gather in front of the TV to watch their favourite Ramadan series.

For the people of Gaza, Ramadan is indeed the most special time of year. Gaza during Ramadan is the most beautiful place on Earth.

But this holy month, we cannot celebrate and enjoy worship in peace. The colourful lights and lanterns and the chants and songs have been replaced with the flashes and sounds of Israeli bombs exploding. The joyful noise of children playing outside in the streets has been replaced with the screams of people buried under the wreckage after another Israeli bombardment. The neighbourhoods full of life have been transformed into graveyards. Mosques are not crowded with people because they are all destroyed. The streets are not bustling with people, because they are all covered in rubble. People fast past iftar because they have no food or water.The families gather not to greet each other and celebrate, but to mourn together the dead. As the holy month of Ramadan begins, we are bidding farewell to martyr after martyr.

The pain is made that much worse by the realisation that the world has abandoned the Palestinian people, allowing Israel to continue its genocide during the Muslim holy month.

President Joe Biden has said the United States will set up a [temporary pier](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/8/five-key-takeaways-from-joe-bidens-2024-state-of-the-union-address) off Gaza to deliver humanitarian supplies to the besieged enclave as Palestinians begin to starve during Israel’s blockade of the strip.

On Sunday, a US military ship carrying the equipment required for initial construction work on the structure [departed for Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/10/us-military-ship-heads-to-gaza-to-build-temporary-humanitarian-aid-port), according to the US military’s Central Command.

The move comes as the US has been airdropping aid amid looming famine in Gaza, which has been devastated by more than five months of Israeli bombardment, ground operations and siege. Aid agencies said the airdrops are not sufficient due to the scale of the crisis. More than 31,000 people have been killed in Gaza, and up to 70 percent of its homes have been destroyed or damaged.Why is the US building a Gaza pier?

In his State of the Union address on Thursday, Biden said the pier would be able to “receive large shipments carrying food, water, medicine and temporary shelter”. According to Biden, the reason for the construction is to allow “a massive increase in the amount of humanitarian assistance getting into Gaza every day”.

At least 25 people have died due to hunger and dehydration as Israel has hampered deliveries of food, medical supplies and other aid items through two land border crossings – Rafah with Egypt and the Karem Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom in Hebrew) with Israel.

Trucks carrying humanitarian aid have to drive from those crossings, both on the southern edge of Gaza, through the conflict zone to deliver the add, including to the largely cut-off areas in the north.

Biden is running for re-election in November’s president vote, and his move is seen as an attempt to address the anger within his own Democratic Party’s base over his [unrelenting support](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/17/us-to-send-weapons-to-israel-amid-invasion-threat-in-gazas-rafah-report) for Israel, which has been accused of indiscriminately killing civilians and destroying hospitals, residential and civilians buildings. The International Court of Justice is hearing a genocide case brought against Israel.

The US has provided billions of dollars in aid as well as weapons that Israel has used in Gaza since October 7. An additional  $14bn in aid to Israel on top of its annual $3.8bn in military aid is now in the US Congress. Last month, it passed the Senate but faces an uncertain fate in the House of Representatives.

In the ongoing voting in the presidential primaries and caucuses, some Democrats have refused to cast ballots for Biden, raising concerns about his ability to turn out voters in the November race, in which former President Donald Trump holds a narrow lead over the Democratic incumbent in opinion polls.

How will the floating pier in Gaza work?

United Kingdom Foreign Secretary David Cameron said his country would be participating in the pier project but added it would “take time to build”.

The Pentagon laid out a timeline on Friday, saying the plan to build the dock could take up to 60 days and involve more than 1,000 American troops.

US defence officials said the 7th Transportation Brigade, based at Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Virginia, is starting to pull together what’s called the Joint Logistics Over The Shore equipment and watercraft. It is compared to a large Lego system — an array of 12-metre-long (40ft-long) pieces of steel that can be locked together to form a pier and causeway.

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The Pentagon said it has not yet determined how the landing site for the floating port system would be secured against any threats and it was in talks with partners, including Israel.

Pentagon Press Secretary Patrick Ryder said there is a risk of a Hamas attack against the port system. He added that no US troops would enter Gaza, even temporarily, to complete the port construction.

On the ground in Gaza, there will likely be allies, contractors and aid agencies instead.

The plan for the pier has two components: The first is a floating, offshore barge that would be able to accept aid deliveries. The US military would then move aid from there to a floating,550-metre-long (1,800ft-long) causeway anchored to the shore.

Once it becomes operational, the pier would allow deliveries of about 2 million meals to Gaza every day, Ryder said.

The US has delivered a total of about 124,000 meals during four airdrops in the past week. The latest airdrop on Friday delivered about 11,500 meals, the US military said.

Gaza already has a small port near the Remal district of Gaza City. However, the port has been under Israeli naval blockade since 2007 when Israel also shut almost all of Gaza’s border crossings. Israel has claimed full control of Gaza’s coastline and territorial waters, blocking ships from reaching the strip since 1967.

Biden said the Israeli government will maintain security at the pier. It is unclear who will be unloading the aid at the dock and moving it to shore. Experts have questioned how Israel, which has crippled aid delivery through land borders, would allow aid supplies via the sea.

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Can the pier help solve Gaza’s aid problem?

The pier seems to be a complicated workaround for a problem that has a much simpler solution – for Israel to open land crossings to Gaza.

“Any effort to bring in more humanitarian aid into Gaza to help the desperate people is absolutely welcome,” said Juliette Touma at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). “However, there is a more efficient, a cheaper, a quicker way to get aid into Gaza, and that is by road.”

 That was the average number of trucks that entered Gaza before the war,

But that changed after October 7. A daily average of 90 trucks entered the enclave in February, and the number of trucks was as low as seven or nine on some days.

Touma also pointed out that for the first two weeks after the war started, no aid trucks entered Gaza. This has created a backlog of 5,000 trucks that are yet to be replenished, which has exacerbated the aid deficit in the enclave.

With markets in Gaza closed, the entire population of the enclave is dependent on aid. “There needs to be much more coming in, not less,” she said, adding that Israel needs to take steps to ensure a larger number of trucks are able to enter the enclave smoothly

the US can do to most efficiently help with the aid crisis in Gaza is to place more pressure on the Israeli authorities to increase the working hours of the one open crossing point between Israel and Gaza – the Karem Abu Salem crossing. Additionally, Israel should be advised to open more crossings and increase the number of trucks allowed, she said.Hundreds of trucks loaded with aid are waiting on the Egyptian side due to Israeli restrictions.The humanitarian group Refugees International published a [report on Thursday](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/7/israels-blocking-of-aid-creating-apocalyptic-conditions-in-gaza) saying Israel has generated “famine-like conditions” in the Gaza Strip “while obstructing and undermining the humanitarian response”. The report deemed the situation in Gaza “apocalyptic”.

Campaigners said no time should be wasted in providing aid as Palestinians are facing famine-like conditions.

“How long does it take to build a sea port? People are starving to death now. When people reach this level of hunger, they have hours in which an intervention might help them. They don’t have weeks,”

“It seems to be just another effort to divert attention from the real issue here, which is that 700,000 people are starving from north Gaza down and Israel is not allowing humanitarian aid needed to them,” Palestinian politician Mustafa Barghouti told Al Jazeera last week.

What efforts are other countries making to send aid to Gaza?

A maritime corridor had been scheduled to deliver aid from Cyprus to Gaza on Sunday. This was a collaboration of a number of partners, including European countries, the US and the United Arab Emirates.

However, the aid was not delivered as scheduled and remained stuck on Cyprus due to technical issues.

For weeks in southern Gaza during a recent visit, I collected stories of women admitted to hospital, each of them there to recover from what they call “war wounds”. But it’s not a war, because only one side has an actual army. Only one side is a state with full military wares.

These victims were mothers, wives and babies, whose slight bodies were pierced, torn, broken and burned. Their deeper injuries aren’t visible, until they open up about their lives over the past five months

Initially, they relay the broadbrush strokes: A bomb struck their homes, they were pulled from the rubble, they had severe injuries, family members were martyred, and the situation was terrible. That is the extent of what they have ever said about unimaginable horrors they endured and continue to endure.

But I probe for details. What were you doing moments before? What was the first thing you saw, the first thing you heard? What did it smell like? Was it dark or light outside?

I nudge them to zoom into the molecular structure of every fact – the gravel in the mouth, dust in the lungs; the weight of something; the warm liquid running down the back; the twisted finger seen but not felt; the moment of realisation; the waiting to be rescued and the fear that no one will come; the ringing in the ears; the strange thoughts; the things that moved and the things that could not; the expectation of death and the wish that it be quick; the longing for life.

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In the months or weeks since one of the world’s most powerful militaries targeted their lives, they had yet to visit, much less verbalise the minutiae of this genocide. As they venture beyond the outlines of their stories, their eyes darken and sometimes they begin to shiver. The slightest unexpected sound startles them.

Tears pool and tears might fall, but only a few allow themselves to cry. Few let the horrors in their minds through the gates. It is not for some superhuman strength. Quite the opposite. They are numbed in a way, as if they’ve yet to comprehend the enormity of what they have endured and continue to endure.

Jamila

One young mother, Jamila (not her real name), cried for the first time since she held her six-year-old son’s lifeless body in the dark, her fingers accidentally sinking into his brain. She’s one of the few who sobbed, surrendering to the memory.

Their family had been targeted by tank fire, not a missile. A drone, perhaps with heat-sensitive sensors she thinks, hovered outside their building, and shelling followed them as they ran from one side of their apartment to the other, unable to exit.

She was sure someone behind a screen was toying with them before delivering one final blow that went through both the boy and injured his father. The world went silent after that. The tank fire stopped, “as if they had come just to kill my beloved son”, she said.

She didn’t cry then. She didn’t make a sound, in fact. “My husband was worried and told me to cry but I didn’t. I don’t know why,” she said.

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Two weeks later, after fleeing from place to place, an Israeli soldier shot her three-year-old daughter Nour in her arms, shattering both of her tiny legs as they cowered in terror inside a hospital they thought would be safe.

When I met baby Nour, she had metal bars sticking out of her tiny shins, with a long scar running the length of her right calf, where the bullet had exited. The doctors had discharged her days prior but had allowed her and her mother Jamila to stay a few more days until they could secure a tent somewhere somehow.

Jamila’s husband, barely able to walk from his injuries, has been living in a tent with a group of men, the most he is able to accomplish is to secure meagre food and water each day. He visited once when I was there after he was able to save up 10 shekels (approximately $3) for transportation and a small gift for his daughter.

Display of the smallest physical intimacy between lovers is a private matter in Gaza, but there is no privacy in a hospital where 40 patients and their caretakers share a single room, rows of beds pushed end to end with just enough walking space between them.

Jamila was over the moon to have spent an hour with her husband after over a month of not seeing or hearing from him (her phone had been destroyed in the bombing). But she told me later that she would have liked to embrace him, maybe even kiss him on the cheek. “He is suffering so much,” she said, carrying his pain with her own and that of a whole nation on her small shoulders.

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Nina

Nina (not her real name) has a disarming smile and effusive generosity about her. She is eager to tell me how she saved her husband from the clutches of Israeli soldiers.

She was married barely a year when Israeli bombing near their house intensified. The recordings that have emerged online from some of those nights are unimaginable. An army of dragons stomping and burning everything around them, shaking their buildings, breaking the glass, terrorising young and old; thunder and earthquakes, demons from above and below closing in.

Nina’s husband Hamad (also not his real name) made the decision to leave along with several members of his family – his parents, uncles, aunts, and their spouses and children -and a few of their neighbours. Together they were about 75 individuals, moving from town to town, unable to find a safe place to hunker down for more than a few days at a time.

Within a week of leaving, Nina learned that her family home had been bombed. In that single instant, at the push of a button by some 20-something-year-old Israeli, 80 members of her family were murdered – father, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, nieces and nephews.

She was initially told her mother had been martyred, but thankfully it turned out she had survived. She was badly injured and transferred to a hospital, where Nina had become her beloved caretaker. This is how I came to meet this extraordinary young woman.

Nina, her husband and the rest of the group eventually made it to a temporary stop in Gaza City, from where they moved along fencing walls to reach a shelter. They went one at a time, on the logic that if Israel fired on them, they would not all die. Losing one was better than 75 at once.One person was indeed shot by a sniper after nearly half of them had made it, splitting the group for a while until they again mustered the courage to run for it, again, one at a time. Children were split up between the parents. Half a family killed is better than all of it. Such were the choices they had to make, not unlike “Sophie’s Choice”.

Before long, their shelter was surrounded by tanks. A “quadcopter” – a new Israeli terror invention – flew into the rooms, spraying the walls above their heads with bullets. Everyone screamed and cried, “even the men”, Nina said. “It broke my heart to see the strong men of our family cowering in fear like that.”

Eventually, soldiers entered. “At least 80 of them,” she said. They separated the men from the women and children, stripping the former to nothing but their boxers in the dead of winter. The women and children were crammed into a small storage room, the men split into two classrooms. For three nights and four days, they listened to the screams of their husbands, fathers, and brothers being beaten and tortured in the other rooms, until finally, soldiers ordered the women, in broken Arabic, to take their children and “go south”.

All the women complied, except Nina. “I didn’t care anymore. I was ready to die but I wasn’t going to leave without my husband.” She ran into the rooms where the men were being held, calling Hamad’s name. None dared respond. It was dark and soldiers were pulling her away. She fought them as they laughed, seemingly amused by her hysteria. “Crazy,” they called her.She recognised her husband’s red boxers in the second room and rushed to him, pulling his blindfold off, kissing him, hugging him, promising to die with him if that’s what it took. She alternated between cursing the soldiers and begging them to release her husband. Eventually, they cut the plastic ties and let him go.

But she wasn’t done. As Hamad walked away, she went back inside to gather clothes for him and for her uncles sitting naked in the cold. They wouldn’t be released yet for weeks. Some of those men would be executed.

She and Hamad made it out together. When they finally arrived somewhere safe, they realised his leg had been broken, his wrists were cut by the plastic ties, and his back bore the Star of David.

Among the screams Nina had heard over the previous days had been her husband’s, as a soldier used a knife to carve the Jewish symbol into his back.

Israeli forces have shot dead at least six Palestinians and wounded 83 in Gaza City as they were waiting for food and humanitarian supplies at the Kuwait Roundabout, an area where large groups of people gather for arriving aid trucks.

The attack on Thursday took place hours after at least five people were killed by an Israeli air strike on a food distribution centre in Rafah, southern Gaza, run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/1/what-is-unrwa-and-why-it-is-important-for-palestinians)), which is the main humanitarian agency in Gaza.

There has been an uptick in fatal assaults by Israeli troops on crowds of starving [civilians lining up](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2024/3/5/the-blood-was-everywhere-inside-israels-flour-massacre-in-gaza) for aid in recent weeks. On Monday night, Israeli forces killed 11 people waiting for food aid at the same roundabout.

Reporting from Rafah, Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud said seeking aid has become “really dangerous” in the enclave, adding that “the Kuwaiti Roundabout is now known as a death trap”.

“We heard from a hungry and largely traumatised population stranded in the Gaza Strip asking what is the purpose of getting those aid trucks into Gaza and its northern area if they’re getting shot at,” he said.

“[The Israeli aggression] also endangers the work of aid workers on the ground,” he added.

The Kuwait Roundabout is between the central area of the Gaza Strip and Gaza City, linking northern Gaza to the south.

More than 400 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks on aid deliveries in recent weeks, according to authorities in Gaza.

‘Forbidden’

Sami Abu Salim, an UNRWA employee, told Al Jazeera that he felt frustrated over Wednesday’s attack on the aid centre and warehouse in the eastern part of Rafah as employees have been working around the clock to provide aid to displaced Palestinians.

“This [attacking an aid centre] is forbidden. We are an international institution,” Abu Salim said. “We take all of this [aid] to the elderly and the children.”

The facility in Rafah is one of the last operating food distribution centres in Gaza.

The UNRWA spokeswoman Juliette Touma told Al Jazeera on Thursday that the Israeli strike caused minimal damage to the supplies, adding that the agency was still distributing aid from the facility after the raid, which killed one of its workers and injured 22 others.

UN facilities must be protected at all times as mandated by international law, Touma stressed.

“Too many times in this war have our facilities and personnel become a target,” she added. At least 165 staff of the UNRWA have been killed in Gaza since October 7 and more than 150 facilities hit, according to the agency, which has called for an independent inquiry into the repeated Israeli attacks.

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Touma said the UNRWA shares the coordinates of its facilities and activities every day with all warring parties, including Israel, and that the location of the Rafah warehouse had been included in a list shared a day before it was attacked

Engineered starvation’

Rights groups say that Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war against Palestinians.

Agnes Callamard, the secretary-general of Amnesty International, slammed the global community for pretending the crisis in Gaza was of a humanitarian nature and not one engineered by Israel.

“While the international community is busy pretending Gaza is a humanitarian crisis, Israel continues to violate international law in total impunity,” she said in a post on X, referencing Israel’s attack on the UN food centre in Rafah.

“Humanitarian assistance [air drop](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/8/aid-airdrop-kills-five-gaza-israel-war-hunger-famine) and a Gaza aid port won’t address these violations. And they won’t address engineered starvation,” she added.

The UNRWA has said Israeli authorities have not allowed it to deliver supplies to the north of the Strip since January 23.

Israel, which controls Gaza’s crossings, has opened just one entry point into the enclave since the start of the war and imposed “endless checking procedures” for trucks to pass through, UN agencies say.

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Since February 9, the average number of trucks that entered Gaza daily was about 55, compared with 500 that used to enter before the start of the conflict, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The UN has said at least half a million, or one in four people in Gaza, [face imminent famine](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/26/no-aid-delivery-in-northern-gaza-since-more-than-a-month-unrwa) as it highlighted the problem of getting desperately needed humanitarian relief into Gaza amid Israeli restrictions.

A new report by humanitarian group Refugees International said that Israel has generated “famine-like conditions” in the Gaza Strip.

The group’s research in Egypt, Jordan and Israel revealed that the Israeli government “consistently and groundlessly [impeded aid operations](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/7/israels-blocking-of-aid-creating-apocalyptic-conditions-in-gaza) within Gaza, blocked legitimate relief operations and resisted implementing measures that would genuinely enhance the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza”.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza reported on Thursday that at least 31,341 Palestinians have been killed and 73,134 wounded by Israeli attacks since October 7.

In the past 24 hours, Israeli attacks have killed 69 Palestinians in Gaza, the ministry said.

Since October 7, scores of writers have authored scores of columns pleading – to no avail – with prominent politicians who wield transformative power to stop the genocide unfolding with such obscene lethality in the apocalyptic remnants of occupied Gaza.

The same dynamic applies to a gallery of preening artists who claim that they are not only allergic to conformity, but also reject as tantamount to censorship any call from any quarter not to entertain audiences in Israel.

Rather than beseeching Nick Cave, the Australian troubadour, or the British band, Radiohead, finally to heed the petitions of Brian Eno, Roger Waters and company and forgo performing in an apartheid state, my aim here is to challenge their, by now, discredited defences to opt to play in Tel Aviv.

After not performing in Israel for some 20 years, in 2014, Cave [refrained](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/nov/22/brian-eno-and-roger-waters-scorn-nick-caves-principled-stand-to-play-in-israel) from signing on to an artist-organised pledge – meant to show tangible solidarity with imprisoned Palestinians – to boycott touring in Israel in the aftermath of yet another Israeli killing spree in Gaza.Cave later explained his decision this way: “There was something that stunk to me about that list. Then it kind of occurred to me that I’m not signing the list but I’m also not playing Israel and that just felt to me cowardly, really.”

The lobbying, Cave added, constituted a “public humiliation” that apparently fuelled his determination to spurn the overture and stage shows in Israel

“It suddenly became very important to make a stand against those people that are trying to shut down musicians, to bully musicians, to censor musicians, and to silence musicians … so really you could say in a way that the BDS made me play Israel,” Cave said, referring to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement.

In this flattering construct, Cave is the portrait of the principled renegade resisting the “age-old” rejectionist forces bent on muzzling him and, by extension, his art.

In a 2017 letter to his “hero” Brian Eno, the British musical savant behind the boycott drive, Cave [insisted](https://www.theredhandfiles.com/what-are-your-thoughts-on-brian-enos-stance-on-israel/) that he was not a supporter of the Israeli government to blame for the “injustices suffered by the Palestinian population”.

And yet, like the Israeli government he distances himself from, Cave recycled the stock canard to discredit the BDS movement by claiming that “the boycott of Israel can be seen as anti-Semitic at heart”.

Cave suggested that Eno should, instead, adopt a more salutary approach by travelling to Israel to share his scorn for the “current regime” with “the press and the Israeli people … then do a concert on the understanding that the purpose of your music was to speak to the Israeli people’s better angels”.

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Cave’s admonition is grounded on a false premise: that the “atrocities” endured by generations of Palestinians are the sole responsibility of a succession of Israeli “regimes” and not the millions of Israelis who empowered and emboldened those regimes by exercising their democratic franchise – time and again.

Cave lauded Israel as a “real, vibrant and functioning democracy” but absolved “ordinary Israelis” of the “atrocities” committed by the governments they elect.

Cave’s jejune reasoning reached an embarrassing zenith in the following sentence that confuses naivete for wisdom.

“How far must we have strayed from the transformative nature of music to feel justified in weaponising music and using it to punish ordinary Israeli citizens for the actions of their government.”

Thom Yorke, the lead singer for Radiohead, has rehashed, near-verbatim, this rationale in rebuffing filmmaker, Ken Loach, who implored the popular band not to go to Israel in 2017 given its encyclopaedic record of egregious human rights violations.

“Playing in a country isn’t the same as endorsing its government,” Yorke [responded](https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-40580326). “We don’t endorse [Israeli Prime Minister] Netanyahu any more than Trump, but we still play in America.”

Yorke’s rejection of BDS has the patina of gravitas that Cave’s smear lacks.

“Music, art and academia,” he wrote, “is about crossing borders not building them, about open minds not closed ones, about shared humanity, dialogue and freedom of expression.”

Yorke’s pretty soliloquy oozes saccharine. Gaza has been reduced to ruins by deliberate design. The Israeli architects of that ruin do not give a hoot about crossing borders, opening minds, shared humanity, dialogue and freedom of expression.

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Prime Minister Netanyahu and his septic cabinet are razing Gaza and the occupied West Bank with the explicit consent, approval and encouragement of most Israelis.

Polls consistently show that the vast majority of “ordinary Israelis” back every malignant aspect of a genocide meant to erase Gaza. The carpet bombing. The blanket destruction of homes, hospitals, mosques, churches, schools and universities. The forced marches. The blockade of food, water, fuel, and medicine – a sinister blueprint to starve Palestinians into submission and capitulation.

The “better angels” Cave urged Eno to “speak to” through music, have, like the bulk of Israel, been consumed by an unquenchable killing rage that burns like a towering bonfire.

Cave and Yorke have compounded their blindness with hypocrisy that reveals a defining insincerity.

In 2022, Cave was [challenged](https://www.theredhandfiles.com/a-few-days-ago/) by a fan to square his vocal, unabashed “solidarity” with Ukrainians with his glaring failure to do the same for “brutalised” and “suffering” Palestinians.

“This saddens me,” the fan wrote, “for this puts you on [sic] a position of a double standard.”

Cave’s reply was a pretentious lump of rhetorical flim-flam brimming with the standard evasions about how “a brutal, unprovoked attack” differs from “a deeply complex clash of two nations that is far from straightforward”.

Cave wrote that he “sympathises deeply” with “the tragic fate of all innocents” and reminded his interlocutor that he has helped raise money for schools in Palestinian “communities”.

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“But this is not the time for these debates,” Cave averred. “This is the time to unite in unequivocal support and love for the Ukrainian people. Right now a catastrophe is unfolding, and I stand with all Ukrainians at this horrific moment in history.”

Yorke parroted Cave’s condescension, scolding BDS supporters for engaging in “the kind of dialogue … that’s black and white.”

There is nothing “complex” about the genocide being perpetrated with ruthless, relentless efficiency by an occupying army that has killed more than 30,000 innocents and maimed and traumatised countless others – with the hearty blessing of much of a grateful nation.

I suspect that the schools Cave championed are – like the 13,000 dead Palestinian infants and children – gone, shattered into bits.

That is the flagrant truth in black and white.

So, play in Israel again if you’re inclined, Mr Cave and Mr Yorke. Just don’t pretend not to know who was complicit in this other “horrific moment in history” and that you chose to sing to them.

Israel has killed more than 13,000 [children in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/3/17/israels-war-on-gaza-live-13-aid-trucks-reach-north-malnutrition-doubles) since October 7 while others are suffering from severe malnutrition and do not “even have the energy to cry”, says the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

“Thousands more have been injured or we can’t even determine where they are. They may be stuck under rubble … We haven’t seen that rate of death among children in almost any other conflict in the world,”

“I have been in wards of children who are suffering from severe anaemia malnutrition, the whole ward is absolutely quiet. Because the children, the babies … don’t even have the energy to cry.”

Russell said there were “very great bureaucratic challenges” moving trucks into Gaza for aid and assistance as famine stalks more than two million Palestinians since Israel’s “genocidal” war began

Moreover, according to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), one in three children under the age of two in northern Gaza is now acutely malnourished. The agency also warned that famine is looming in the besieged enclave facing relentless Israeli bombing for more than five months.

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International criticism has mounted on Israel due to the death toll of the war, the starvation crisis in Gaza, and allegations of blocking aid deliveries into the enclave.

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeated his [threat of a ground assault](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/17/netanyahu-repeats-rafah-assault-threat-says-civilians-wont-be-locked-in) on Rafah, the town bordering Egypt where more than a million Palestinians have taken refuge.

“No amount of international pressure will stop us from realising all the goals of the war: eliminating Hamas, releasing all our hostages and ensuring that Gaza will no longer pose a threat against Israel,” Netanyahu said in a video released by his office.

“To do this, we will also operate in Rafah,”

Since October 7, Israel’s military campaign has killed at least 31,645 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza’s health ministry, and displaced nearly two million of its residents.

The Israeli operation has also led to accusations of genocide, being probed at the UN’s International Court of Justice.

Israel has repeatedly denied the genocide charges and stressed that it is acting in self-defence after the October 7 attack by Hamas that it says killed more than 1,130 people and took more than 200 as captives.

Bosnians have experience with genocide. Not just the signs of it coming. Not just the fact of it happening. But also this strange phenomenon we call “Schrödinger’s genocide”: the simultaneous glorification and denial of genocide. There is a cruel dance between the systematic relativisation of the legal qualification of genocide and the continuous pursuit of genocidal politics and its results.

Despite the verdicts issued by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), we have not healed. The ethnically cleansed Republika Srpska still stands as the triumph of the Serb genocidal project

Bosnian history has demonstrated the futility of the “never again” mantra and Gaza is now confirming it. The genocide of my people was accompanied by the same rhetoric that Israeli officials now espouse: a genocidal army is the only thing standing between Europe and “Muslim barbarians”, they claim.

I have often lamented how the Jews, who struggled for years after World War II to globalise the knowledge about the Holocaust, started facing serious Holocaust denial as the number of living survivors started to dwindle. Swedish survivors Hédi Fried (98) and Emerich Roth (97) died recently – a major loss for the Jewish community and those working to uphold the “never again” vow.

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By contrast, Bosnians are experiencing genocide denial while most of us, survivors, are still alive. Genocide scholar Gregory Stanton argued there are 10 stages of genocide, the last one being denial, but we are effectively experiencing the 11th phase: glorification and triumphalism.

There are people who not only invest resources into historical revisionism of the genocide they committed in the 1990s, but are de facto threatening to repeat it. The Bosnian “final solution” was not properly finalised, they often say. In my home city, Banja Luka, the administrative capital of Republika Srpska, you can buy T-shirts with the faces of war criminals Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić, Biljana Plavšić, and Slobodan Milošević. And Russian President Vladimir Putin, too.

In the case of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, which the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has already characterised as a plausible genocide, we see denial among Israeli politicians and propagandists while it is still going on. There is even more denial in Western countries with histories of horrific genocides, [especially Germany](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/2/27/german-guiltwashing-in-times-of-genocide).

Western governments and media are engaged in a systematic cover-up of Israeli war crimes and bullying of those who try to expose them. Laws are proposed on short notice that aim to criminalise free speech and criticism of Israel.

At the same time, the glorification of this genocide is broadcast in real time on social media. Accounts with thousands of followers post footage of Israeli soldiers committing war crimes. People want credit even for discrediting content. The Palestinians have been dehumanised to such an extent that their executioners are deeply convinced that their violent acts are not just morally justified but also noble, and they must take pride in their “good work”.

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The Serb authorities did much to hide the concentration camps from foreign journalists. They tried to cover up massacres, moving mass graves multiple times. By contrast, the hubris of Israeli soldiers drives them to produce countless images and videos of their work: endearing messages to loved ones from sites of destruction, the mocking of everything Palestinian, proud repetitions of the genocidal discourse.

French philosopher Jean Baudrillard was right: We postmodern humans want to broadcast ourselves to the world whatever we do. I am not surprised that the Israeli army is broadcasting its war crimes as I was not surprised that Hamas had cameras on on October 7.

We have seen attempts to whitewash Hamas’s crimes, but we have also seen propaganda campaigns aimed at making them look even more horrible as a way of justifying the crimes of the Israeli army. Meanwhile, Palestinians have felt compelled to report in detail the atrocities they face. It is perverse that people suffering so much are forced to record and broadcast unimaginable slaughter to be believed, to be humanised, to be pitied enough so their cry for help is heard.

We think we live in a different time, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government has shown the world that the old rules still apply. Though Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari is correct that since World War II fewer people have died in wars, Israel keeps confirming the fact that nations are built through violence.

In Gaza, the old world order came back with a vengeance. Western powers are doing the exact opposite of acting in the spirit of the civilisation they have bragged about building. They have armed the aggressor and aided his indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, their starvation, and culturicide. They encouraged the media to dehumanise the victims and cover up the crimes. And finally, despite the explicit ruling by the ICJ, they cut aid.

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Let us note here that even the Israeli judge in the ICJ hearing on Gaza voted in favour of the provision of humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians. As a Holocaust survivor, of course, he did at least that.

Despite the staggering effort by Western media to suppress information, there has been a significant shift in public opinion in the West. This means that the timing is bad for Israel. Netanyahu and his predecessors should have finished their genocidal project decades ago.

Back then, there were fewer avenues for the truth to surface. Places were ethnically cleansed and mass graves were buried under parking lots. As the Israeli interviewees in a 2022 documentary about a massacre in the Palestinian village of Tantura made clear, they got away with it because no one was watching.

But people across the whole world are watching now and there is no excuse not to act to stop it.

Once a genocide happens, history shows, there is no going back. Six million Jews and millions of their unborn descendants are missing in Germany and other nations. Many are missing from countries across Asia and Africa. They will never return.

Germans may have apologised, built memorial centres, financed historical studies, and instituted prizes for science and literature, but the fact remains. The state of Israel is a continuous reminder that the Jews will never get back what they lost.

The laws of nation-building are like entropy. It is a one-way road. We Bosnians know this too well. Despite all the convictions of war criminals, the authorities of Republika Srpska still enjoy the gift they were given: half of Bosnia, nice and clean. Threats of secession and annexation to Serbia continue. The dream of Greater Serbia is on the horizon. Greater Serbia in the European Union. Maybe even in NATO.

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No peace process will ever retrieve the territories and recreate Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multiethnic state with equal rights for all citizens. Bosnia remains an ethnostate where three ethnicities rule and others, such as Jews and the Roma, do not have equal political rights.

We see Israelis dream big of Greater Israel. If the world – whatever that means – allows Israel to take Gaza, it will never go back to the Palestinians even if the ICJ convicts all war criminals. There might be symbolic justice for some, but in practice, it will be an irreversible loss, endlessly debated in history books.

Netanyahu knows, as do all the others in his government, that even if they are sentenced as war criminals, the posterity will absorb that. Films will be made about them as complex human beings with good and bad sides. Many will glorify and whitewash them. The Bibi T-shirt industry will do well.

Some Israelis are already thinking of Gaza in terms of real estate. The future intrudes on the present. We are watching Schrödinger’s genocide live, analysing what is happening as if it is already history, as if we are already in the future, observing it from a distance. It is almost like a quantum (entangled) genocide.

I understand some Israelis who are against the war but are in denial about the genocide just as I understand some Serbs who cannot imagine atrocities have been done in their name. And yet, a new zeitgeist is emerging and the interest in international law is rising. Times are changing, but where are we going? And, more importantly, what will we be when we get there?

“The extent of Israel’s continued restrictions on entry of aid into Gaza, together with the manner in which it continues to conduct hostilities, may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war, which is a war crime,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said.

His spokesperson, Jeremy Laurence, told reporters in Geneva that the final determination of whether “starvation is being used as a weapon of war” would be determined by a court of law.

“The suffering of the people of Gaza is unconscionable,” he said.

While aid agencies blame Israel for the crisis due to its blockade of Gaza, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government says it is facilitating supplies. Israel claims the UN and relief groups are at fault for the quantity and pace of aid deliveries.

“Israel, as the occupying power, has the obligation to ensure the provision of food and medical care to the population commensurate with their needs and to facilitate the work of humanitarian organisations to deliver that assistance,”The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report released on Monday said malnutrition and food shortages have probably exceeded famine levels in northern Gaza and hunger-linked death rates were likely to do so soon.

The war has left roughly half of Palestinians in Gaza – about 1.1 million people – experiencing “catastrophic” hunger, the report warned.

Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told reporters in Geneva that the agency feared that without action, “you’re looking at more than 200 people dying from starvation per day.”

Turk said the crisis was “human-made” and “entirely preventable”.

“Everyone, especially those with influence, must insist that Israel acts to facilitate the unimpeded entry and distribution of needed humanitarian assistance and commercial goods to end starvation and avert all risk of famine,”

“There needs to be full restoration of essential services, including the supply of food, water, electricity and fuel.”

Oxfam also released a report on Monday, accusing Israel of using bureaucracy to [“deliberately” hinder aid supplies](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/18/israel-deliberately-blocking-medical-aid-from-gaza-oxfam-report-warns) headed into Gaza.

It said aid trucks are waiting an average of 20 days to access the enclave.

The United States has circulated a draft United Nations Security Council resolution calling for an “immediate ceasefire tied to the release of hostages” in Gaza, according to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken who is on [a tour of the Middle East](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/20/blinken-begins-latest-middle-east-tour-set-to-meet-arab-leaders-in-cairo).

Israel’s key political and military backer has [repeatedly vetoed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/21/world-condemns-uss-latest-un-security-council-veto-on-gaza-ceasefire) previous UNSC votes on ending the nearly six-month war, objecting as recently as February to the use of the term “immediate” in a draft submitted by Algeria.

In recent weeks, however, it has upped the pressure on Israel while insisting that Hamas fighters must immediately release the captives seized during its October 7 attacks on Israel.

“Well, in fact, we actually have a resolution that we put forward right now that’s before the United Nations Security Council that does call for an immediate ceasefire tied to the release of hostages, and we hope very much that countries will support that,” “I think that would send a strong message, a strong signal,” “Of course, we stand with Israel and its right to defend itself … but at the same time, it’s imperative that the civilians who are in harm’s way and who are suffering so terribly – that we focus on them, that we make them a priority, protecting the civilians, getting them humanitarian assistance,” “The Security Council determines the imperative of an immediate and sustained ceasefire to protect civilians on all sides, allow for the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance, and alleviate humanitarian suffering and towards that end unequivocally supports ongoing international diplomatic efforts to secure such a ceasefire in connection with the release of all remaining hostages.”

Al Jazeera’s Diplomatic Editor James Bays said while the development “sounds very important”, the “exact language” of the resolution is crucial, adding that what the US was actually demanding was ambiguous.

“It’s certainly the strongest language yet, but is it what the rest of the Security Council wants in terms of a demand for an immediate ceasefire? Or is it just a resolution where the Security Council would say an immediate ceasefire is something that’s very important?” he said.

No vote has yet been scheduled on this text.

In February, the US was the only country to vote against the draft – its third such veto – while the United Kingdom abstained.

For a UNSC resolution to be adopted, it requires at least nine votes in favour and no vetoes by any of the five permanent members: the US, UK, France, Russia or China. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN, said then that her country was vetoing the resolution over concerns it would jeopardise talks between the US, Egypt, Israel and Qatar that were seeking to broker a pause in the war and the release of captives held in Gaza.

Talks for a ceasefire deal were continuing in Qatar this week following failed attempts to secure an agreement before the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Qatari officials said they were “cautiously optimistic” after discussions with Israel’s intelligence chief in Doha, although Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari said on Tuesday that an [Israeli ground operation in Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/16/israel-approves-plan-to-attack-gazas-rafah-but-keeps-truce-talks-alive) in southern Gaza would set back any talks.

Bays also said this was “not the only draft resolution that’s floating around”.

“The language of other resolutions that the US has vetoed have demanded a ceasefire. This one uses the words, ‘determines the imperative’, so it says it is important that there is a ceasefire. It is not really demanding one now,” he added.

“My suspicion is that what the US is trying to do is have this resolution ready while the talks continue in Doha – the idea being that you get some sort of deal in Doha for a ceasefire and a release of the captives, and then you pass this resolution in the Security Council. That, I think, is the timing but we’ll need more clarity.”

Blinken is on his sixth tour to the Middle East since [Israel’s war on Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/) began. He already met Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia.

On Thursday, he is due to meet foreign ministers from Egypt, Qatar and Jordan in Cairo, as well as the Emirati international cooperation minister and the general secretary of the Palestine Liberation Organization’s (PLO) executive committee, according to the Egyptian foreign ministry. “I told him that I hope we will do it with the support of the US, but if we have to – we will do it alone,” he said in a statement.

However, Blinken said a major military ground operation into Rafah “is not the way” to defeat Hamas and would risk “further isolating” Israel.

Speaking as he departed Israel, Blinken told reporters he had “candid conversations”, referring to meetings with Netanyahu and the war cabinet.

A ground operation in Rafah “risks killing more civilians. It risks wreaking greater havoc with the humanitarian assistance. It risks further isolating Israel around the world and jeopardising its long-term security and standing,”

He also emphasised to Netanyahu the need to protect civilians in Gaza, the US Department of State said.

‘Criminal’

Blinken has been on a whistlestop tour of the region to support truce talks in Qatar that involve indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas officials.

However, on the ground, Israel continues to pound Rafah and its surroundings in the south.

Elsewhere in the strip on Friday, Israeli forces continued to raid al-Shifa Hospital, Gaza’s largest medical complex, for a fifth day, bombing several buildings and burning down its vascular department, Gaza’s Health Ministry said.

Israeli forces also detained about 240 patients and 10 health personnel at the Prince Nayef Center, the hospital’s radiology unit, the ministry added.

Israel claimed to have killed more than 150 “terrorists” at the facility in its ongoing operation, which Hamas has called “criminal”.Tensions between the Biden administration and Netanyahu have spiked in recent weeks. Washington has implored Israel to do more to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, where aid agencies say much of the population is on the verge of [famine](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/21/who-chief-warns-the-future-of-a-generation-in-peril-as-gaza-famine-looms).

Blinken said that during talks with Israeli officials, they discussed “surging and sustaining the amount of humanitarian assistance for the people in Gaza”.

While there have been “positive” steps taken over the last few days regarding the entry of aid, “it’s not enough”, Blinken said.

Al Jazeera’s senior political analyst, Marwan Bishara, said there has been a growing sense that Israel is becoming more “isolated”, especially in the West.

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“I think the United States can use that against Israel because basically, Israel today has only one friend … and that’s the United States,” he said.

‘Urgency’ about ceasefire

During Blinken’s visit to Tel Aviv, several dozen people, including family members of captives being held in Gaza, gathered outside a hotel where the US delegation was based, holding banners calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

Inside the hotel, Blinken met the families of American Israeli captives, a US official said.

On October 7 and in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks, the group took about 250 captives. Some captives were released in an earlier pause in fighting, but more than 100 are believed to remain, although some have been reported killed by Israeli air raids.

Blinken’s visit came as the United Nations Security Council [failed to pass a draft US resolution](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/22/un-security-council-does-not-pass-us-resolution-calling-for-gaza-ceasefire) that called for, but did not demand, a ceasefire in Israel’s war that has killed more than 32,000 Palestinians in Gaza.

Washington has repeatedly blocked ceasefire resolutions at the UN. On Friday, a majority backed the renewed diplomatic push, but China and Russia vetoed the US text, saying it put no pressure on Israel.

“On the resolution, which got very strong support, but then was cynically vetoed by Russia and China, I think we were trying to show the international community a sense of urgency about getting a ceasefire,” Blinken told reporters in Tel Aviv.

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Meanwhile, Israel’s spy chief David Barnea headed to Qatar for truce and captive release negotiations along with CIA chief William Burns and Qatari and Egyptian officials.

“We made progress in the last couple of weeks on the hostage negotiations, closing gaps, but almost by definition, when you get down to the last items, they tend to be the hardest,” Blinken said about the talks. “So there is still a lot of … hard work to be done.”

A Hamas official said earlier in the week that Israel’s response to the group’s latest proposal for an initial six-week truce had been “largely negative”.

In the days leading up to Ramadan, we heard the hopeful word “ceasefire”. The US president uttered it, and the media repeated it. For a short moment, the lives of Palestinians in Gaza hung in the balance, caught between the possibility of a truce for the holy month and Israel’s relentless drive to eliminate my people from the face of the Earth.

International Women’s Day came and went; women in Canada, where I physically live, celebrated; women in Gaza, where my heart is, faced another day struggling to help their families survive. Still, no sign of a ceasefire.

In the evening, on the TV – which we have not turned off in our house since October 7 – we heard breaking news: the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) had targeted the area around al-Masri Tower in Rafah.

Al-Masri is one of the oldest residential blocks in Rafah. It used to house dozens of families, but many more were sheltering there since the war began. My Uncle Fathi and his extended family were among them. I screamed in disbelief

Seeing my anguish, my youngest son Aziz whispered, trying to console me. “Mom, at least the tower is not struck directly like the homes of Uncle Nayif or Uncle Harb. Uncle Fathi is lucky. Thank Allah.” This is the new marker of luck in Gaza: not dying, managing to escape an Israeli attack that renders you homeless. The weight of loss and uncertainty loomed heavy while I waited to hear about my relatives’ fate.

Uncle Fathi, his wife, his adult children and their families, his brothers and their families, nephews and nieces and other members of the extended family, had fled to Rafah after the Israeli army invaded Khan Younis. Uncle Fathi worked for many years in Saudi Arabia before returning to Gaza to work as a teacher with the United Nations in Khan Younis refugee camp. The whole family are highly educated professionals who lived in a beautiful home in Khan Younis, which was destroyed in December by an Israeli air strike.

Shortly after, Uncle Fathi posted to Facebook showing a before and after image of their house. He wrote, “This is our beloved home, that has vanished. The fruit of hard work and toil for 40 years was destroyed and annihilated by the occupation army who claim to be moral. I wonder what my home did to them … Did it fight them? … This is the collective punishment of humans, of stones, and all forms of life… Allah is sufficient for us, and the best disposer of affairs.”My cousin Ahmad, Uncle Fathi’s son, had gone back to see what was left of their home. That is when he learned that some neighbours – relatives of my husband – had stayed behind to care for elderly and disabled people who could not be moved. They had all sheltered in the diwan (the family hall for social gatherings) of one house. Then the bombs struck and killed 18 of them.

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Ahmad recounted the horror, his words searing into my soul. He told me how he collected the body parts of my husband’s family – old people, children, and women – scattered everywhere. He did what he could for the dead, then he had to think of the living. He went through the rubble of his family home, looking for children’s toys and clothes to take to their new shelter in al-Masri Tower.

As the attack on al-Masri Tower unfolded, I stayed glued to the TV, praying that my relatives had survived. I was worried that even if they had, my uncle with his heart problems and high blood pressure, would be at risk. Ahmad had expressed deep fear for his father’s health the last time we had spoken. A few hours later, it was confirmed that the tower had been hit. People documented it with their cell phone cameras. I tried to sleep.

The first thing I saw upon opening my eyes the next morning was a video clip recorded by a young man showing the raw emotions, the chaos and the uncertainty on the faces of the young and the old amid the darkness; the heartbreaking cries of little children could be heard in the background. “It’s 3am, and I’m still in the street with my family. The tower was hit with five rockets. We don’t know where to go, but thank God, we are alive,” he said.

Then a message came from my cousin Mohammed, Uncle Fathi’s other son, a professor in Oman, saying, “Ghada, my dad and the families left the building 30 minutes before it got hit. My father is okay.” Relief flooded over me.

The weekend moved on from Uncle Fathi and his family’s fate to new horrors unfolding as Ramadan drew closer. I was involved in a constant stream of phone calls and text messages with family members in Canada and the Middle East. We sought news to reassure ourselves that one family member or another had survived some terrible suffering.

My Aunt Aziza’s trembling voice over the phone from the United Arab Emirates relayed the harrowing news of the arrest of several of our relatives by the IOF in Hamad town, Khan Younis. They had returned to their abandoned home to retrieve some items, thinking the Israeli military had withdrawn from the area.

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But IOF soldiers showed up and surrounded them. Part of the large group were three of my cousins. They, along with all other men, were stripped to their underwear, their dignity torn apart in an act of unfathomable humiliation before their families. They were subjected to interrogation and cruel beatings before being taken to an unknown place.

The agony of witnessing such horror proved too much for one of my relatives. Jamal, the nine-year-old disabled son of one of my cousins, Shaima, suffered convulsive seizures. The Israeli soldiers, not knowing what to do with her and her ill and hungry child, released them after several hours of being held in the street.

She was ordered to run away without looking back. Terrified of being shot if she turned her head to see the fate of the others, she immediately left with her son in her arms, looking only ahead. She walked, carrying her son all the way from Hamad to al-Mawasi and crying over the horror she had just witnessed, not knowing how she would deliver the devastating news to our family.

This news shattered my heart. Would we ever see our cousins again? Would they be released, or would they suffer the same fate as the many Gaza men taken hostage by the IOF, then either shot dead or imprisoned in torture centres? I could not sleep.

The next day I spent time on Facebook searching for news about my family. The crescent moon was anticipated that night to usher in the holy month. I wondered about those of us who chose to fast and those who were enduring forced starvation in Gaza. Then I saw a post by my uncle Hany, about his experience returning to check on his home in Khan Younis refugee camp, after evacuating on Christmas Eve. He wrote:

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“I went home. There was severe destruction in the place. In front of me is a rectangular building that I know, which sustained minor damage. I was able to determine the coordinates of my house. Someone shouted from among the mountains of rubble, ‘Don’t take this rugged path, take that path,’ and he pointed with his hand. I arrived with difficulty, the place was filled with rubble. A shell cut off the neck of my only palm tree … Even my tree has a place in my heart. I searched for Abu Khudair, my cat, but I could not find him. Someone told me that he had seen the cat and that he was alive. I didn’t stay long. I didn’t come to mourn stones. I left from the other side of the camp. I turned around when a girl shouted, ‘Thank Allah for your safety.’ It was [our neighbour] Aida! I shouted in surprise, ‘What has brought you here, you crazy girl?’ She said, ‘I did not leave at all. I stayed with my father.’ Aida had little luck in life. She had little education and came from a poor family and her father had lost his movement and his memory. ‘How could I leave him? Either we live together or we die together’ she said.”

His post continued:

“How was Aida able to take care of her father for all this time while death hovered over their heads for weeks? That girl is the greatest, bravest, smartest and most pious … Aida is an icon. I said to myself as I controlled my steps to balance on the hills of rubble: Who among us could measure up to Aida’s strength? No one. She is a martyr living on Earth.”

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Across the Gaza Strip, as the Ramadan moon came into view, people would greet each other with the words “Ramadan Kareem” which means “Ramadan is generous”. Others would respond “Allah Akram” which means “Allah is the most generous”.

Indeed, Allah is the most generous and Aida’s lived experience is one more proof of it.

Aida stands in stark contrast to those who have chosen to ignore the genocide. She is a beacon of courage and hope in the darkest moments. Her very presence among us exposes the barbarity of global politics and the cowardice of political leaders who choose to tolerate genocide and refuse to stop it. Who among them could ever rise to Aida’s level? Thank Allah she has lived to see another day.

Mass graves, crippled hospitals, thousands of civilian deaths and near total destruction of infrastructure haunt Gaza as Israel’s war on the besieged Palestinian coastal enclave entered its 200th day on Tuesday

Israel launched its brutal military offensive on October 7 after a deadly attack by Hamas fighters. About 240 people were taken captive in southern Israel and 1,139 were killed by the Palestinian fighters. Nearly 85 percent of Gaza’s 2.3 million people have been displaced and more than 14,000 children have been killed in the offensive, which critics have called a war of vengeance.

Here are some numbers that highlight the unprecedented level of violence used in the past six months while Israel remains adamant about launching a ground offensive in Rafah. The southernmost city in Gaza is sheltering 1.5 million Palestinians, most of whom fled earlier phases of the war.

34,000 killed

According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, at least 34,183 people have been killed and 77,084 have been wounded in Israeli attacks.

About 72 percent of those killed are women and children, according to an update by Gaza’s Government Media Office on Tuesday.

On Monday, United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk said a child in Gaza is [killed or wounded](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-human-rights-chief-deplores-harrowing-killings-children-and-women-rafah) “every 10 minutes”.

We have seen death over the last 200 days at an unprecedented scale,” said Emily Tripp, director of the London-based nonprofit Airwars, which tracks casualties in aerial bombardments during war. “We have now identified more incidents where civilians have been killed since October 7 in Gaza than we did in eight years of the US and allied campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

“We have documented strikes where more than 100 people have been killed – and the news barely reaches international headlines,” she told Al Jazeera.

In a [report](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session55/advance-versions/a-hrc-55-73-auv.pdf?fbclid=PAAabhMBtg0Fe6gnsKWQHCnmLRvcoDOaxa2eR2UjsdwtOFzlycWdVBsI5tufg_aem_ATT4jd7qlwV2rf88Xakb9-DT-GCtVnDw0SD_XWzPyNS7D7WBoYdl5jVmYb4hNJbN8cM) published in late March, Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territory, said there were clear indications that Israel has violated three of the five acts listed under the UN Genocide Convention.

These acts Albanese said were “killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to the group’s members; and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”.

About 1.1 million people — half of Gaza’s pre-war population — are living through catastrophic food insecurity, the world’s hunger watchdog, known as the Integrated Food-Security Phase Classification (IPC), said in a report published on March 18. Catastrophic food insecurity, the IPC’s worst level of food insecurity, refers to conditions in which starvation and acute malnutrition are evident.

In northern Gaza, famine is likely to occur by May and could spread across the enclave by July, the report added.

According to the IPC, famine is defined as when at least 20 percent of households are facing an extreme lack of food, at least 30 percent of children are suffering from acute malnutrition and at least two adults or four children for every 10,000 people are dying every day from outright starvation or a combination of malnutrition and disease

The Gaza media office on Tuesday said at least 30 children have died “as a result of famine”. It said 1.09 million people have been infected with diseases as a result of being displaced in the coastal enclave.

Moreover, the war in the coastal enclave has hampered the work of aid agencies such as UNRWA.

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The UN has said more than 200 aid workers have been killed during the war, most of them Palestinians.

As of March 16, UNRWA said at least 180 of its staff have been killed since October 7.

26 hospitals destroyed and hundreds of medics killed

Israeli forces have repeatedly targeted hospitals in the Gaza Strip, including besieging some of its biggest health facilities.

World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on March 30 said only 10 of Gaza’s 36 hospitals were “minimally functional”.

Tlaleng Mofokeng, the UN special rapporteur on the right to health, on Monday said at least 350 healthcare professionals have been killed since October 7 with 520 wounded, adding that the numbers were “grossly underreported”.

Mofokeng said Israel’s war in Gaza has from the start been a “war on the right to health” and has “obliterated” the health system in the coastal enclave.

The Gaza media office on Tuesday said 485 medical staff have been killed since the war began. The destruction of healthcare facilities continues to catapult to proportions yet to be fully quantified,” Mofokeng, a doctor from South Africa, said.

In recent months, some of Gaza’s most renowned health facilities were besieged by Israeli forces. Last week, nearly 300 bodies were retrieved from a mass grave found inside Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Younis weeks after Israeli forces withdrew.

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This month, bodies were also uncovered at Gaza City’s al-Shifa Hospital, which was besieged by Israeli forces for weeks.

Four UN resolutions calling for ceasefire vetoed

The United States has vetoed UN Security Council resolutions [calling for ceasefire on three occasions](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/25/world-welcomes-unsc-resolution-calling-for-ceasefire-in-gaza) since October 7 while a fourth truce resolution was blocked by Algeria, Russia and China.

On March 23, the three countries vetoed a US-drafted resolution, which Moscow said was a “hypocritical spectacle” that did not pressure Israel.

On March 25, the US decided not to veto a ceasefire resolution by abstaining from the vote. The resolution called for an immediate ceasefire for the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Israel has failed to stop its war despite the resolution.

“The Israeli occupation commits a massacre, killing 19 and injuring 23 civilians while thousands of citizens were waiting for flour and aid near Al-Kuwait roundabout,”“towards the hungry people who were waiting for bags of flour and aid in a place far from posing any danger to the occupation”.

Mahmud Basal, the spokesman for the Civil Defence Department in Gaza, said there had been “heavy shooting at civilians” and victims had been transported to a nearby Ahli Arab Hospital.

But with Gaza’s healthcare system at near collapse, many were treated outside in the open air.

“There were very serious injuries, some of whom were injured by shrapnel. The reality is tragic, difficult and challenging,”

the Israeli forces shot at the crowd, leaving “many dead” and leaving others injured while they tried to get “a bite to eat” for their children.Half of Palestinians in Gaza are experiencing “catastrophic” hunger, with [famine](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/21/who-chief-warns-the-future-of-a-generation-in-peril-as-gaza-famine-looms) projected to hit the north of the territory by May unless there is urgent intervention, a United Nations-backed food assessment warned on Monday.

But aid distribution has become increasingly dangerous and sometimes lethal.

Last Tuesday, 23 Palestinians were killed, and several others were injured by [Israeli bombing](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/2/8/mapping-israels-destruction-of-gaza) that targeted Palestinians waiting for [humanitarian aid](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/3/21/a-jordanian-flight-across-israel-an-airdrop-over-gazas-ruins) in the northern Gaza Strip.

On February 29, Israeli forces opened fire on hundreds of Palestinians as they gathered south of Gaza City waiting to receive humanitarian aid in what is known as the “[flour massacre](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/1/flour-massacre-how-gaza-food-killings-unfolded-and-israels-story-changed)”, leaving 118 dead and 760 wounded, according to the Health Ministry in the enclave.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Saturday during a [visit to the Rafah crossing](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/23/un-chief-says-blocked-gaza-aid-is-a-moral-outage-calls-for-war-to-end) that the line of blocked aid trucks stuck on Egypt’s side of the border with the Gaza Strip while Palestinians face starvation on the other side is a “moral outrage”.

Al Jazeera’s Tareq Abu Azzoum, reporting from Rafah, said the latest shooting is part of a “clear, systematic policy that Israel has been using in the course of the past few months”.He said the Israeli forces have been imposing restrictions on aid deliveries to the north of the enclave while also attacking people who attempt to reach humanitarian aid convoys.

He said that people in Gaza, despite the risks, continue to wait for the convoys as they are “hungry, dehydrated, and they want to return back to their families with something to [break the fast](https://www.aljazeera.com/podcasts/2024/3/11/the-take-observing-ramadan-against-the-backdrop-of-war)“. The Israeli army denied it had fired on the crowd.

“The reports claiming that the [Israeli military] attacked dozens of Gazans at an aid convoy are incorrect,” an army statement said.

“Preliminary findings have determined that there was no aerial strike against the convoy, nor were there incidents found of [Israeli] forces firing at the people at the aid convoy.”Russia and China on Friday [vetoed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/22/un-security-council-does-not-pass-us-resolution-calling-for-gaza-ceasefire) a text proposed by the United States, criticising it as “exceedingly politicised” and saying it did not clearly state opposition to Israel’s long-threatened [ground operation in Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/16/israel-approves-plan-to-attack-gazas-rafah-but-keeps-truce-talks-alive), the southernmost Gaza city where about 1.5 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

Guterres – who visited the Egyptian side of the border with the Gaza Strip not far from [Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/23/un-chief-says-blocked-gaza-aid-is-a-moral-outage-calls-for-war-to-end) on Saturday – said there was a “growing consensus emerging in the international community to tell Israel a ceasefire is needed”, and to “tell clearly to the Israelis that any ground invasion of Rafah could mean a catastrophic humanitarian disaster”.China said it supported the new UNSC draft resolution which is due to be voted on later on Monday. “We hope the Security Council will pass it as soon as possible and send a strong signal for the cessation of hostilities,” foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said.

The new text is expected to demand “an immediate ceasefire” for the ongoing Muslim holy month of Ramadan, “leading to a permanent sustainable ceasefire”

Gaza turned into graveyard’

Israeli forces surrounded the al-Amal and Nasser hospitals in southern Gaza, while pressing on with their [siege of Gaza City’s al-Shifa Hospital](https://www.aljazeera.com/podcasts/2024/3/20/the-take-why-has-israel-launched-an-attack-on-al-shifa-hospital-again), the largest medical complex in the Strip.

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) said one of its staff members was killed when Israeli tanks suddenly pushed back into areas around the al-Amal and Nasser hospitals in Khan Younis amid heavy bombardment and gunfire.

Reporting from Rafah, Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud said: “Military vehicles, tanks and attack drones are encircling these two facilities. They’re also blocking the entrance with piles of sand, preventing medical staff, patients and injured people inside from leaving safely and constantly failing to provide a safe corridor for people and evacuees trapped inside the hospital.”

Nebal Farsakh, a spokesperson for PRCS, told Al Jazeera of Israeli orders to evacuate the facilities, adding that “at the same time they are firing bombs at the hospital”.

“Everyone inside the hospital [medical staff, patients, the wounded] is trapped since there is very intense and heavy gunfire.”

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Mahmoud said people inside al-Amal Hospital were being ordered, via loudspeakers, “to come out only with their underwear on”.

Reporting from Rafah, Al Jazeera’s Tareq Abu Azzoum said the two hospitals in Khan Younis have been under Israeli siege for more than 24 hours.

“Gaza has been turned into a graveyard, with hospitals and houses being attacked and destroyed,” he said.

“Israeli forces at al-Amal Hospital have been forcing patients to flee from the hospital under really critical conditions, while there are still patients inside unable to leave as the bombardment and confrontations between Hamas fighters and Israeli soldiers continue.”

The Israeli military said its troops began operating around al-Amal following “precise intelligence … which indicated that terrorists are using civilian infrastructure for terror activities in the area of al-Amal”.

Israel alleges that hospitals in Gaza, where the war has been raging for [more than five months](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/), are used by Hamas as bases. Israeli authorities have released videos and pictures that they say support their claim.

Hamas and medical staff deny the accusations

The Hamas-run Gaza government media office said Israeli forces had killed five Palestinian doctors. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

“Right now, Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists are barricading themselves inside Shifa Hospital wards,” said Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari, also claiming that gunmen were firing at his soldiers from inside the emergency and maternity wards.

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On Monday, the Israeli military claimed to have arrested 500 Hamas and Islamic Jihad members at al-Shifa Hospital since its week-old operation began.

Ismail al-Thawabta, the director of Gaza’s government media office, said: “How can they claim this while their soldiers roam and frolic inside the complex with ease, conducting interrogations with displaced persons, patients, and the wounded.”

Jameel al-Ayoubi, who was one of thousands of Palestinians sheltering at the hospital, saw Israeli tanks and armoured bulldozers drive over at least four bodies in the hospital courtyard, The Associated Press news agency reported. Ambulances were also crushed,

The US move garnered widespread attention as a sign of Biden’s growing frustration with Israeli leadership, which is pressing on with its deadly military campaign in Gaza.

But Palestinian rights advocates argue that what is needed is a fundamental rethinking in Washington’s support for Israel — beyond symbolism and rhetoric.

“It’s a shift. However, it hasn’t stopped arms transfers from being made. And that’s ultimately what really matters,” said Adam Shapiro, a political analyst.

Washington played down the resolution as “non-binding”, but the change in stance was enough to prompt a fiery response from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who lashed out at the US for failing to block the motion.

His office issued a statement accusing Washington of harming Israel’s war efforts, underscoring the growing tensions with Biden.‘A dance’ between leaders

Advocates say the question is now whether the Biden administration will use its leverage to pressure Israel to end its abuses against Palestinians in Gaza.

Biden officials have urged the Israeli government to protect civilians and allow more aid to Gaza, but they have so far declined to place conditions on aid to Israel to further those goals.

Tariq Kenney-Shawa, a US policy fellow at Al-Shabaka, a Palestinian think tank, said the true test of where the US stands is whether it will grant the “wish list” of arms Israel is expected to ask for.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant is on a visit to Washington, DC, and US and Israeli media outlets have reported that he will request specific weapons for the ongoing war.

“The policy of providing Israel and Netanyahu in particular with all the tools he needs to continue the [assault on Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/3/25/israels-war-on-gaza-live-nine-killed-in-israeli-strike-on-deir-el-balah) has continued uninterrupted since October,” Kenney-Shawa said in an email to Al Jazeera.

“In many ways, I see this as a dance. The Biden administration is taking what it sees as the necessary public steps to make it look like they’re doing everything they can to hold Israel’s feet to the fire, when in reality, they’re facilitating and enabling Israel to no end. Israel has yet to face any concrete consequences from the US for its war crimes and genocide.”

The war started on October 7, after an attack on southern Israel killed 1,139 people. Since then, [Israel’s military offensive](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/23/un-chief-says-blocked-gaza-aid-is-a-moral-outage-calls-for-war-to-end) on Gaza has killed more than more than 32,000 Palestinians and displaced hundreds of thousands more. Its blockade of Gaza has also brought the territory to the [verge of famine](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/3/18/un-backed-report-says-famine-imminent-in-northern-gaza).

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Monday’s resolution, which was adopted in a 14-0 vote, called for a “lasting” ceasefire as well as the release of Israeli captives in Gaza and a surge of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian territory.

“Our vote does not — and I repeat that, does not — represent a shift in our policy,” White House National Security spokesperson John Kirby told reporters on Monday.

“We’ve been very clear, we’ve been very consistent in our support for a ceasefire as part of [a hostage deal](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/22/netanyahu-rejects-hamas-deal-to-end-war-release-captives).”

‘Slap in the face’

That is not how Netanyahu saw it, though. The Israeli prime minister said the abstention “constitutes a clear departure from the consistent US position in the Security Council since the beginning of the war”.

In response, Netanyahu cancelled an Israeli delegation’s visit to Washington, DC. The group was meant to discuss ways to avert an Israeli assault on the crowded city of Rafah in southern Gaza.

Israel had previously threatened to call off the trip if the US did not veto the resolution.

The Biden administration has been urging Israel not to launch a full-scale [offensive in Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/18/biden-warns-netanyahu-against-mistake-of-invading-rafah-white-house), warning that such an invasion would harm civilians trapped in the city and further isolate Israel on the world stage.

Against that backdrop, multiple US officials had talked up the delegation’s now-cancelled visit as an example of Washington’s efforts to contain the war.

On Monday, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller described Netanyahu’s move to nix the trip as “surprising and unfortunate”.

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Shapiro, the analyst, told Al Jazeera that it was a “slap in the face” to Biden. He questioned why the US — a global superpower — is failing to advance its priorities with Israel, a much smaller ally dependent on US aid.

“At this point, the United States is not reacting in accordance with its complete failure to get its policy objectives met, in the current context of what Israel is doing in Gaza or the larger picture in terms of what Israel is doing overall on the occupied territories,” he said.

Nancy Okail, the president of the Center for International Policy, a US-based think tank, said this is far from the first time Netanyahu has openly flouted US demands.

Last week, for example, [Israel announced](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/22/israel-seizes-800-hectares-of-palestinian-land-in-occupied-west-bank) the illegal seizure of 800 hectares (1,977 acres) in the occupied West Bank, defying US policy.

Significant’ vote

Still, Okail said Monday’s vote on the ceasefire resolution is “significant” because it brought the US policy closer to its rhetoric on stopping the war and came against Netanyahu’s threats.

“However, it’s still very late and still not enough,” Okail told Al Jazeera. “It also needs to be followed with concrete steps to show how serious the US administration is about support for ceasefire and lasting peace and about making sure that humanitarian assistance is delivered adequately and in time for the Palestinian people.

“And that means taking steps towards assessing whether the US should continue sending arms to Israel.”

So far, US officials have ruled out placing conditions on aid to Israel, often reasserting their commitment to Israel’s security.

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As the war on Gaza rages on, Israel’s public disregard for the US policy agenda is intensifying calls for Biden to take steps to pressure Netanyahu and uphold laws that ban weapon transfers to human rights abusers.

The Biden administration says it is working on a comprehensive solution to the broader conflict that would see the establishment of a Palestinian state, with security guarantees for Israel and the establishment of [formal diplomatic relations](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/2/us-wants-an-israeli-saudi-normalisation-deal-why-now) between Israel and Arab states.

But Netanyahu and other right-wing members of his government have categorically rejected the two-state solution, stressing that Israel must maintain security control on the occupied Palestinian territory.

“The ball is very much in the Biden administration’s court. And they have options,” Shapiro said, referring to halting US aid and weapons to Israel.

“And I think for the first time in a long time, there are options that if they want to use them, they would have vast support from the American public at large and in particular from the [Democratic base](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/2/how-democrats-are-alienating-their-base-by-blasting-a-gaza-war-ceasefire)

The resolution calls for an “immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan respected by all parties leading to a lasting, sustainable ceasefire”. It additionally calls for the release of the Israeli captives taken by Hamas on October 7. It emphasises the need for more humanitarian aid flowing into Gaza and on adherence to international law.

While promising at least a pause in the war, the resolution has been criticised by some analysts for being more symbolic than substantial in its ability to bring an end to the war. Nancy Okail, the president of the US-based think tank Center for International Policy, [told](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/25/not-enough-why-us-did-not-veto-gaza-ceasefire-resolution-at-un) Al Jazeera’s Ali Harb that while the resolution is significant, it is “still very late and still not enough”

Is the resolution binding?

All UNSC resolutions are considered binding, in accordance with Article 25 of the UN Charter which was ratified by the US.

However, the US has described the Monday resolution as non-binding. US ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said Washington fully supported “some of the critical objectives in this non-binding resolution”. On the same day, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters: “It is a non-binding resolution”.

This has been contested by other UN officials and [Security Council members](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/ahead-of-key-israel-hamas-ceasefire-vote-where-do-unsc-members-stand). China’s UN ambassador Zhang Jun said that Security Council resolutions are binding.

Deputy UN spokesperson Farhan Haq added that UNSC resolutions are international law, “so to that extent they are as binding as international law is”.

The Anadolu Agency reported that Pedro Comissario, Mozambique’s UN ambassador, said “all United Nations Security Council resolutions are binding and mandatory”.

If a UNSC resolution is not followed, the council can vote on a follow-up resolution addressing the breach and take punitive action in the form of sanctions or even the authorisation of an international force.

Al Jazeera’s Diplomatic Editor James Bays has [previously said](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/11/can-the-next-un-vote-stop-israels-war-on-gaza) that “There are virtually no circumstances under which the Biden administration would support a punitive resolution” that takes action against Israel.

Israel has repeatedly gotten away with flouting UN resolutions in the past.

In December 2016, during the last days of Barack Obama’s presidential term in the US, the UNSC passed a resolution deeming Israel’s [settlements](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/6/who-are-israeli-settlers-and-why-do-they-live-on-palestinian-lands) in Palestine illegal and a violation of [international law](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/un-chief-says-clear-violations-of-international-humanitarian-law-in-gaza). The resolution passed with 14 votes and the US abstained. Israel ignored this resolution.

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More recently, in December 2023, the UN General Assembly voted with an overwhelming majority to call for a “humanitarian ceasefire”. That was a non-binding resolution – and Israel refused to act on it.

Israel is also [under the scanner](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/26/has-israel-complied-with-icj-order-in-gaza-genocide-case) of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), where South Africa has accused it of committing acts of genocide in Gaza.

Will the UN resolution stop the war?

The resolution calls for an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan. However, since [Ramadan](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/3/11/a-sad-ramadan-for-gaza-as-israel-continues-attacks) ends around April 9, the ceasefire demand – even if implemented now – would last for just two weeks.

The document says that the immediate ceasefire in Ramadan should then lead to a lasting and sustainable ceasefire. Shortly before the vote on Monday, the word “permanent” was dropped from the resolution to try to build consensus on the text. Russia tried to push for the use of the word “permanent,” saying that not using the word could allow Israel “to resume its military operation in the Gaza Strip at any moment” after [Ramada](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/3/11/remembering-the-beauty-of-ramadan-in-gaza)n

The US has also not halted the supply of military aid to Israel and has insisted that its commitment to Israel’s security remains firm. In fact, White House National Security spokesperson John Kirby told reporters on Monday: “Our vote does not – and I repeat that, does not – represent a shift in our policyA [draft resolution](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/22/un-security-council-does-not-pass-us-resolution-calling-for-gaza-ceasefire) was put forth by the US before the council last Friday and the members voted on it. It was vetoed by Russia and China; Algeria voted against it and Guyana abstained. Eleven members voted in favour of this draft resolution.

The resolution did not demand a ceasefire, but instead supported “international diplomatic efforts to establish an immediate and sustained ceasefire as part of a deal that releases the hostages”.

In a press statement on Monday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken added that the US wants any demands of a ceasefire to be tied to the release of Israeli captives.

The Friday resolution also urged UNSC member states to “suppress the financing of terrorism, including by restricting financing of Hamas”. The resolution also condemned Hamas and noted that Hamas “has been designated as a terrorist organisation by numerous member states”. Blinken’s statement further said that the resolution that passed on Monday failed to condemn Hamas, which is key language that the US views as essential.

Israel has criticised Monday’s resolution for not tying a ceasefire to the release of captives – and instead for the two to each happen separately.

Has the resolution deepened US-Israel tensions?

The US abstained on Monday after vetoing three previous draft resolutions calling for a ceasefire.

Heightened tensions between the US and Israel were seen on Monday after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cancelled a trip by a delegation to Washington. This was described as “surprising and unfortunate” by State Department spokesperson Miller.

However, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant is in the US: He met Blinken on Monday and is scheduled to meet US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on Tuesday. Blinken told Gallant to refrain from a ground invasion of the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

While the US reiterated that its policy remains consistent, the official Prime Minister of Israel X handle posted on Monday night: “The United States has abandoned its policy in the UN today”.

Gaza is on the brink of starvation, with at least 32, 000 Palestinians killed. “This resolution must be implemented,” posted UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on X.

“Failure would be unforgivable”

A United Nations expert who published a [report](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/26/un-expert-accuses-israel-of-several-acts-of-genocide-in-gaza) saying there were reasonable grounds to believe Israel has committed genocide in its war on Gaza says she has received threats throughout her mandate.

Francesca Albanese, the special rapporteur on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, presented a report entitled “Anatomy of a Genocide” to the UN Human Rights Council on Tuesday, which Israel said it “utterly rejects”. In the report, Albanese said there are clear indications that Israel has violated three of the five acts listed under the UN Genocide Convention in its war on Gaza.

Asked whether her work on the report had caused her to receive threats, Albanese said: “Yes, I do receive threats. Nothing that so far I considered needing extra precautions. Pressure? Yes, and it doesn’t change either my commitment or the results of my work.”

Albanese, who has held the position since 2022, did not elaborate on the nature of the threats, nor did she say who had issued them.“It’s been a difficult time,” “I’ve always been attacked since the very beginning of my mandate.”

Israel has criticised Albanese, saying she was “delegitimising the very creation and existence of the State of Israel”. Albanese denied the accusation.

Albanese said one of her key findings was that Israel’s executive and military leadership and soldiers have intentionally “subverted their protection functions in an attempt to legitimise genocidal violence against the Palestinian people”.

“The only reasonable inference that can be drawn from the unveiling of this policy is an Israeli state policy of genocidal violence toward the Palestinian people in Gaza,” she said, adding that it was a “long-standing settler colonial process of erasure”.

She called for the “ongoing [Nakba](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/15/nakba-mapping-palestinian-villages-destroyed-by-israel-in-1948)” to stop, referring to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948.

Israel’s diplomatic mission in Geneva said the use of the word [genocide](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-bottom-line/2024/3/17/professor-jeffrey-sachs-us-is-complicit-in-israeli-genocide) was “outrageous” and said the war was against [Hamas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-tothe-palestinian-group) and not Palestinian civilians.

Albanese, an Italian lawyer and academic, is one of dozens of independent human rights experts mandated by the United Nations to report on specific themes and crises.

The views expressed by special rapporteurs do not reflect those of the global body as a whole. Israel has killed more than 32,000 Palestinians [in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/3/27/israels-war-on-gaza-live-rafah-bombing-intensifies-despite-un-truce-call), displaced more than 80 percent of the population, destroyed large parts of the territory and imposed a suffocating blockade, bringing the enclave to the verge of famine.

But nearly six months into the war, the United States says it has not determined that Israel has violated international humanitarian law.

Washington’s assertion, made public this week as part of an oversight process on US weapons transfers to allies, has spurred bewilderment and condemnation from human rights groups.

“It’s absurd,” said Sarah Leah Whitson, director of Democracy for the Arab World Now. “It invites global mockery and disdain to hear such a statement issued in front of the world by the Biden administration.”

US laws prohibit arming countries engaged in human rights abuses. But advocates say the administration of President Joe Biden is bending the facts and denying well-documented Israeli violations to appear to be in compliance with the rules.

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Whitson noted that [Biden himself](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/biden-warns-israel-losing-support-over-indiscriminate-gaza-bombing) has described Israel’s bombing of Gaza as “indiscriminate”, which would make it a war crime, and that Washington has openly recognised that Israel is impeding aid to the territory.

The Biden administration has been facing increasing pressure to enforce US law when it comes to arming Israel. A recent public [opinion poll](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/27/most-americans-disapprove-of-israels-actions-in-gaza-poll) suggested that the majority of Americans disapprove of Israel’s actions in Gaza.NSM-20 memorandum

There are several US statutes that regulate the transfer of weapons to foreign countries.

Last month, the Biden administration issued a memorandum, dubbed NSM-20, requiring credible, written assurances from the recipients of American weapons that the arms are not being used in rights violations.

The allies must also certify that American defence articles are not being used to “arbitrarily deny, restrict, or otherwise impede, directly or indirectly, the transport or delivery” of US humanitarian aid.

On Monday, the US Department of State said it received the assurances from Israel and found them “credible”.

“We have not found them [Israel] to be in violation of international humanitarian law, either when it comes to the conduct of the war or when it comes to the provision of [humanitarian assistance](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2024/3/3/are-airdrops-an-effective-way-to-deliver-humanitarian-assistance-to-gaza),” State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters.

A day later, he said the US is conducting its own assessments of the war — not merely taking Israel at its word.

“We look at those assurances, and we look at them informed by the assessments that we have had ongoing,” Miller added. “And as I said, we have not reached the conclusion with respect to Israel that they have violated international humanitarian law.”What is international humanitarian law?

International humanitarian law is a set of rules meant to protect non-combatants in armed conflict. It consists of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and subsequent international treaties aimed at limiting civilian suffering during war.

According to Whitson, apparent Israeli violations of international humanitarian law run the gamut: Israel has been accused of targeting civilians, indiscriminate bombing and disproportionate attacks.

“What we’ve seen throughout Gaza, particularly in the north, is widespread destruction of residential areas, farms, schools, universities, churches, mosques, hospitals — highlighting the indiscriminate nature of Israeli bombardment,” she told Al Jazeera.

“Even if they were targeting something arguably with a military value to them, the fact that they are doing this in such a wanton, reckless, widespread, catastrophic manner is evidence of the indiscriminate nature of the bombing.”

Moreover, [witnesses](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/18/systematic-torture-to-be-palestinian-in-an-israeli-prison#:~:text=Beaten%20brutally,tables%20and%20chairs%20were%20confiscated.) and rights groups, including Amnesty International, have accused Israel of mistreating and torturing detainees during the war.

Last month, United Nations experts also [raised concern](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/19/un-experts-warn-of-israeli-violations-against-palestinian-women-girls) about reports that Palestinian women in Israeli custody have been subjected to “multiple forms of sexual assault”.

There has been a growing number of reports about extrajudicial executions by Israeli forces in Gaza.

Earlier this month, Al Jazeera [obtained footage](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/3/22/gaza-drone-video-shows-killing-of-palestinians-in-israeli-air-attack) from an Israeli drone showing the targeting of four unarmed Palestinians on an open road in southern Gaza.While the US’s assessment of Israeli attacks is continuing, Miller said “none” have been found to be in violation of international humanitarian law.Israeli soldiers [shot dead](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/3/28/israels-war-on-gaza-live-unarmed-palestinians-killed-buried-by-bulldozer) two unarmed Palestinian men in Gaza, their bodies buried in sand and rubbish by an army bulldozer, exclusive broadcast footage obtained by Al Jazeera has shown.

At least one of the two men repeatedly waved what appeared to be white fabric, in a sign of surrender and to show that there was no threat.

They were near the Nabulsi Roundabout, southwest of Gaza City, and were trying to return to their homes in the north of the Strip via [al-Rashid Street](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/29/dozens-killed-injured-by-israeli-fire-in-gaza-while-collecting-food-aid), the only possible route, an Al Jazeera correspondent said. This is where they encountered the Israeli soldiers.

The airing of the video comes days after the United Nations Security Council [passed a resolution](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/25/un-security-council-adopts-resolution-calling-for-immediate-gaza-ceasefire) demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and amid growing calls for Israel to halt its nearly six-month assault on the besieged enclave that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and prompted warnings of imminent famine.

The footage shows one man approaching the troops, waving, before he disappears from view behind a building. Meanwhile, the other turned around but all the while appearing to raise a piece of white fabric.The man who turned around is seen being pursued by an armoured vehicle. Soldiers open fire on him and the footage shows him collapsing in the sand.A bulldozer is then used to bury two bodies, including that of the first man who had walked towards the soldiers, the video shows.

The Israeli army told Al Jazeera on Thursday that “a thorough and professional examination is required in order to assess the details of the incident”. It said the video “is edited and does not show the context of the incident”, adding that it had transferred its report “to the relevant professional bodies for review”.

Hamas condemned the killings, saying it was “further evidence of the scale of fascism and criminality that governs Zionist behaviour, in the context of the brutal war of extermination against our people in the Gaza Strip”.

It also called on the International Criminal Court to take “necessary measures” to hold Israel accountable for “the crimes they commit against children and defenceless civilians”.

The Palestinian armed group says any ceasefire agreement must include the right of Palestinians to return to their homes safely without being shot at by Israeli troops.

‘Heinous war crime’

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a civil rights and advocacy group based in the United States, called for a United Nations investigation into the “heinous war crime”, and said Israel appears to “kill Palestinians on a whim” and then treats the bodies of its victims “like trash”.

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“This genocide must be stopped, not excused or supported with weapons [and] rhetoric,” CAIR said.

Nebal Farsakh, spokesperson for the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), said, “These are brutal and terrifying scenes because we are looking at extra-judicial killings,” adding it was obvious that Israel was making an attempt to hide the evidence.

“Israel is getting away with this because of the silence of the international community,” Farsakh told Al Jazeera. “How many thousands of Palestinians should be killed before the world takes serious steps to hold Israel accountable and to have an immediate and sustained ceasefire?”

Professor Richard Falk, a former UN special rapporteur on human rights in Palestine, said the shootings were “vivid confirmation of continuing Israeli atrocities”.

They also highlighted the “unambiguous character of Israeli atrocities that are being carried out on a daily basis”, Falk told Al Jazeera.

“The eyes and ears of the world have been assaulted in real-time by this form of genocidal behaviour,” Falk said, describing the lack of condemnation from Western nations as a “shameful moment”.

Judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have unanimously ordered Israel to take all the necessary and effective action to ensure basic food supplies arrive without delay to the Palestinian population in Gaza.

The ICJ judges said in an order on Thursday that Palestinians in Gaza face worsening conditions of life and [famine](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/21/who-chief-warns-the-future-of-a-generation-in-peril-as-gaza-famine-looms) and starvation are spreading.

The court observes that Palestinians in Gaza are no longer facing only a risk of famine … but that famine is setting in,” the judges said. “At least 31 people, including 27 children, having already died of malnutrition and dehydration according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs,” they said.

In its legally binding order, the court told Israel to take “all necessary and effective measures to ensure, without delay, in full co-operation with the United Nations, the unhindered provision at scale by all concerned of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance” including food, water, fuel and medical supplies. The ICJ, however, does not have a mechanism to enforce its rulings.

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The new measures were [requested](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/6/south-africa-asks-icj-for-more-measures-against-israel-over-gaza-famine) by South Africa as part of its continuing case that accuses Israel of carrying out genocide in Gaza.

In January the ICJ, also known as the World Court, ordered Israel to refrain from any acts that could fall under the Genocide Convention and to ensure its troops commit no genocidal acts against Palestinians in Gaza.

In Thursday’s order, the court reaffirmed the January measures but added Israel must take action to ensure unhindered provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance to Palestinians throughout Gaza.

The judges added that this could be done “by increasing the capacity and number of land crossing points and maintaining them open for as long as necessary”. The court ordered Israel to submit a report in a month after the order to detail how it had given effect to the ruling.

There was no immediate comment from Israel on the order.

The crippling shortages come as Israel continues to severely restrict supplies of humanitarian aid to Gaza and presses on with its military assault, which began more than five months ago.

Israel launched its war on Gaza after Hamas fighters from the territory led an attack on southern Israel on October 7, killing at least 1,139 people, mostly civilians, according to Israeli statistics.

The Israeli assault has killed more than 32,500 people, mostly women and children, according to Palestinian authorities. More than 80 percent of Gaza’s 2.3 million residents have been displaced and entire neighbourhoods have been levelled in Israel’s bombardment and ground invasion.

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Changing situation

The court said that earlier orders imposed on Israel “do not fully address the consequences arising from the changes in the situation” in Gaza.

Al Jazeera’s Gabriel Elizondo, reporting from the UN headquarters in New York City, said the new measures are meant to act as “an enhancement if you will, or a highlighting of some of the provisional measures that were already announced”.

According to Elizondo, the ICJ said that these are meant to be “modifications to the previous provisional measures that were announced due to the change in the situation in Gaza”.

“When the first provisional measures came out in late January, Palestinians in Gaza were facing risk of famine, and the ICJ is now saying – that famine is now setting in,” Elizondo said.

This is a way for the court to tell Israel “the situation has gotten a lot worse”, Elizondo said, and that the ICJ expects Israel to abide by the measures.

In a written response earlier this month to South Africa’s request for more measures, Israel said that claims by South Africa in its request were “wholly unfounded in fact and law, morally repugnant, and represent an abuse both of the Genocide Convention and of the Court itself”.

The United States has greenlighted the transfer of billions of dollars worth of bombs and fighter jets to Israel, The Washington Post reported, even as it publicly expresses concerns about the long-threatened [Israeli invasion](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/18/biden-warns-netanyahu-against-mistake-of-invading-rafah-white-house) of Gaza’s Rafah and the [rising civilian casualties](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/3/30/israels-war-on-gaza-live-fears-grow-of-wider-conflict-after-deadly-strike) in the enclave.

The new arms package includes more than 1,800 MK84 2,000-pound bombs and 500 MK82 500-pound bombs, according to Pentagon and Department of State officials, the Washington Post reported on Friday.

The 2,000-pound bombs, which can inflict damage to people up to 1,000 feet (300 metres) away, have been “linked to previous mass-casualty events throughout Israel’s military campaign in Gaza”, the report said. The US gives $3.8bn in annual military assistance to its longtime ally.

Reporting from Washington, DC, Al Jazeera’s Kimberly Halkett said the transfer “amounts to about $2.5bn”, adding that “this is taking place despite a growing rift between both the Israeli and US governments”.

The US continues to provide [weapons packages](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/18/the-west-is-giving-israel-weapons-while-discussing-delivering-aid-to-gaza) to Israel while pushing for an end to hostilities in the five-month war and on Monday [did not veto](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/25/un-security-council-adopts-resolution-calling-for-immediate-gaza-ceasefire) a United Nations Security Council resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of captives.

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While Washington is publicly pressuring Israel to “dial back” its [war in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/), its policy moves are sending an entirely different signal, Marc Owen Jones, associate professor of Middle East studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University,

In the face of widespread international condemnation, including from Washington, Israel has said it will soon launch a ground invasion of Rafah, the southernmost city in the Gaza Strip that borders Egypt and where about 1.5 million forcibly displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

On Saturday, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticised the US, posting on X that “demanding [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu to stop killing civilians and supplying him with weapons is an unprecedented principled and moral contradiction”.

The ministry expressed regret at the “ongoing failure” on the part of the UN Security Council and of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to bring Israel to respect their decisions.

US senators have urged President Joe Biden [to cut military aid](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/12/us-senators-call-on-biden-to-condition-israel-aid-on-humanitarian-access) to Israel until it ensures access to humanitarian aid for Gaza. Many countries and rights groups have called for Israel to obey an [ICJ](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/29/world-warns-israel-to-obey-icj-on-gaza-aid-as-netanyahu-plans-rafah-assault) order to allow the unimpeded delivery of aid into Gaza, where famine has set in.US Senator Bernie Sanders slammed the move as “obscene”.

“The US cannot beg Netanyahu to stop bombing civilians one day and the next send him thousands more 2,000-pound bombs that can level entire city blocks,” he said in a post on X.

“We must end our complicity: No more bombs to Israel.” Jordan’s Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi called on the international community to stop supplying Israel with weapons.

“UN agencies are telling horror stories of suffering in Gaza. Over 30,000 killed. Over two million people starved. These facts shame the world,” he posted on X.

“Weapons must stop flowing to Israel. Israel must be forced to end this catastrophe. This is what international law, what human values, demand,” he said.

The White House declined to comment on the weapons transfers.

‘Business as usual’

Biden on Friday acknowledged “the pain being felt” by many Arab Americans over the war in Gaza. Still, he has promised continued support for Israel despite an increasingly public rift with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu abruptly cancelled a planned meeting between US and Israeli officials to review Israeli plans for an operation in Rafah, following Washington’s abstention from the Security Council vote.

In a sharp reversal, he requested for the meeting [to be rescheduled](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/28/israel-seeks-new-date-for-cancelled-us-meeting-on-rafah-offensive-plans), and it is expected to take place as early as Monday, broadcaster CNN reported.

The unfettered assistance to Israel, which aid groups say is [hindering aid to Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/29/world-warns-israel-to-obey-icj-on-gaza-aid-as-netanyahu-plans-rafah-assault) as famine-like conditions spread, is undermining Biden’s efforts to reposition the US as a “moral authority in the world,” Owen Jones told Al Jazeera.

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“We need to bear in mind that just a few weeks ago, the US passed a federal funding bill that both reaffirms military aid to Israel with over $3bn and cuts funding to [UNRWA](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/1/what-is-unrwa-and-why-it-is-important-for-palestinians),” the main group providing aid in Gaza, he said, referring to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East.

“The US’s policy is actually just business as usual.

“Biden is breaking, or at least not enforcing, the Leahy Laws,” he said, referring to US human rights laws that bar the US from supplying weapons to countries plausibly engaged in rights abuses.

“How is Biden going to position himself as any kind of moral authority when he is contravening laws that are meant to defend the human rights of people like those in Palestine?”

Reporting from Rafah, Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud said that Israel’s threats of expanding the ground invasion to Rafah City “are exhausting people here who are tired of living in a state of panic”.

The fear Rafah will suffer the same fate as Gaza City or Khan Younis, “whose public facilities and infrastructure have been obliterated”.

Countries have called for Israel [to obey](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/3/29/israels-war-on-gaza-live-netanyahu-says-army-preparing-to-enter-rafah) an International Court of Justice order to allow the unimpeded delivery of aid into Gaza, where famine has set in, as it continues to flout a United Nations Security Council resolution demanding an [immediate ceasefire](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/25/un-security-council-adopts-resolution-calling-for-immediate-gaza-ceasefire) in the enclave.

Judges at the UN’s top court, which is examining South Africa’s charge that Israel is committing genocide, unanimously delivered a [legally binding ruling](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/28/icj-orders-israel-to-take-action-to-address-famine-in-gaza) on Thursday that Israel should “take all necessary and effective measures to ensure, without delay … the unhindered provision … of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance” in Gaza.

South Africa’s presidency welcomed the order, a provisional measure in its [genocide](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/upfront/2024/2/2/can-south-africas-genocide-case-at-the-icj-stop-israel) case.

“The fact that Palestinian deaths are not solely caused by bombardment and ground attacks, but also by disease and starvation, indicates a need to protect the group’s right to exist,” it said in a statement.

Echoing the judges’ ruling, the presidency said the only way for Israel to fulfil its responsibilities to prevent genocide would be to adhere to the court’s directives and to halt military operations in Gaza.

Earlier in the week, the UN Security Council [passed a resolution](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/25/world-welcomes-unsc-resolution-calling-for-ceasefire-in-gaza) calling for an immediate ceasefire for the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and the release of all captives seized in the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on October 7.

Belgium praised the ICJ measure and said “Israel must stop starving civilians and children”. Caroline Gennez, the minister of development cooperation and urban policy, posted on X that Israel’s use of “hunger as a weapon of war” was a “flagrant violation of international law”.

Amnesty International said the World Court highlighted “the continuing catastrophic deterioration” in the situation in Gaza, noting that the order had come days after Israel blocked aid convoys from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/1/what-is-unrwa-and-why-it-is-important-for-palestinians)) from entering northern Gaza.

“This new ruling must serve as a critical reminder to all states of their clear duty to prevent genocide which requires them to ensure that all of the ICJ’s provisional measures are duly implemented,” the rights group said on X. Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that it was “committed to international law” and “places no limitation” on the amount of humanitarian aid allowed to enter the enclave.

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In a post on X, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lior Haiat blamed “operational challenges” on the ground to delivering aid and Hamas for its “abhorrent efforts to commandeer, hoard, and steal aid” as reasons for current shortages that have already caused the deaths by malnutrition and dehydration of at least 31 people, including 27 children.

Aid agencies and top UN officials have repeatedly said that Israel has [deliberately blocked](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/7/israels-blocking-of-aid-creating-apocalyptic-conditions-in-gaza) critical humanitarian supplies from reaching Gaza while bombarding the territory and besieging its few remaining hospitals.

With malnutrition among children soaring, the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) said Israel needed to “surge” humanitarian relief into Gaza or there would be starvation.

“The is nowhere else in the world where so many people face imminent famine,” WFP’s Palestine country director Matthew Hollingworth said, noting that Gaza City is the “epicentre of the crisis”.

Only 11 convoys of WFP food aid have reached the north of the Palestinian territory since the start of this year, the agency said

‘No more international law’

The ICJ order was not likely to increase the amount of assistance flowing into Gaza unless a ceasefire is reached, analyst Marc Owen Jones told Al Jazeera.

“After the last ICJ provisional measures [in January], the amount of aid entering Gaza actually decreased,” the Middle East expert at Hamad Bin Khalifa University said. “Just because the ICJ have put this ruling forward doesn’t necessarily mean Israel is going to comply.”

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He said only a ceasefire would lead to a spike in aid, adding that “otherwise, I’m afraid Israel’s response will just be rhetoric”.

Palestine’s foreign ministry said the ICJ ruling indicated Israel had “committed heinous crimes”. Nations had to “compel Israel to implement the court’s interim measures, to prevent the genocide of the Palestinian people, hold Israel and its officials accountable for this crime, and hold them accountable for the consequences”, it said in a statement.

Yet, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told relatives of soldiers held captive in Gaza that only military pressure would secure their release and the army was “preparing to enter [Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/28/israel-seeks-new-date-for-cancelled-us-meeting-on-rafah-offensive-plans)”, in the southernmost tip of Gaza where about 1.5 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

Mustafa Barghouti, general-secretary of the Palestinian National Initiative, said Israel would not stop its assault until sanctions were imposed.

“Netanyahu wants to proceed with this terrible war, and he is now even promising a much bigger massacre by attacking Rafah,” he told Al Jazeera, adding that the muted response from Western governments, with many “providing protection to Israel”, sent a message that there was “no more international law”.

The restrictions are “unprecedented”, Khan said as a procession of worshippers, far smaller than the usual Good Friday crowds, walked the Via Dolorosa – the path Jesus is said to have followed on the way to his crucifixion more than 2,000 years ago.

The Old City is unusually empty owing to the [war in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/), but Palestinian Christians were “desperate” to visit their places of worship, Khan said.

“Palestinian Christians from the occupied West Bank – not the international tourists who are staying away because of the war on Gaza – these are people who actually want to come to the Old City and celebrate Easter, but they’re not being allowed to.

Christians are usually granted access to [East Jerusalem](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/occupied-east-jerusalem/), he said, although Palestinian Muslims routinely face restrictions. Access to [Al-Aqsa Mosque](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/15/israel-blocks-thousands-of-palestinians-from-visiting-al-aqsa-mosque) has been denied to men under the age of 65 and women under the age of 50 on the third Friday of the Muslim holy month of [Ramadan](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/3/28/the-cost-of-a-ramadan-iftar-meal-around-the-world).

‘Dark days’

“These are very dark days, very difficult days,” the Reverend Munther Isaac said, speaking to Al Jazeera from Bethlehem in the West Bank. “I think the restrictions this year have definitely increased. Even for us here in Bethlehem – and Jerusalem is literally 20 minutes away from here – we don’t have access.”

“Jerusalem is very important for us, especially at Easter. We’re accustomed to … praying in the [Church of the Holy Sepulchre](https://www.aljazeera.com/videos/2018/2/25/holding-the-key-jerusalems-church-of-the-holy-sepulchre),” he said.

“This is part of our daily life under occupation. The war has added to our pain because of the magnitude of death and killing.”

Fayaz Dakkak, the owner of a family store selling religious souvenirs, said he was not expecting to make any sales. As the war rages on, the typical crowds from around the world have not descended on the city to visit the 12th-century Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site where Jesus is believed to have been crucified, buried and resurrected.

“We’ve been feeling a lot more uncomfortable this time because there’s profiling. If you’re passing by any gate, whether it’s the Damascus Gate, New Gate, Jaffa Gate, and the police officer or the soldier feels you are not Israeli, you’re stopped, you’re checked,” he said.

“Most of the time, it’s not very pleasant,” he added. While some members of the security forces carry out straightforward ID checks, others are more “violent”, he said.

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Rafi, a Christian youth coordinator, said [Israeli settlers](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/3/22/how-israeli-settlers-are-expanding-illegal-outposts-amid-gaza-war-3) had made the Old City an almost no-go zone. “Even before the war started, we saw the settlers attacking the churches and even the Christian cemeteries,” he said.

“They were attacking any priest or any nun walking inside Jerusalem. Even the pilgrims walking the Way of the Cross [Via Dolorosa] were under attack.”

Many Palestinian Christians from the occupied West Bank have been deprived of walking the Via Dolorosa this year.

Even before the war, Palestinian Christian had to request permission to visit the Old City well in advance of celebrations. Last year, the Greek Orthodox Church slammed what it called Israel’s “[heavy-handed restrictions](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/12/church-slams-israel-heavy-handed-restrictions-easter)” on freedom of worship during Easter.

Israeli police had said limits were needed for safety during the [“Holy Fire”](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2022/4/24/photos-christians-celebrate-holy-fire-ceremony-in-tense-jerusalem) celebration at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, during which a flame taken from Jesus’s tomb in the church is used to light the candles of worshippers. Christian leaders said there was no need to alter a ceremony that had been held for centuries and they believed it was part of an [ongoing Israeli policy](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2014/4/20/palestinian-christians-kept-from-holy-sites) to push Palestinians out of their  homeland.

On Saturday, April 13, Iran launched [hundreds of drones and missiles](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/13/israeli-army-says-iran-has-launched-drones-at-israel) at Israel in retaliation for a deadly [Israeli strike](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/1/several-killed-in-israeli-strike-on-iranian-consulate-in-damascus-reports) on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, that took place on April 1.

The vast majority of the projectiles were intercepted by Israel’s air defence system, with assistance from the ever-helpful United States military, and damage was minimal. Having completed its retaliation, Iran has now declared that the matter can “be deemed concluded” – although Israel is not usually one to let anyone else have the last word.

In the meantime, the barrage of criticism of Tehran’s “aggression” has continued unabated in the West.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak condemned “in the strongest terms the Iranian regime’s reckless attack against Israel”, which he insisted had once again shown that Iran was “intent on sowing chaos in its own backyard”. The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs lamented that “Iran’s long term aggressive behavior is preventing the Middle East region to live in peace and security”.

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For his part, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau whined about Iran’s “disregard for peace and stability in the region”, and regurgitated that old, tired slogan about “Israel’s right to defend itself”. Germany’s Ambassador to Israel Steffen Seibert took to social media to proclaim German solidarity “with all Israelis tonight whom Iran is terrorising with this unprecedented and ruthless attack”.

Lastly, US President Joe Biden, who was forced to cut his beach weekend short due to the developments, announced: “Our commitment to Israel’s security against threats from Iran and its proxies is ironclad.”

The Iranian attack, mind you, occurred a little over six months into Israel’s ongoing pulverisation of the Gaza Strip, which has killed [nearly 34,000 Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/4/12/weaponising-underwear-genocide-with-a-semi-pornographic-twist), including some 13,800 children. And yet given the thousands of missing persons presumed to be buried under the rubble, even these terrifying numbers are no doubt grave underestimates.

More than 76,000 people have been wounded, as the Israeli military has busied itself flattening entire neighbourhoods and blowing up schools, hospitals, and other basic infrastructure, all the while condemning the territory’s inhabitants to [famine and starvation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/28/icj-orders-israel-to-take-action-to-address-famine-in-gaza).

Talk about “terrorising”.

Indeed, [genocide](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/26/un-expert-accuses-israel-of-several-acts-of-genocide-in-gaza) is nothing if not “long term aggressive behaviour” – to borrow the Czech Foreign Ministry’s words. If the whole business weren’t so unprecedently heinous, it would be almost laughable to claim that Iran is the one “intent on sowing chaos” and disregarding “peace and stability in the region”.

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But because Israel’s outsize role as a prized US partner in crime entitles it to a total subversion of logic, genocidaires become victims and unmitigated Israeli aggression becomes “self-defence”. And never mind the April 1 Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus; that was just preemptive retaliation, right?

In light of the unceasing slaughter in Gaza, though, the Western response to the intercepted Iranian missiles and drones is sickeningly cynical. Sunak’s pathetic claim that “no one wants to see more bloodshed” fails to account for the reality that, as long as it’s Palestinian blood, it’s all totally fine.

Unfortunately, the Iranian spectacle may provide the Biden administration with exactly what it needs to shift the focus away from Gaza – and specifically US complicity in genocide. After all, it would be a sad day for the arms industry if the US had to stop sending so many weapons to such an active client.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the US was responsible for a full 69 percent of arms imports by the Israeli military between 2019 and 2023, when the all-out genocide kicked off.

So much for “peace and stability”.

But one should never underestimate the imperial utility of the good old Iranian menace in justifying whatever US policy needs justifying. Recall Tehran’s inclusion on the original “axis of evil” shortlist, courtesy of former US President George W Bush, who in his 2002 State of the Union address denounced Iran for “aggressively” pursuing weapons of mass destruction and “export[ing] terror”.

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Armed with said “axis”, the US proceeded to engage in nothing less than mass destruction and terror throughout the Middle East and beyond.

Fast-forward 22 years to the present era of destruction, and the Iranian bogeyman is as handy as ever. Following this weekend’s attack, perhaps everyone’s favourite refrain “But do you condemn Hamas?” can be updated to: “But do you condemn Iran?”

As for things genuinely worthy of condemnation, these continue to include, well, genocide in Gaza – not to mention the brazenly hypocritical Western insistence on Israel’s “right to self-defence”, which ultimately amounts to genocidal apologetics.

And as leaders continue to trip over themselves in affirmation of solidarity with Israel after this “unprecedented attack”, we’d all do well to remember that you reap what you sow – and that Iran is not the aggressor here.

Four Palestinian men are walking in the city of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip through an area largely pulverised by Israeli bombardments. There is no indication that they are carrying weapons or doing anything aside from putting one foot in front of the other, as humans do to get from one place to the next.

Suddenly, a direct air strike on the pedestrians takes out two of the men. The third continues walking and is quickly blasted to bits as well. The fourth is eliminated by yet another strike after falling to his knees.

This episode, which reportedly took place in February, is depicted in Israeli [drone footage released in March by Al Jazeera](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/3/22/gaza-drone-video-shows-killing-of-palestinians-in-israeli-air-attack). Watching the defenceless men systematically picked off from the sky in a fanatical display of firepower, one is reminded of the [Collateral Murder](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2010/4/6/video-shows-us-attack-on-iraqis) video published by WikiLeaks in 2010, in which a dozen Iraqi civilians were exuberantly massacred by helicopter-borne United States military personnel.

In the Khan Younis incident, it appears that the “crime” of the four men – meriting an instant death sentence – was their presence in one of the Israeli military’s so-called “kill zones” in Gaza, the subject of a recent expose in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz. The article specifies that “there is no written order” stipulating kill zones in the Israeli army’s “rule book”, but it’s abundantly clear that they are a very real phenomenon with very little institutional oversight. “Ultimately, the boundaries of these zones and the exact procedures of operation are subject to interpretation by commanders in that specific area,” the newspaper found.

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Speaking to Haaretz, one Israeli reserve officer described the business as follows: “In every combat zone, commanders define such kill zones. … As soon as people enter [a zone], mainly adult males, orders are to shoot and kill, even if that person is unarmed.”

So much for the world’s “[most moral army](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/16/the-myth-of-israels-most-moral)”.

In sum, then, Palestinians can be slaughtered simply for finding themselves in an area that happens to have been arbitrarily designated a “kill zone” by some Israeli commander or another.

And if you’re killed in a “kill zone”, chances are you’ll be marked down by Israel as a “terrorist”, which certainly helps in terms of inflating the casualty count of “bad guys” in a war that as of mid-March had already killed [more than 13,000](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/17/over-13000-children-killed-in-gaza-others-severely-malnourished-unicef) Palestinian children.

According to Haaretz, of the more than 32,000 Palestinians estimated to have been killed in Gaza over the past six months, the Israeli army says 9,000 or so were “terrorists” – a claim that has failed to convince even many army commanders. As one officer who previously served in Gaza commented to the newspaper: “In practice, a terrorist is anyone the [military] has killed in the areas in which its forces operate.”

Not that the Zionist politico-military establishment hasn’t been known to deploy the terms “Palestinian” and “terrorist” more or less interchangeably. Indeed, 75 years of perverse propaganda has sought to persuade the world that the victims of [continuous terrorisation](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/8/12/israel-normalising-terror-one-dawn-at-a-time) by Israel are in fact the ones doing the terrorising.

Now the victims of “kill zones” get to be terrorists too. Never mind that, regarding the case of the four pedestrians in Khan Younis, a senior Israeli military officer remarked to Haaretz: “They were unarmed. They didn’t endanger our forces in the area in which they were walking.”

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The article goes on to quote the same officer’s speculation that many civilians in Gaza had met their demise after entering areas they thought the army had already abandoned, possibly in the hopes of finding food that had been left behind: “When they went to such places, they were shot, perceived as people who could harm our forces.”

An Israeli military spokesperson has huffily denied the “kill zone” reports. And yet at the end of the day, the Gaza Strip is one big kill zone – with literally no space off limits to killing. How else do you explain massacres at Palestinian [hospitals](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/20/israeli-military-says-90-people-killed-in-gazas-al-shifa-hospital-raid) and United Nations [shelters](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/24/several-killed-in-israeli-attack-on-un-shelter-housing-800-in-southern-gaza) or the [slaughter](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/1/flour-massacre-how-gaza-food-killings-unfolded-and-israels-story-changed) of people waiting in line for food aid as children [starve to death](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/3/4/emaciated-child-dies-from-lack-of-food-and-medicine-in-gaza)?

To be sure, Israel has long boasted of its alleged prowess in conducting surgically precise air strikes and targeted killings. But even if the figure of 9,000 dead “terrorists” tallied by the Israeli army had any basis in reality, it’s difficult to account for more than 23,000 “collateral murders”, to borrow the WikiLeaks phrasing.

Unless, of course, collaterality has nothing to do with it and Israel is simply straight up targeting civilians – which, after all, is how [genocide](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/26/un-expert-accuses-israel-of-several-acts-of-genocide-in-gaza) works, isn’t it?

After six months of apocalyptic war, Gaza today is a bunch of “kill zones” within a larger kill zone. And as Israel continues its quest to normalise depravity across the board, the current Israeli monopoly on terrorism will certainly be tough to break.

The Israeli military has [withdrawn](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/1/no-life-here-israeli-army-withdraws-from-al-shifa-hospital-in-gaza) from the Gaza Strip’s largest hospital after a two-week raid, leaving behind scenes of devastation.

Hundreds of people returned to al-Shifa Hospital and the surrounding area after the withdrawal early on Monday. They reported finding bodies strewn inside and outside the facility.

Mohammed Mahdi, who was among those who returned, described a scene of “total destruction”. He said several buildings had been burned down and that he had counted six bodies in the area, including two in the hospital courtyard.

Another resident, Yahia Abu Auf, said army bulldozers had ploughed over a makeshift cemetery inside the hospital compound, where there were still patients, medical workers and displaced people sheltering.

Several patients have been taken to the nearby Ahli Arab Hospital, he added.

“The situation is indescribable,” he said. “The occupation destroyed all sense of life here.”

Israel has accused Hamas of using hospitals for military purposes and has raided several medical facilities. Critics accuse the Israeli army of recklessly endangering civilians and of decimating a health sector already overwhelmed with war wounded.The military had previously raided al-Shifa Hospital in November.

US President Joe Biden’s administration is weighing whether to go ahead with an $18bn arms transfer package to Israel that would include dozens of F-15 aircraft, according to the Reuters news agency.

The sale of 25 F-15s has been under review since the US received the formal request in January 2023, Reuters reported, citing one of five sources familiar with the plans, long before Israel’s six-month-old military campaign in Gaza. This sale would boost that number to as many as 50 F-15s

Accelerating delivery of the aircraft was among the top requests from Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant, who [visited Washington](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/26/pentagon-chief-says-civilian-death-toll-in-gaza-far-too-high) last week and held talks with US officials including National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, a second source said.

Biden faces pressure from foreign partners, human rights groups and some of his fellow Democrats in Congress to impose conditions on arms transfers to rein in Israel’s offensive in Gaza where health officials say at least 32,845 Palestinians have been killed, many of them civilians.

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One US official said that even if formal notification were sent to Congress tomorrow and the deal was finalised immediately, the earliest the aircraft would be delivered would be 2029. Israel is seeking to beef up its already formidable fleet of warplanes not just for its continuing fight against Hamas but to ward off any further threat from the Tehran-backed Lebanese [armed group Hezbollah](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/10/what-is-hezbollah-a-look-at-the-lebanese-armed-group-backing-hamas) on its northern border as well as from regional rival Iran.

House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul gave the green light for the F-15 sale on January 30, a committee aide told Reuters, when the relevant congressional offices responsible for approving major arms transfers were notified.

Administration-Congressional deliberations on the F-15 case have already occurred,” the second source familiar with the matter said, but added that some of the four officers required to sign off on any arms transfers had yet to do so.

US law requires Congress to be notified of significant foreign military sales agreements and allows it to block such sales by passing a resolution of disapproval if there is concern about human rights violations or other issues, although no such resolution has ever passed and survived a presidential veto.

An informal review process allows the Democratic and Republican leaders of foreign affairs committees to vet such agreements before a formal notification to Congress.

Planes, munitions and support

The Israel package includes 50 F-15 aircraft, and support services, training, maintenance, sustainment and many years of contractor support during the jets’ lifecycle, which could typically go for up to two decades, the sources told Reuters.

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One source said the Biden administration had expressed support to Israel for its F-15 request. Washington has publicly expressed concern about Israel’s proposed [military offensive in Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/25/kamala-harris-says-us-wont-rule-out-consequences-if-israel-invades-rafah), the southernmost city of the Gaza Strip where many Palestinians have taken shelter after being displaced by Israel’s assault.

Israel is also facing accusations it has violated international humanitarian law – a set of rules aimed at protecting civilians in armed conflicts, including the Geneva Conventions.

Witnesses and rights groups have accused Israel of indiscriminate bombing, targeting civilian infrastructure, [mistreating detainees](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/13/after-the-unrwa-report-more-accounts-of-israels-torture-in-gaza), [extrajudicial executions](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/20/palestinians-accuse-israeli-forces-of-executing-19-civilians-in-gaza) and using humanitarian aid as a weapon of war, among other abuses.

But last week, the [State Department](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/27/us-overlooks-israeli-abuses-in-gaza-to-justify-arms-transfers-advocates) said it had not found Israel to be in violation of international humanitarian law in any incident.

This sale is separate from the $14bn in aid for Israel that Biden has asked Congress to approve as part of a sweeping $95bn national security supplemental spending package that also includes aid for Ukraine and Taiwan.

Washington gives $3.8bn in annual military assistance to Israel, and the administration has so far resisted calls to condition any arms transfers even though senior US officials have criticised Israel over the high civilian death toll.

On Sunday, Democratic Senator Jeff Merkley invoked the Easter holiday to condemn the war on Gaza.

“We must also recognise that America is complicit in this tragedy by resupplying Israel with bombs and failing to use America’s leverage to increase aid delivered into Gaza,” he wrote in a series of social media posts. The United Nations Human Rights Council has adopted a resolution calling for Israel to be held accountable for possible war crimes and crimes against humanity [committed](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/) in the Gaza Strip, and demanding a halt to all arms sales to the country.

Friday’s vote marked the first time that the UN’s top rights body has taken a position on the nearly six-month war, [highlighting warnings of “genocide”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/26/un-expert-accuses-israel-of-several-acts-of-genocide-in-gaza) in the conflict that has killed more than 33,000 people.

The resolution passed with 28 of the council’s 47 member states voting in favour. The United States and Germany were among the six countries that opposed it, while France, Albania and 11 other countries abstained. The council said the vote was a necessary measure, among other things, “to prevent further violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights”.

It stressed that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in January “that there is a plausible risk of genocide” in Gaza, as it expressed “grave concern at reports of serious human rights violations … including of possible war crimes and crimes against humanity” in the enclave. The World Court in March [unanimously ordered](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/28/icj-orders-israel-to-take-action-to-address-famine-in-gaza) Israel to take all the necessary and effective action to ensure basic food supplies arrive without delay to the territory, warning that Palestinians face worsening conditions and famine and starvation are spreading.

“Symbolically this is significant. This is the first time that the top human rights body had taken a position on this conflict. This is reflective of the unprecedented nature of this [conflict],” Marc Owen Jones, an associate professor on Middle Eastern studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar

Friday’s resolution was brought forward by Pakistan on behalf of all the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states except Albania.

Meirav Eilon Shahar, Israel’s ambassador to the UN in Geneva, slammed the measure as “a stain for the Human Rights Council and for the UN as a whole”.

The vote follows the UN Security Council’s passage of a resolution [calling for a ceasefire](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/26/will-the-un-ceasefire-resolution-stop-israels-war-on-gaza) in March.

While countries like Canada, the Netherlands, Japan, Spain and Belgium have suspended arms sales to Israel, several other Western nations continue to supply lethal weapons despite mounting criticism over the growing civilian casualties.

The United States [has supplied](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/1/us-doubles-down-on-its-defence-of-arming-israel-despite-gaza-atrocities) the bulk of Israel’s defence requirements, including 2000-pound bunker buster bombs. This year, the US Congress also approved an additional $14bn military aid package to Israel.

The council resolution also condemned “the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in Gaza”, where the UN has warned that [famine is looming](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/3/26/they-scream-in-hunger-how-israel-is-starving-palestinians-in-gaza).

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It denounced “the unlawful denial of humanitarian access, willful impediment to relief supplies and deprivation of objects indispensable to the survival of civilians, including food, water, electricity, fuel and telecommunications, by Israel”.

The rights body criticised as well Israel’s persistent refusal to cooperate with numerous investigations ordered by it. An Israeli air raid has killed six international aid workers and a Palestinian driver.

The United States-based aid group, World Central Kitchen (WCK), confirmed on Tuesday that its staff members were killed in a “targeted attack” by the Israeli military. The dead were from Palestine, Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom, as well as a US-Canada citizen.

WCK said the attack came as its staff were delivering food from its latest shipment to Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been pushed to the brink of famine by Israel’s offensive.

Footage showed the bodies of those killed at a hospital in the central town of Deir el-Balah. Several of them wore protective gear with the charity’s logo.

WCK said it was immediately suspending operations in the region. The strike marked a big setback to efforts to deliver aid by sea, a route that has been [developed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/12/first-aid-ship-to-gaza-leaves-cyprus-port) due to Israeli restrictions on access to Gaza, where experts say famine is imminent.

“The WCK team was traveling in a deconflicted zone in two armored cars branded with the WCK logo and a soft skin vehicle,” the charity said in a statement.

“Despite coordinating movements with the [Israeli army], the convoy was hit as it was leaving the Deir al-Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tons of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route.”

Erin Gore, the CEO of the charity, said, “This is not only an attack against WCK, this is an attack on humanitarian organisations showing up in the most dire of situations where food is being used as a weapon of war. This is unforgivable.”

The bodies of the aid workers have been taken to a hospital in the southern city of Rafah on the Egyptian border. The foreigners’ bodies will be evacuated out of Gaza and the Palestinian driver’s body will be handed to his family in Rafah for buria

For the past six months, Israel has put a lot of effort into covering up its genocidal crimes in Gaza. One of the most brutal ways it does this is by routinely threatening, targeting and assassinating Palestinian journalists.

The US-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has reported that at least 90 Palestinian journalists have been killed since October 7 alongside two Israelis and three Lebanese. This is the highest death toll of journalists in any modern conflict that CPJ has monitored. Another 25 Palestinian journalists have been detained by Israeli forces, and four are missing.

Israel also bans foreign media outlets from entering Gaza, forcing them to report from Tel Aviv, Jerusalem or southern Israel. On Israeli territory, they must comply with the rules and censorship of the [Israeli Military Censor](https://theintercept.com/2023/12/23/israel-military-idf-media-censor/), which is part of the Israeli army and requires media materials be submitted for its review prior to publication or broadcasting. On Monday, the Israeli Knesset also [passed](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/4/1/knesset-passes-a-law-that-could-shutdown-al-jazeera-in-israel) a law allowing its government to shut down news networks. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to use the legislation to ban Al Jazeera.

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Killing journalists and censoring media operating in Israel are supposed to ensure that global coverage reflects Israel’s spin on events or ignores aspects of its scorched earth conduct in Gaza.

But this strategy is failing for three reasons. First, because scores of highly motivated Palestinian journalists continue to brave Israeli bombardment and fire to report on events on the ground. Second, because ordinary Palestinians also document and share on social media their coverage of events. Third, because international media increasingly question Israeli accounts of events and demand more verified facts.

Worse for Israel, its behaviour to kill first, accuse the dead of terrorism and then not answer any questions is actually backfiring. It is generating greater global attention and media coverage of the assassinations of Palestinian journalists along with demands for Israeli political and legal accountability, which increased after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) proclaimed that Israel is “plausibly” carrying out genocidal acts in Gaza.

This backlash is increasingly apparent even in American mainstream media, which tend to slant pro-Israel. In an unusually bold [article](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/20/media/israel-journalists-killed-questions/index.html) published on CNN’s website on March 20, Oliver Darcy, the channel’s senior media reporter, openly criticised the Israeli armed forces and government for the deaths of journalists in Gaza.

“With each death, the world sees a little less from the war-torn region. It is incumbent on Israel, which is responsible for the conduct of its military forces, to fully explain its actions when a member of the press is killed. So far, however, the [Israeli military] has been less than forthcoming,” Darcy wrote.

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United States media outlets have also launched their own investigations into the assassinations of Palestinian journalists. The Washington Post, for example, investigated the killings of two Palestinian journalists – Al Jazeera’s [Hamza Dahdouh](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/7/hamza-son-of-al-jazeeras-wael-dahdouh-killed-in-israeli-attack-in-gaza) and Mustafa Thuraya – by an Israeli missile that hit their car on January 7 near Khan Younis. Its research raised significant doubts about Israel’s explanation that the men were “terrorists” who threatened Israeli troops.

Representatives of major US media outlets – including NBC, CNN, The New York Times and The New Yorker – also [signed a letter](https://cpj.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/IOPT-News-Organizations-Letter.pdf) with other foreign media organisations calling on Israel to protect Palestinian journalists’ rights and hold to account those responsible for their deaths.

Meanwhile, various nonprofit organisations have dedicated significant resources to covering the violations against and killings of Palestinian journalists. The CPJ, Reporters Without Borders and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which represents 600,000 journalists in 140 countries, have issued regular reports on the situation in Gaza. On February 26, the IFJ observed the International Day for Palestinian Journalists and called on its affiliates to support and come out in solidarity with them.

The Security in Context network of international scholars published a [paper](https://www.securityincontext.com/posts/shooting-the-messenger-2-follow-up-articles) revealing how Israel restricts media “beyond detentions and assassinations, to target media institutions, resulting in the complete or partial destruction of over 60 local and foreign media institutions”.

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The United Nations has also extensively documented the plight of Palestinian journalists. In early February, five special rapporteurs of the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights warned: “We have received disturbing reports that, despite being clearly identifiable in jackets and helmets marked ‘press’ or traveling in well-marked press vehicles, journalists have come under attack, which would seem to indicate that the killings, injury, and detention are a deliberate strategy by Israeli forces to obstruct the media and silence critical reporting.”

They asked the ICJ and the International Criminal Court to pay special attention to crimes committed against Palestinian media workers.

Many more international expressions of support for Palestinian journalists have come from their colleagues around the world.

Seasoned American journalist Lawrence “Larry” Pintak, for decades a CBS foreign correspondent and later the founding dean of the Edward R Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University, is certain that Israel has attacked and killed journalists – because he experienced one such attack on his own film crew in southern Lebanon in 1984.

“This is not a new story,” he told me in a recent interview. “Journalists who know the Middle East have no doubt that Israel has targeted journalists, as many of us witnessed first-hand. But it is also likely that some were killed by random hits.”

Only independent investigations can reveal the facts of any killing, but Israel never allows these to happen. The cumulative evidence of Israel assassinating journalists causes more international media organisations and individuals to doubt Israeli accounts of new deaths, Pintak said.

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“We journalists are a tribe, and we become defensive when someone attacks us. This is happening with Israel’s repeated denial that it kills journalists. It creates a backlash, for sure, as the media now demands more facts before believing or rejecting Israel’s accounts, and media organisations themselves now conduct many of the forensic investigations that generate facts.”

Israel’s attacks on journalists increase scrutiny, rather than curtail it, as scores of highly motivated younger Palestinian journalists simply “pick up the fallen cameras of their assassinated colleagues and keep filming”, he said.

Apart from extending solidarity within the profession, media professionals across the world are also concerned about the larger effect of the impunity with which Israel targets Palestinian journalists.

Julia Bacha, award-winning producer of Boycott and other documentaries on Palestine-Israel, explained in a phone interview that beyond Israel’s criminal actions and Palestinian families’ grief, the targeting of Palestinian journalists endangers their colleagues elsewhere as well.

“This issue is critical because what happens here will impact journalism elsewhere for years. We cannot let this moment in modern history of the unprecedented rate of killing journalists pass without urgent action to protect the media during wars. It would send a very bad message to others in the world, especially autocrats who feel they can ignore laws and kill journalists as they wish. Journalists must be allowed to work safely because we can only hold people accountable for criminal deeds if we have the facts that only on-the-spot journalists can gather, verify and disseminate,”. Indeed, by mass killing Palestinian journalists, Israel positions itself alongside other brutal regimes that deny or restrict media coverage of their actions, which further exposes the big holes in its democratic credentials that it tries to project to international media. By attacking Palestinian journalists and denying foreign media access to Gaza, it has shot itself in the foot and weakened its own credibility. Israel is clearly losing its war on truth.World leaders have expressed horror and anger following an [Israeli air strike](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/2/gaza-aid-worker-attack-what-do-we-know) that killed seven aid workers in the central Gaza Strip, and reiterated calls for an immediate ceasefire.

United States-based aid group World Central Kitchen (WCK) confirmed on Tuesday that its staff members were killed in a “targeted attack” by the Israeli military. The dead were from Palestine, Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom, and US-Canada.

The NGO said its team was traveling in a “deconflicted” area in a convoy of “two armored cars branded with the WCK logo and a soft skin vehicle” at the time of the strike.

WCK called on Israel to stop “this indiscriminate killing” in Gaza, It also announced that it was “pausing [its] operations in the region”

“Despite coordinating movements with the IDF, the convoy was hit as it was leaving the Deir al-Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tons of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route,” it said.

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World leaders echoed the NGO’s anger, as Israel’s onslaught on Gaza continues to worsen its global image.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese confirmed one of the killed aid workers was Australian national Zomi Frankcom.

Speaking at a news conference in Brisbane, Albanese said Frankcom’s death was “completely unacceptable” and “beyond any reasonable circumstances”.

“This news today is tragic. DFAT have also requested a call-in from the Israeli ambassador as well,” Albanese said, referring to Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. “We want full accountability for this. This is a tragedy that should never have occurred.

“The truth is that this is beyond any reasonable circumstances that someone going about providing aid and humanitarian assistance should lose their life and there were four aid workers as well as a Palestinian driver in this vehicle,”

Albanese also reiterated calls for a “sustainable ceasefire”. “Australians want to see an end to this conflict,” he said.

DFAT said earlier in a statement that Australia has been “very clear that we expect humanitarian workers in Gaza to have safe and unimpeded access to do their lifesaving work”.

UK Foreign Minister David Cameron described the killings as “deeply distressing”, calling on Israel to investigate and provide an explanation.

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“British Nationals are reported to have been killed, we are urgently working to verify this information and will provide full support to their families,” Cameron said on X.

“It is essential that humanitarian workers are protected and able to carry out their work. We have called on Israel to immediately investigate and provide a full, transparent explanation of what happened.”

Poland’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed condolences to the family of its citizen who was killed in a post on X. It added that it “objects to the disregard for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians, including humanitarian workers”.

A foreign ministry spokesman said Warsaw had requested an “explanation from the Israeli embassy, the security forces and the Israeli military”, adding that the ministry was currently relying on information from the WCK.

Spain’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Jose Manuel Albares said he was “horrified” by the deaths of the aid workers. “Spain supports their work. We demand a ceasefire and the entry of humanitarian aid,” he said.

Janez Lenarcic, the European Union’s humanitarian affairs commissioner, also condemned the attack and called for a ceasefire.

“This must stop. Now,” he said in a post on X.

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Al Jazeera’s Hind Khoudary, reporting from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir el-Balah, where the deceased’s bodies were taken, said she had spoken with the aid workers earlier in the day.

“Everyone in the hospital is amazed and astonished, they don’t believe Israeli forces targeted internationals,” Khoudary said.

The Israeli military has said it is investigating “to understand all the circumstances of the incident” and that it makes “extensive efforts to enable the safe delivery of humanitarian aid”.

Several hours later, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the strike was unintended.

“This happens in wartime,” he declared. “We are thoroughly looking into it, are in contact with the governments (of the foreigners among the dead) and will do everything to ensure it does not happen again.”

The invading Israeli army ought to have erected signs throughout Gaza that read: “Don’t feed the Palestinians: Punishable by death.”To understand why seven aid workers were killed by Israel earlier this week in Gaza only requires a short-term memory.

Their deaths were not a “tragic event … that happens in war”, as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [claimed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/2/netanyahu-admits-israeli-forces-killed-ngo-workers-in-gaza) in a statement meant to blunt the “outrage” over the killings.

No, the seven souls, employed by World Central Kitchen (WCK) travelling in a convoy in Deir el-Balah after unloading 100 tonnes of food aid at its central Gaza warehouse, were casualties of a directive issued by Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant on October 9.

Gallant’s remarks were televised to convey to the world Israel’s uncompromising resolve and intent.

“We are imposing a complete siege on Gaza. There will be no electricity, no food, no water, no fuel, everything will be closed. We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly,” Gallant [said](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/9/israeli-defence-minister-orders-complete-siege-on-gaza).

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Gallant has kept his word. Famine is rampant in Gaza. Israel’s aim is to starve Palestinians into submission and capitulation. Anyone, from anywhere who feeds the Palestinians is, de facto, a legitimate military target and Israel has acted “accordingly”.

The WCK staff were not considered humanitarians by Israel’s occupation forces, but collaborators aiding and abetting the Palestinians who perpetrated the October 7 assault on Israel and subsequently seized captives turned negotiating pawns.

That is why the WCK convoy was fired upon, and the occupants summarily killed. Gallant made clear the “rules of engagement” on October 9.

No one of any consequence in Washington, London, Paris, Berlin, or Ottawa demurred, let alone objected, to Israel’s designs to lay “siege” to Gaza in any way, and by whatever means, it, and it alone, saw fit.

That is also why the so-called “outrage” that the killings provoked in Western capitals has struck me as largely performative and hypocritical, as have the perfunctory demands for “independent” probes into the lethal attack.

Beyond offering Gallant their unqualified consent to do whatever he wanted to do in Gaza, the presidents and prime ministers now expressing their calibrated outrage have, year after disgraceful year, granted Israel carte blanche to imprison Palestinians, torture Palestinians, invade Palestinian homes, steal Palestinian land, destroy Palestinian crops, and, of course, shoot, maim and kill Palestinians at will.

These same, suddenly outraged presidents and prime ministers have watched, approvingly, as Israel has gone about systematically denying the Palestinians shelter by obliterating their homes and neighbourhoods; denying them care and comfort by storming and obliterating hospitals; denying them education by obliterating their schools and universities; denying them places of worship by obliterating their churches and mosques; denying them their roots and past by obliterating their libraries, museums and historical sites.

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These same presidents and prime ministers nodded in fulsome agreement with Gallant: Israel’s adversaries – without distinction – were indeed “human animals” and the inevitable consequences of the “siege” of Gaza were not only acceptable but warranted.

So, count me as unconvinced and unimpressed by this trite, meaningless censure of Israel. For months, these same presidents and prime ministers have been spouting the same hollow bromide: Israel must do more to protect “innocent civilians”; otherwise, we will trot out the same hollow bromide.

It is a pathetic pantomime. These presidents and prime ministers will always choose “Israel’s right to defend itself” over international law and the “rules” of war and the disposable lives of seven humanitarian workers be damned.

Remember, these are the same presidents and prime ministers who instantly dismissed reports produced by human rights groups which established that, for decades, Israel has committed “the crime against humanity of apartheid” in its methodical persecution of Palestinians.

The reports stood not only as indictments, but warnings of what was inevitably to come if the injustices set out in such clinical and persuasive detail were not finally acknowledged and addressed in tangible ways by a galvanised “international community”.

Predictably, those prescient warnings went unheeded. The result: a still unfolding genocide and all the murderous madness on unrelenting display.

Ah, but Israel’s apologists will say: Israel admits its “errors” and punishes those responsible. In this “unfortunate” case, two Israeli officers have been “[fired](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/4/5/israels-war-on-gaza-live-biden-presses-israel-for-immediate-ceasefire?update=2820194)” and three others “reprimanded” for “violating” the “army’s rules of engagement”.

When the outrage ebbs – as it already has – the “punished” will, in due course, be rehabilitated since, as Israel’s National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has in effect said, the “abandoned” officers were just following Gallant’s orders.

“The chief of staff’s decision to dismiss senior officers is an abandonment of the fighters in the middle of a war and a serious mistake that conveys weakness,” the voluble minister [wrote](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/5/israeli-military-sacks-two-officers-over-drone-strikes-on-aid-convoy) on X. “Even if there are mistakes in identification, soldiers are backed up in war.”

Their penance will be short. I suspect that most Israelis, like Ben-Gvir and Netanyahu, will close ranks behind “the fighters” who did what they were told to do by Gallant on October 9. When your foe is a “human animal”, the only rule of engagement is “acting accordingly”.

The other part of this pantomime is steeped in politics. Nervous Democrats can count. In recent presidential primaries, more than 500,000 Democrats have registered their fury with Joe Biden’s embrace of Netanyahu’s plan to erase Gaza and, ultimately, to absorb it and the occupied West Bank. They have voted “uncommitted” – or a variation of the term – in states that the president had carried by slim margins in 2020.

So, to mollify a movement that some silly observers insisted was confined to Michigan’s suburbs, Biden’s reliable surrogates, including former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, are – surprise, surprise – signing a [letter](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/6/us-democrats-urge-biden-to-halt-weapons-transfer-to-israel-amid-gaza-war) dipped in Pixie dust advising Biden to make US military support to Israel contingent on the protection of Palestinian civilians in the wake of the deadly ambush of the aid workers.

The letter is 33,000 dead Palestinians too late. It is not going to convince the growing legion of “uncommitted” Democratic voters that “Zionist” Joe is poised to change his engrained attitudes towards Israel or his steadfast support for razing Gaza along with extinguishing Hamas.

Come November, the Democratic Party establishment will have to reckon with this fact: A Democratic president sacrificed the presidency and democracy – his strained rhetoric, not mine – to save Netanyahu and assuage Israel’s killing rage. The United Nations Human Rights Council has adopted a resolution calling for Israel to be held accountable for possible war crimes and crimes against humanity [committed](https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/) in the Gaza Strip, and demanding a halt to all arms sales to the country.Friday’s vote marked the first time that the UN’s top rights body has taken a position on the nearly six-month war, [highlighting warnings of “genocide”](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/26/un-expert-accuses-israel-of-several-acts-of-genocide-in-gaza) in the conflict that has killed more than 33,000 people. The resolution passed with 28 of the council’s 47 member states voting in favour. The United States and Germany were among the six countries that opposed it, while France, Albania and 11 other countries abstained. The council said the vote was a necessary measure, among other things, “to prevent further violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights”.

It stressed that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in January “that there is a plausible risk of genocide” in Gaza, as it expressed “grave concern at reports of serious human rights violations … including of possible war crimes and crimes against humanity” in the enclave.

The World Court in March [unanimously ordered](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/28/icj-orders-israel-to-take-action-to-address-famine-in-gaza) Israel to take all the necessary and effective action to ensure basic food supplies arrive without delay to the territory, warning that Palestinians face worsening conditions and famine and starvation are spreading.

“Symbolically this is significant. This is the first time that the top human rights body had taken a position on this conflict. This is reflective of the unprecedented nature of this [conflict],” Marc Owen Jones, an associate professor on Middle Eastern studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar, told Al Jazeera

Friday’s resolution was brought forward by Pakistan on behalf of all the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states except Albania.

Meirav Eilon Shahar, Israel’s ambassador to the UN in Geneva, slammed the measure as “a stain for the Human Rights Council and for the UN as a whole”.

The vote follows the UN Security Council’s passage of a resolution [calling for a ceasefire](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/26/will-the-un-ceasefire-resolution-stop-israels-war-on-gaza) in March.

While countries like Canada, the Netherlands, Japan, Spain and Belgium have suspended arms sales to Israel, several other Western nations continue to supply lethal weapons despite mounting criticism over the growing civilian casualties.

The United States [has supplied](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/1/us-doubles-down-on-its-defence-of-arming-israel-despite-gaza-atrocities) the bulk of Israel’s defence requirements, including 2000-pound bunker buster bombs. This year, the US Congress also approved an additional $14bn military aid package to Israel.

The council resolution also condemned “the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in Gaza”, where the UN has warned that [famine is looming](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/3/26/they-scream-in-hunger-how-israel-is-starving-palestinians-in-gaza).

It denounced “the unlawful denial of humanitarian access, willful impediment to relief supplies and deprivation of objects indispensable to the survival of civilians, including food, water, electricity, fuel and telecommunications, by Israel”.

The rights body criticised as well Israel’s persistent refusal to cooperate with numerous investigations ordered by it. For a very long time, many in the Western world have not engaged at all with the issues stemming from the occupation of Palestine. The occupation was in the news, every year or so, for a day or two, and then it would go again. It was too “complicated”, those who knew about the context – on either side – were too passionate. So many opted to remain neutral. Many more believed the smears against the Palestinian people.

However, the scale and severity of brutality that has defined the past six months of conflict has put an end to the widespread apathy towards the suffering of the Palestinian people. The wall-to-wall media coverage, thanks to fearless reporting from organisations like Al Jazeera and Palestinian journalists on the ground, has opened people’s eyes to the reality people in Gaza, and the rest of Palestine, have had to endure for generations. At Action For Humanity, one of the leading NGOs working in Gaza and influencing policymakers in the United Kingdom, we have commissioned polling by YouGov and found that 56 percent of the UK are now in favour of halting arms exports to Israel. Only 17 percent are against and the rest are unsure. This is huge. We have been polling the public on conflicts like Syria and Yemen for years and never have the UK public not just been so aware of a conflict, but also feel so passionately about it.

Furthermore, when asked, 59 percent of the respondents said they felt Israel was committing human rights abuses in Gaza – almost three in five people and just 12 percent felt this was not the case.

And it’s worth noting this survey was conducted before the April 1 killing of World Central Kitchen aid workers – an atrocity which has horrified the world, even the UK and US governments. We now anticipate, due to the widespread condemnation of this event, that the number of people who realise what horrors are being committed and want no part of it, is higher.

Other polling by YouGov has [shown](https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/48675-british-attitudes-to-the-israel-gaza-conflict-february-2024-update) that, the longer this war on Gaza goes on, the more people are likely to support a ceasefire (from 59 percent in November to 66 percent in February), are more likely to think the attack on Gaza is not justified (from 44 percent in November to 45 percent in February) and are more likely to want peace talks (61 percent in November to 66 percent in February).

And this is a pattern we are seeing all across the Western world. In the United States, the biggest backer of Israel on the global stage, it is not just the administration in the White House that is struggling to attempt to justify the accelerating civilian death toll, the public too are showing disapproval. A CBS/YouGov poll found that in October 47 percent – almost half- of the US supported sending weapons to Israel, this month the number has plummeted to just 32 percent – less than a third, and that support for a ceasefire is growing.We believe that this is the case across the West and now that the overwhelming majority of the Western public are becoming more and more aware of the crimes against humanity that are being committed in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem, the more people are completely appalled. And even those who once felt the huge civilian death toll in Gaza were justified and realising in increasing numbers that nothing on this earth can justify what is happening.

However, sadly, the politicians of Western governments are completely out of step with their public’s mood. Not only is this morally reprehensible, but it is politically shortsighted.

The year 2024 has been called “the year of elections”, with at least 49 percent of the world voting at some point this year, politicians who do not realise their publics want them to stop facilitating and supporting human rights abuses in Gaza, face electoral defeat – even if they refuse to face their conscience.

Here in the UK, the Labour Party, which many believe will form the next government, have also been behind the public’s growing demand to stop arming Israel – even though our polling found that a huge 71 percent of those who intended to vote Labour at the next election believe the UK government should stop funding Israel.

For decades, Western states were able to support abuses against Palestinians with impunity due to public ignorance on the issue – due to people not paying attention to what’s happening, and buying into lies. This is now over, and the horrific way Israel conducted its war on Gaza is the reason why. Humanity, in all its forms, everywhere, is fundamentally good. Most humans, at their core, believe in peace and justice. They know that murdering innocents is wrong. Now the world is paying attention to Gaza, everyone can see what an unnatural, horrendous reality Palestinians are forced to endure, and they want no more of it.  When in early October we, Palestinians, laid out to the world what was going to happen, our testimonies and foresight were [seen](https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=B-7ofzxz7fI) as an exaggeration.

Our warnings of Israel’s terrifying enthusiasm for using excessive violence were not taken seriously. Worse, our warnings that Israel was going to commit killings of Palestinians on a massive scale were dubbed “anti-Semitic”.

Today, the official statistics say 33,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli air strikes with US-made bombs, shelling and field executions in Gaza and the West Bank. This number does not account for all those “missing” under the rubble, shot dead in the streets or in their homes by the occupation soldiers, or [buried under the sand](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/28/israeli-soldiers-shoot-dead-two-unarmed-palestinian-men-in-gaza-video) by their bulldozers.

And while Gaza is bearing the brunt of Israel’s tormenting violence, Palestinians in the West Bank are being arrested by the thousands, including children, most of whom are denied trial. They are held under torturous and abusive conditions that have resulted in the killing of at least 13 Palestinian captives in the last six months.Meanwhile, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship as well as Palestinians in Jerusalem suffer under Israel’s draconian apartheid laws while being policed, detained, tortured and attacked by Israeli mobs for simply sharing social media posts or consuming what Israel calls “[terrorist media](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/8/knesset-introduces-consumption-of-terrorist-publication-as-offense)”.

If I were to describe the past 26 weeks, it would be one hour after another of just barely pulling through. I have asked myself, what is the point of writing another piece about Israel’s remorseless sadism? Between pitching this article and finding the strength to actually write it, more than 3,000 Palestinian children, women and men were killed. Al-Shifa Medical Complex was completely destroyed and the extrajudicial killings in the West Bank have only intensified.

The feeling of numbness, of paralysis among Palestinians is one of the aims of the Israeli “attrition” strategy. A war of attrition is meant to create the conditions to drain, exhaust and weaken an opponent. It is meant to diminish the capacity to fight back.

Israel’s goal is the emotional, moral and mental depletion of those resisting its occupation and colonisation so they lose motivation and commitment to engage and mobilise in the face of brute repression.

It has applied this strategy in “peacetime” as well. Following in the footsteps of European colonialists and their logic of pacification, Israel has sought to wear down the Palestinian population into full submission by making life impossible at all levels. While feeding the world the false narrative of “self-defence”, it has tried to create the moribund Palestinian: not necessarily dead, but always on the edge, constantly facing the choice between death and torment.

I do not think I will ever be able to fully explain what it is like to be a Palestinian – in all the shades of bruises we come in. It is not for the lack of words as much it is for the recognition that if I were to speak of the horrors, I am not confident that those who listen would bear to hear all the pain embedded in the Palestinian experience.

For the past 182 days, Palestinians have been plunged into waves of deep grief, penetrating pain, and a crippling fear of anticipated loss. Quivers of terror remain stuck in our spine unable to escape, just like us.

One of the most testing parts of this aggression is having to manage this grief. So many people we know are either killed, arrested or displaced. Palestinians have suffered not only physical displacement but psychological displacement as well; our mental and emotional anchors have been dislodged. It is an excruciating type of pain to keep witnessing the different ways in which Palestinian bodies can be turned lifeless.

There is no capacity to bury the slain bodies, no ability to collectively mourn our losses, not just the material but also the emotional: the destroyed homes, the destroyed memories, and the destroyed hope we mustered to have.

With continued exposure to Israel’s unyielding psychopathy, comes a collective feeling of burnout not only among the population still trying to survive Israel’s slaughter, but also among those mobilising to stop a genocide still being committed as I write these words.

The burnout is real. Too many of us are too exhausted to say anything, to resist succumbing to the delusion that our voices do not matter and will achieve nothing. As we sit with those uncomfortable and hopeless feelings, the war persists and the scale of the horrors increases.

And it is not just us, Palestinians in Palestine. This extends to those in the world who rose up against the genocide. Israel has responded to global resistance with more slaughter – like the [killing](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/2/al-jazeera-sanad-probe-finds-israeli-forces-deliberately-hit-wck-convoy) of international humanitarian workers – and more lobbying for its critics to be punished.

As governments refuse to take action to end the slaughter, those mobilising against the genocide are slowly and strategically pushed towards incapacitation, despair, and the conviction that the Israeli onslaught cannot be stopped.

In May of 2021, when Palestinians were in the midst of the largest uprisings of the past decades, when they showed true unity across Gaza, the West Bank, the 1948 territories and the diaspora, I wrote a piece for the Guardian titled, Why are Palestinians protesting? Because we want to live.

I wrote the piece on my phone in between running from tear gas fired by Israeli soldiers and barely escaping the brutal beatings at the hands of the Palestinian Authority’s security forces.

Those were brutal times, terrifying times, and defining times. In that piece, I tried to capture the strategy of colonialism: “This is what colonialism does: it suffocates every part of your life, and then it finishes by burying you.”

I was not trying to draw a silhouette of a killer. I was trying to capture the moment of defiance and renewed unity among Palestinians from the river to the sea and in the diaspora.

“It is a strategic, deliberate process, and it is only obstructed or delayed because oppressors are almost always confronted and challenged by those under their rule,” I wrote.

Indeed, over the past many decades, Israel was not left without challenge. Palestinians continued to rise up against its policies of repression: One uprising after the next, from nonviolence to diplomacy, to armed resistance. As the Israeli conquest of Palestinian lands, resources and lives intensified, so did Palestinian struggle.

For the past six months, Israel and its backers have sought to erase history and context and portray October 7 as an “unwarranted” brutal attack on Israel. The reality is, on October 7, a people suffocated by decades of colonialism and oppression used their last breath to reject the impossible choice of death or torment and to call out to the world.

Perhaps that is what really shook Israel and its allies on October 7. What triggered Israel’s wrath was the fact that Palestinians were still breathing after decades of colonial pacification.

Understand this: What stands between our eradication and our survival is you, the global community. As Israel unleashed its genocidal force onto us, it implicated the rest of the world.

Israel’s genocide is enabled by international engagement. It uses weapons provided by foreign governments and enjoys impunity guaranteed by them to avoid accountability for its crimes.

Recognise this: Palestinians are not buried yet, and while the destruction is massive, so is the number of survivors with dreams to pursue, miracles to witness, and a faith in humanity to be re-instiled.

Amid all the destruction there is life, and Palestinians are putting up one hell of a fight for it. Palestinian Muslims are marking a tense and sombre last weekend in Ramadan, as Israel’s war on Gaza approaches the six-month mark.

Some 120,000 people descended on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which dominates the Old City in Jerusalem, officials said on Friday.

There were minor scuffles between worshippers and Israeli police controlling the entrance to the mosque, which is the third holiest site in Islam.

Adli al-Agha, 53, from Jerusalem, told the AFP news agency that many people “had to flee dawn prayers” after Israeli police deployed a mini-drone spraying tear gas to disperse worshippers.

Friday marked [Laylat al-Qadr (“The Night of Power”)](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/17/what-is-laylat-al-qadr-the-holiest-night-in-ramadan), considered the holiest night of Ramadan, which commemorates the moment the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

It is the night when Muslims believe their prayers are most likely to be granted, a festive moment while children stay up late and shops stay open till the small hours.

But many Palestinians are not in the mood to celebrate and are praying for an end to the war in Gaza after almost six months of bloodshed.

Sameeha al-Qadi, 55, who had come from near Bethlehem, said Jerusalem “is sad and has lost its light – we all feel what is going on in Gaza. We can’t escape it for a minute”.

This year there are few Ramadan decorations or lights in the Holy City, with Palestinians instead having a bitter coffee and a date – traditionally to mark mourning – on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, when feasts are usually held.

“There is sweet nothing about the feast this year. People are not celebrating,” said Sabah, 54, some of whose relatives have been killed in Gaza. “Everything is bitter in my mouth. It is so painful at this time which is all about family.”

In Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, Palestinians gathered on Laylat al-Qadr, praying in and outside a tent they had built near the debris of al-Faruq Mosque – now reduced to ruins by Israeli air strikes.

People also gathered to pray within the surviving section of the Great Omari Mosque in Gaza City. Also known as the Great Mosque of Gaza, the largest and oldest mosque in the strip was destroyed by Israeli military bombardments. Despite its destruction, the mosque remains a favoured venue for residents of the region to gather for prayers.

Palestinians displaced from their homes in Gaza for almost six months by Israeli attacks have observed Ramadan in makeshift tents, under limited means and difficult conditions. Many are spending the last days reading the Quran or decorating their tents for Eid. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says a date has been set to invade Rafah in southern Gaza as truce talks with Hamas in Cairo are ongoing but do not appear close to the finish line.

In a video statement in Hebrew, Netanyahu reiterated his position that a [ground military operation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/16/israel-approves-plan-to-attack-gazas-rafah-but-keeps-truce-talks-alive) in Rafah, bordering Egypt, where more than 1.5 million Palestinians are sheltering, is essential for victory in the war.

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The Palestinian group confirmed in a statement that it is reviewing the proposal, but said Israel “has not responded to any of the demands of our people and our resistance”. Senior Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zahry told Al Jazeera that Netanyahu’s remarks “raise questions about the purpose of resuming negotiations”.

“The success of any negotiations depends on ending the aggression,” said Zahry, adding that the group’s “demands are clear: an end to aggression against our people”.

Israel has so far rejected Palestinian demands of an unrestricted return of hundreds of thousands of Gaza Palestinians to the enclave’s north, and the retreat of Israeli military ground forces from the strip.

The Israeli military said it has withdrawn some of its ground forces from Gaza, but has kept the troops in charge of maintaining an east-west corridor that effectively cuts the enclave in half and prevents the return of Palestinians to the north.

The United States continues to be publicly opposed to the idea of Israel’s invasion of Rafah as it has said there are no viable plans to evacuate the large number of civilians who are in the area.

An unnamed Israeli official told The Associated Press news agency that Israel is buying 40,000 tents to prepare for the evacuation of Palestinians from Rafah.

US Department of State spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters following Netanyahu’s announcement that the US has not been fully briefed on any new Rafah developments.

“We have made clear to Israel that we think a full-scale military invasion of Rafah would have an enormously harmful effect on those civilians and that it would ultimately hurt Israel’s security,” Miller said. This comes as the leaders of Egypt, Jordan and France wrote a joint op-ed published by several media outlets, including The Washington Post and Le Monde, that called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, as demanded by a United Nations Security Council [resolution passed in late March](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/25/un-security-council-adopts-resolution-calling-for-immediate-gaza-ceasefire).

“We warn against the dangerous consequences of an Israeli offensive on Rafah, where more than 1.5 million Palestinian civilians have sought refuge. Such an offensive will only bring more deaths and suffering, heighten the risks and consequences of mass forcible displacement of the people of Gaza and threaten regional escalation,” said the leaders.

Mahjoob Zweiri, director of the Gulf Studies Center at Qatar University, told Al Jazeera it has become apparent to Israel’s Western allies and even within the country that Netanyahu has no interest in reaching a deal “any time soon”.

“He wants more time, he wants to go to Rafah, he wants to have something he has failed to achieve so far,” Zweiri said. “He and the right wing need individuals, they need names – they talk about [Hamas leaders Yahya] Sinwar and [Mohammed] Deif, and none of this has been achieved.”

Zweiri said as long as this continues, the Israeli prime minister’s stance will remain the same out of “self-interest” to preserve his political future.

“Everyone knows, but the issue is whether the international community accept this, will accept to see more killing and more destruction for someone who is irresponsible politically and immorally is waging war on civilians,”

## What does Israel want?

Beyond this assault, what Israel wants in Gaza remains unclear, and there is no Palestinian, international or Israeli consensus on who would administer the enclave in the future.

Israeli forces, dramatically reduced in number from the massive deployment at the beginning of the war – with just one brigade reported to be present in southern Gaza – have struggled to gain and retain control over territory crisscrossed by unknown miles of tunnels that allow Palestinian fighters mobility and access.Areas such as al-Shifa Hospital, which was stormed for a second time in mid-March after Israeli claims of having searched and cleared it in November.

Among other areas it claimed to have “cleared of terrorists”, the Israeli army has returned to the Zeitoun neighbourhood in Gaza City, the Shati refugee camp and the city of Beit Hanoon, among others.

Hamas fighters, aided by what appears to be a still serviceable tunnel network, which a Western intelligence official told the BBC in February seemed to have only been reduced by a third, have forced Israeli forces into a deadly chase across the enclave.

Current troop numbers stand in stark contrast with the 360,000 reservists mobilised to counter the October 7 Hamas-led attack on Israel, which saw 1,139 people, the majority civilians, killed and 250 taken captive into Gaza.

## What can Israel afford?

To return to Gaza in the numbers needed to prove effective would be costly. After the call-up for the initial surge into Gaza, the Israeli economy shrank by 7 percent as the war drew workers from their jobs.

Moreover, the possibility of a fresh front opening on Israel’s northern border with the Lebanon-based group, Hezbollah, with which it maintains a steady exchange of fire, remains a possibility. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defines the war aims as defeating Hamas and freeing an unknown number of remaining Israeli captives.

A wartime opinion poll during December’s brief ceasefire suggested an increase in support for Hamas across Gaza, as well as a clear rejection of the West’s preferred candidate to administer any post-war settlement in Gaza: Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas.

Israel will probably “face lingering armed resistance from Hamas for years to come, and the military will struggle to neutralise Hamas’s underground infrastructure, which allows insurgents to hide, regain strength, and surprise Israeli forces”, the US said of the situation in its Threat Assessment in March.

“I don’t know if it’s about support for Hamas as much as it is whoever’s striking back,” Baraa Shiban, an associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute said, referring to Palestinians responding to Hamas as a resistance group rather than a political entity.

Meanwhile, Gaza’s homes and life-saving infrastructure lie in ruins, with 84 percent of Gaza’s healthcare facilities damaged or destroyed, and a lack of electricity and water to operate those that remain, a [report](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/2/gaza-infrastructure-damages-estimated-at-18-5-bln-in-un-world-bank-report) by the World Bank said earlier this month.

According to the same report, the cost of the damage inflicted on Gaza was $18.5bn, 97 percent of the combined gross domestic product (GDP) of Gaza and the occupied West Bank in 2022.

“It’s going to cost billions to rebuild,” Boaz Atzili, an associate professor at the American University in Washington, DC, said from southern Israel.

“I don’t sense any appetite for that in Israel. It’s possible that some of the Gulf countries might contribute to that, but they’re going to want to see some kind of lasting political settlement, even if that’s just a technocratic administration, first, so they don’t end up back here again.” Why would Israel plan Gaza’s future?

There seems to be international consensus that Israel will be involved in one form or another in the future of Gaza, once its assault on the besieged enclave ends.

“There is no real plan for Gaza,” said Baraa Shiban of the Royal United Service Institute (RUSI). “Israel just needed to respond forcefully to the [Hamas-led] attack of October 7th and maintain that narrative, which it’s struggled to do.

“Broadly speaking, political opinion in Israel seems to fall into three categories. Firstly, there’s Netanyahu’s view, which is just to get rid of Hamas and free the hostages.

“Secondly, there are those who would like to occupy and administer Gaza.

“Lastly, there’s a group that would like to apply so much pressure onto the Palestinian population that it just spills out into the Sinai [breaching Egypt’s border].”

Several people in Netanyahu’s government have proposed “plans” for Gaza on “the day after”.

In January, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant published a vague proposal for a US-led multinational group overseeing a civilian administration of a few “Palestinian notables” – likely heads of the powerful families that emerged from the chaos of war. Gallant’s plan triggered rival plans from within the cabinet, some proposing the settlement of Gaza, and together muddying the waters, saying as much about Israel’s political unity as the future of Gaza.

In February, Netanyahu published a one-and-a-half-page plan of his own, proposing the complete closure of Gaza’s southern border with Egypt, as well as the overhaul of Gaza’s civil administration and education.

Netanyahu’s plan received intense criticism from other states, including Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and the US.

In the face of the carnage inflicted on Gaza, the mounting humanitarian catastrophe and a looming famine, few plans speak to the reality of the people of Gaza: Most have lost loved ones and face the prospect of famine on top of the physical and psychological ravages of a war that does not seem likely to stop.

“While it’s true that Netanyahu would like to extend the conflict into a forever war,” Atzili continued, “it’s equally true that [Hamas leader] Yahya Sinwar would too. Neither has any interest in facing the consequences of their actions.”

No follow-up poll has been conducted on support for Hamas as Gaza suffered successive rounds of Israeli attacks that have destroyed [at least 62 percent of homes](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/2/gaza-infrastructure-damages-estimated-at-18-5-bln-in-un-world-bank-report), the equivalent to 290,820 housing units, destroyed, with over a million people left homeless, according to the World Bank.

In the meantime, with no way of occupying the enclave, or clear and agreed war aim in sight, Israel will have little choice but to continue its attack upon Gaza, with millions of Palestinians paying the price.

It has been six months since Israel launched its brutal assault on the Gaza Strip on October 7.

Israel shows no sign of stopping, as its allies continue to provide it with more weapons to use on Palestinians along with political support, and mediated talks have not led to a ceasefire.

The war on Gaza, Israel says, is in retaliation for attacks on Israeli territory by armed groups, led by Hamas’s Qassam Brigades, from Gaza which killed 1,139 people and took about 250 captive.

Let’s take a look at the toll the Israeli attacks have taken on Gaza.

## How many people have been killed or injured?

At least 33,137 Palestinians have been [killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker) by the Israeli army in Gaza since the start of the war on October 7, the Ministry of Health in Gaza says.

Thousands more are missing under the rubble of collapsed buildings and infrastructure, and are presumed dead.Children and women comprise the overwhelming majority of those killed, with Save the Children saying more than 13,800 children have been killed.UNICEF, the United Nations fund for children, estimated that at least 17,000 Palestinian children are currently unaccompanied or separated from their parents in Gaza.

At least 75,815 people have been injured in Israeli attacks since the start of the war – about four out of every 100 people in Gaza.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said this week that some 1,000 children in Gaza have lost one or both of their legs.

Dozens of people are still killed and injured every day amid relentless Israeli attacks.

## Are people starving?

The humanitarian situation in Gaza has grown significantly worse in 2024 as the Israeli army blocks the arrival of aid and has effectively imposed [starvation](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/3/26/they-scream-in-hunger-how-israel-is-starving-palestinians-in-gaza) as a weapon of war.

Nearly all 2.3 million people trapped in Gaza now face starvation, with the UN saying famine will take hold in various parts of Gaza by May.

Northern Gaza, which was the first to be decimated by an Israeli ground invasion, is the worst-hit – Israel continues to severely restrict access to the north, blocking routes and subjecting aid convoys to delays or cancellations.

Babies and young children have died from dehydration and malnutrition in northern Gaza, but Israel is still blocking many humanitarian missions.

Last week, Israeli forces [deliberately killed seven foreign aid workers](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/2/al-jazeera-sanad-probe-finds-israeli-forces-deliberately-hit-wck-convoy) in three targeted, consecutive strikes on a convoy of cars over a stretch of 2.3km (1.4 miles), prompting some aid organisations to suspend services.

## How many people have been displaced?

The Israeli military ordered Palestinians to “go south” from the start of the war as its ground forces invaded Gaza from the north.

Nobody has been able to return to their homes in northern Gaza since then as Israel has established a military corridor cutting the Strip in half.

Some 1.9 million people, or more than 80 percent of Gaza’s population, have been internally [displaced](https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2024/displacement-israel-war-on-gaza-no-safe-place/?utm_source=www.aljazeera.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=ucms). Most are sheltering in UN installations such as schools and hospitals, nevertheless, more than 400 have been killed and at least 1,400 injured in those places. More than 1.5 million people are now crammed into Rafah, Gaza’s southernmost city on the border with Egypt. Many have been forced to stay in makeshift camps or the streets, exposed to Israeli air attacks.

Israel has insisted it will invade Rafah by land as well.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) says more than 350 Israeli military attacks have targeted its buildings, with 161 installations damaged. The highest number of UN staff in history – 176 – have been killed in Gaza since October 7.

## How much of Gaza is in ruins?

The war has damaged or destroyed approximately 62 percent of all homes in Gaza – 290,820 housing units – leaving more than a million people without homes.

The [$18.5bn in damage](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/2/gaza-infrastructure-damages-estimated-at-18-5-bln-in-un-world-bank-report#:~:text=The%20education%20system%20has%20collapsed,destroyed%20and%20219%20partially%20damaged.) estimated by the World Bank and the UN has also been to public service infrastructure, with 26 million tonnes of debris and rubble left by the destruction.

Damage has been most extensive in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, where Israeli ground and air attacks destroyed thousands of homes and infrastructure in a stated effort to combat “terrorists”.

Eight of every 10 schools in Gaza are damaged or destroyed, according to UNICEF. As many as 625,000 students have no access to education.

## Are hospitals functioning?

The Israeli army has focused its attacks on hospitals across Gaza despite their protection under international law, claiming Hamas is operating within and underneath them.

All hospitals have suffered critical damage, with only 10 out of 36 able to function partially but they are increasingly overburdened.

A two-week-long siege in and around al-Shifa Hospital, the largest in Gaza, [left it heavily damaged and burned](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/1/no-life-here-israeli-army-withdraws-from-al-shifa-hospital-in-gaza) by last week. The Israeli army killed at least 400 people at the compound during its siege and arrested hundreds more.

An acute shortage of medicine, along with exhausted and starving healthcare professionals, means most patients are unable to receive treatment in Gaza. Many operations and amputations have had to be performed without anaesthetic.

## How many journalists have been killed?

The Israeli army has killed the largest number of journalists of any modern conflict and detained more than 24.

On March 18, Al Jazeera correspondent [Ismail al-Ghoul](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/18/al-jazeera-journalist-beaten-arrested-by-israeli-forces-from-gaza-hospital) was arrested for 12 hours and beaten by Israeli forces in al-Shifa Hospital.

Before that, on January 7, Al Jazeera journalist Hamza Dahdouh, son of Gaza bureau chief Wael Dahdouh, was [killed by an Israeli missile in Khan Younis](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/7/hamza-son-of-al-jazeeras-wael-dahdouh-killed-in-israeli-attack-in-gaza). Hamza was in a vehicle near [al-Mawasi](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/6/how-israel-is-squeezing-1-8-million-palestinians-into-an-airport-sized-area) with another journalist, Mustafa Thuraya, who was also killed in the attack.

On December 15, 2023, Al Jazeera cameraman [Samer Abudaqa](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/14/al-jazeeras-samer-abudaqa-was-targeted-left-to-bleed-by-israel-report) was hit in an Israeli drone attack that also injured Wael Dahdouh, in Khan Younis, Gaza.

Abudaqa bled to death over four hours as emergency workers were unable to reach him because the Israeli army would not let them.

The Committee to Protect Journalists puts the number of journalists killed at 90, with the Government Media Office in Gaza saying some 140 have been killed. Last week, an Israeli strike targeted a journalists’ tent in the courtyard of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, killing at least four people and wounding multiple journalists. The chasm between Arab populations’ demand for more decisive responses to Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza and the shameful silence and implicit complicity of many of their leaders has yet again exposed the decades-old trend of authoritarian Arab regimes exploiting public support for the Palestinian cause for political gain – a trend that is currently being spearheaded by none other than Tunisia’s dictatorial President Kais Saied.

At first glance, Saied’s response to the war on Gaza seems to echo the Tunisian population’s unwavering support for the Palestinian cause. Presenting himself as a staunch advocate of the Palestinian liberation struggle since the beginning of his presidency, Saied has repeatedly argued in the past few years that Tunisia has a “duty to stand by the Palestinian people” and that any Arab nation that normalises ties with Israel is a “traitor”. And since October 7, he has been vocal, persistent and unapologetic in his condemnation of Israel’s actions in Gaza, as well as its decades-old illegal occupation and apartheid. His impassioned rhetoric on Palestine resonates with Tunisians who have long stood in solidarity with their oppressed Palestinian brothers and sisters and embraced their struggle as their own

When you look beyond the fiery statements, however, it becomes blatantly obvious that Saied’s support for Palestine is nothing but a facade. The Tunisian president’s passionate speeches on Palestine are never backed by actions; he is merely exploiting popular support for the Palestinian liberation struggle for political gain.

Saied’s hypocrisy is impossible to miss if you take a closer look at the Tunisian regime’s material response to the war on Gaza in the past few months.

While the president has not missed any opportunity to publicly condemn Israel’s genocidal war on Palestinians, he also consistently opposed all direct political and legal actions proposed against Israel’s atrocities.

For example, he refused to back proposed [legislation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/tunisias-parliament-deliberates-on-anti-israel-normalisation-bill) aimed at penalising normalisation with Israel within Tunisia’s borders and abroad. Such legislation would not only reaffirm Tunisia’s commitment to the Palestinian cause, but also send a clear message to Israel that its occupation of Palestine and oppression of Palestinians would never be accepted. Saied never offered a meaningful explanation for his opposition to such legislation, beyond vague suggestions that it may, somehow, endanger Tunisia’s security or hinder its economic interests.

The truth, of course, is simple: Saied prioritises strategic and economic advantage – however small, ambiguous and inconsequential – over Palestinian liberation and justice.

Beyond refusing to back legislation that would provide material support to the Palestinian cause, Saied has also used the deep public anger against Israel and its Western backers to [pass legislation](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/6/in-tunisia-pro-palestinian-fervour-used-to-pass-stricter-laws) that would curtail the work of the country’s burgeoning domestic NGO community and put their activities under the direct control of Saied’s regime.

By exploiting the pro-Palestinian sentiments of the Tunisian public in this way, Saied has exposed the moral bankruptcy of his authoritarian regime and tarnished Tunisia’s image as a country that champions Palestinian liberation.

After its 2011 revolution, thanks to the pivotal role it played in the Arab Spring, its success in establishing the foundations for a functional democracy on the ruins of a brutal dictatorship, and its consistent support for Palestinian rights, Tunisia was hailed as an emerging bastion of democracy and justice in a region still plagued by tyranny and oppression.

Under Saied’s rule, however, Tunisia has not only experienced unprecedented democratic erosion and reversed all its post-revolution democratic gains, but also abandoned true Palestinian solidarity for empty posturing, ruining this reputation for good.

It needs to be noted again, however, that the Tunisian regime’s hypocrisy on Palestine is not an anomaly or a unique failing in the Arab world. Many authoritarian Arab regimes’ support for Palestine has been [hollow and performative](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/5/14/the-arab-world-has-forsaken-the-palestine-cause), like that of Saied, since long before the beginning of this latest war.

For many years, Arab rulers across the region have professed solidarity with Palestine while engaging in clandestine dealings with Israel and upholding normalisation efforts. In their bid to maintain positive relations with the United States, many ceased all practical efforts to further the Palestinian struggle for liberation, ceding control of all initiatives to resolve the decades-old conflict to Washington – Israel’s principal source of political and diplomatic legitimacy, weapons and military backing. Today, six months into Israel’s genocide in the Gaza Strip, which has killed well more than 33,000 Palestinians, maimed tens of thousands of others and reduced most of the Palestinian coastal enclave into rubble, many powerful Arab regimes continue to hold the door open for a peace agreement with Israel. Others didn’t even withdraw their ambassadors.

As a result, Arab populations, who see the Palestinian struggle as their own, are feeling angry, betrayed and abandoned. They want their supposedly pro-Palestine leaders to back their passionate rhetoric with concrete actions. They want the Palestinian struggle to be the defining priority of their states’ foreign policy, but struggle to be heard by their leaders.

In fact, in many countries, their demands for immediate, meaningful political, diplomatic and economic action against Israel meet violence. Protests are being dispersed by police and pro-Palestine activists are being criminalised.

Many Tunisians and other Arabs across the region are not only repeatedly traumatised by the daily acts of dehumanisation and genocide against Palestinians, but also by their own leaders’ hypocrisy and inaction.

Saied is a hypocrite on Palestine, and his inaction in the name of maintaining good relations with Palestine’s oppressors and preserving his ill-gained power is harming not only long-suffering Palestinians, but also Tunisia and its people.

This is time for Tunisians, and other Arabs across the region in the same position, to make it clear to their leaders that they are not content with their leaders’ empty posturing on Palestine. It is time for them to show they would not be satisfied with anything other than political, legal, diplomatic and economic actions that would clearly communicate to Israel that Arabs would not turn a blind eye to the genocide of their Palestinian brothers and sisters. Ending Arab complacency in the devastation of Palestinians, and holding hypocritical and power-hungry leaders like Saied to account is essential not only for bringing peace and justice to Palestine but also ensuring security and stabillity in the region. Israeli and Hamas officials say no significant progress has been made in the latest round of Gaza truce talks in Cairo attended by representatives from mediators Egypt, Qatar and the United States.

“There is no change in the position of the occupation and, therefore, there is nothing new in the Cairo talks. … There is no progress yet,” a Hamas official, who asked not to be named, told the Reuters news agency on Monday, shortly after reports quoting Egyptian sources said headway had been made.

Israel’s Ynet news outlet cited an unidentified Israeli official as saying there had been “nothing dramatic” in the talks.

“We still don’t see a deal on the horizon. The distance is still great, and there has been nothing dramatic in the meantime,” the official said.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz described the Cairo talks as the closest the sides have come to a deal since a November truce under which Hamas freed dozens of hostages.

“We have reached a critical point in the negotiations. If it works out, then a large number of hostages will come home,” he told Israel’s Army Radio.The US said that negotiators had presented Hamas with a proposal for a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal, but that it was up to the Palestinian militant group to decide.

“Where we are now is that a proposal has been presented to Hamas, and we are waiting on Hamas’s response,” National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

“Now it’s going to be up to Hamas to come through.”

Much of the international community has expressed outrage over the Palestinian death toll and [humanitarian crisis](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/8/more-than-300-aid-trucks-enter-gaza-as-palestinians-battle-starvation) arising from Israel’s military operation in the Gaza Strip.

More than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed in [Israel’s war on Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/8/israels-war-on-gaza-list-of-key-events-day-185) since October 7, according to Palestinian officials.

Israel launched its assault on Gaza in response to Hamas-led attacks on Israel on October 7, which killed 1,139 people, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on Israeli statistics.

Hamas seized 253 people at that time and took them back to Gaza. Of those, 133 captives remain, and negotiators have spoken of about 40 going free in the first stage of a prospective deal with Hamas.

Israel’s army says more than 600 of its soldiers have been killed in combat.Delegations set to return to Cairo

Israel and Hamas sent teams to Egypt on Sunday after the arrival on Saturday of CIA Director William Burns, whose presence underlined rising pressure from the White House for a deal that would reach a truce, free captives held in Gaza and get aid to isolated civilians.

Al Jazeera’s Imran Khan, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, said the fact that talks have not broken down was a positive development.

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“There is apparently a ceasefire framework that the Israelis are now taking back to the war cabinet and Hamas is discussing within the movement,” he said.

Khan said senior Israeli politicians are actually talking about the potential of the talks.

“Finance Minister [Bezalel] Smotrich is calling for a meeting to get an update on what this framework is, and Yair Lapid, head of the opposition, says he’s willing to give the government a safety net to be able to come to some sort of deal,” Khan said.

Two Egyptian security sources and state-run Al-Qahera News said on Monday that some progress had been made in the Cairo talks.

The security sources said both sides had made concessions that could help pave the way for a deal for a truce that – as proposed during previous talks – would be staggered over three stages with the release of the remaining Israeli captives and a long-term ceasefire addressed in the second stage.

The concessions relate to the release of Israeli captives and Hamas’s demand for the return of displaced residents to northern Gaza, they said.

Mediators suggested the return could be monitored by an Arab force in the presence of Israeli security deployments that would later be pulled back, they added.

Delegations left Cairo, and consultations were expected to continue within 48 hours, the sources and Al-Qahera said. ‘Mixed messages’

Luciano Zaccara, a professor of Gulf politics at Qatar University’s Gulf Studies Center, that while mixed messages were emerging from Egypt, the Israeli government has made it clear the war will go on. The weekend pullout of Israeli forces from Gaza is aimed at reorganising troops for their future mission in Rafah, “meaning that Israel has not stopped pursuing the main objective, which is to destroy Hamas completely”.

“But the government is aware of the mounting pressure from captives’ families who joined forces with those seeking the prime minister’s resignation,” he added.

“It seems like something is moving inside Israel to reach an agreement. They have to show they are working towards a solution, but we have to wait for the next 48 hours to see if a deal is reached,” Zaccara said.

Six months into its [offensive on Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/4/8/israels-war-on-gaza-live-palestinians-return-to-destroyed-khan-younis), Israel has devastated the enclave and left most of its 2.3 million people homeless and many at risk of famine.

The country is under global pressure to ease [Gaza’s humanitarian crisis](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/24/only-effective-way-to-ramp-up-gaza-aid-is-by-land-un-chief-guterres-says) and drop its plans to storm Rafah, a town on the southern border with Egypt packed with more than a million displaced Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that a date has been set for the Israeli offensive on Rafah. He did not disclose when it would be. Iran’s supreme leader has condemned Israel and the West over “crimes” in Gaza during Ramadan in an Eid al-Fitr speech that also promised retaliation for the [attack](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/1/several-killed-in-israeli-strike-on-iranian-consulate-in-damascus-reports) on the Iranian consulate in Syria.

“When they attack our consulate, it is as if they have attacked our soil,” Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a speech on Wednesday to thousands in Tehran, with the crowd repeatedly breaking into chants of support.

“The malicious regime made a mistake on this matter, and it must be punished and will be punished.”

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz responded to Khamenei by writing in posts on X in Hebrew and Persian that “if Iran attacks from its own territory, Israel will respond and attack in Iran”.

Khamenei and other top military and government officials have repeatedly warned of retaliation since the April 1 Israeli airstrike in Damascus, which killed the commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Syria and Lebanon.

He made it clear that the strike constituted an Israeli attack on Iranian soil, appearing to increase the [likelihood of a direct response](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/8/how-will-iran-respond-to-israels-attack-on-its-damascus-consulate), as opposed to one by the “axis of resistance” that it supports across the region. The members of the axis, ideologically aligned allies and non-state groups, have been attacking Israel as they have repeatedly since the start of the war on Gaza.The Islamic Resistance in Iraq umbrella group of armed forces said it launched two drones at the port city of Haifa in the early hours of Wednesday.

The group has also been behind many dozens of attacks on United States forces in Iraq and Syria since the current conflict in Gaza broke out on October 7, which had significantly decreased in intensity following a [drone attack in Jordan](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/3/strategic-error-iran-condemns-us-attacks-on-iraq-syria#:~:text=Iran's%20Foreign%20Ministry%20says%20overnight,integrity'%20of%20the%20two%20countries.) that killed three American soldiers but appears to be gradually picking up again.

Hezbollah in Lebanon has been exchanging fire with the Israeli military daily since the start of the war on Gaza, and the Houthis in Yemen continue to launch attacks in the Red Sea.

Israel has been [bolstering its defences](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/4/israel-boosts-defences-after-iran-consulate-attack-in-syria) as it expects an Iranian attack, reinforcing its personnel, aircraft and air defence systems while evacuating some diplomatic missions abroad.

During his speech, the Iranian supreme leader also blasted the leaders of the US and United Kingdom for their continuing support of the war, to the chants of “death to America” by the crowd.

“Western governments, in the past year’s events, openly displayed the wicked nature of Western civilisation to the world,” Khamenei said.

“The bloody events in Gaza have left a bitter taste for Muslims around the world during this year’s blessed Ramadan,” he said, adding that Israel has been attacking women, children and the elderly since it has failed to defeat Palestinian fighters.

More than 33,300 Palestinians, most of them women and children, have been killed by the Israeli military in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war.

The brinkmanship and resulting tensions have put further strain on Washington’s foreign policy. Already, the US is caught between two seemingly conflicting priorities: offering unconditional support for Israel and preventing the [conflict in Gaza](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/4/12/israels-war-on-gaza-live-at-least-20-killed-in-gaza-in-last-24-hours) from expanding.

“Biden is doubling down on a formula that so far has been absolutely disastrous,” said Trita Parsi, executive vice president at the Quincy Institute, a think tank that promotes diplomacy.

Parsi said Biden should have rebuked Israel for attacking the Iranian embassy on April 1, violating international law and endangering US troops in the region.

But, he explained, the Biden administration is rewarding the Israeli government by promising to support it instead. Let’s pretend for a moment that, in the course of waging war against the state of Israel, Hamas militants from the Gaza Strip had taken to posing for social media posts with lingerie belonging to Israeli women who had been forced to flee their homes and/or killed in the war.

Imagine the moral outrage that would swiftly ensue, inevitably entailing racist and self-righteous allegations of Arab perverseness, the barbaric sexism of Islam, and the violent tendencies of sexually repressed Muslims.

The Fox Newses of the world would have had a field day.

As it turns out, a version of this hypothetical spectacle is true – except that it stars Israeli soldiers and Palestinian women’s lingerie. A [recent Reuters article](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-soldiers-play-with-gaza-womens-underwear-online-posts-2024-03-28/) titled “Israeli soldiers play with Gaza women’s underwear in online posts” describes how combatants from the world’s self-appointed “most moral army” have been “posting photos and videos of themselves toying with lingerie found in Palestinian homes, creating a dissonant visual record of the war in Gaza”. In one video highlighted by Reuters, an Israeli soldier “sits in an armchair in a room in Gaza grinning, with a gun in one hand and dangling white satin underwear from the other over the open mouth of a comrade lying on a sofa”.

Another visually “dissonant” episode features a solider perched on a tank, who proceeds to introduce his “beautiful wife”: a female mannequin sporting a helmet and black bra.

In response to the news agency’s inquiry, an Israeli military spokesperson “sent a statement saying the [army] investigates incidents that deviate from the orders and expected values” of Israeli soldiers.

And yet it is pretty perverse in itself to even talk about “values” in the middle of a [genocide](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/26/un-expert-accuses-israel-of-several-acts-of-genocide-in-gaza) and Israeli-made [famine](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NCbfeEX3Ds) in the Gaza Strip.

Since October 7, Israel has [killed](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/4/10/israels-war-on-gaza-live-israel-bombards-gaza-kills-14-in-nuseirat-camp?update=2828500) nearly 34,000 Palestinians in Gaza, among them some 14,500 children and 9,500 women – numbers which are presumed to be grave underestimates. More than 76,000 people have been wounded as homes, hospitals, [schools](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/24/how-israel-has-destroyed-gazas-schools-and-universities) and everything else that is bombable have been bombed. Children are [starving](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/3/27/videos-of-malnourished-children-show-gazas-forced-starvation-crisis) to death.

Rather than constituting an isolated blot on the morality of the Israeli armed forces, then, social media posts of Palestinian women’s underwear would seem to be aligned with general moral depravity and therefore entirely consistent with Israeli military “values”.

The United Nations Human Rights Office spokesperson has declared such posts to be “demeaning to Palestinian women, and all women”. So, to be sure, is mass slaughter. That said, there is plenty to say about this sort of exercise in militarised semi-pornography as a calculated assault on the dignity of women in an overwhelmingly conservative society. Ultimately, the taunting display of Palestinian lingerie amounts to an almost pathetically cliched violation of the intimate space of Gazan women. But to be playing around with the panties of people you are killing takes depravity to another level.

Call it Orientalist fetishization with a genocidal twist.

Granted, it’s not just the females of Gaza who are eligible for such “demeaning” treatment; Gazan males can be intimately humiliated, too. In December, dozens of Palestinian men and boys sheltering at two Gaza schools were detained by the Israeli army, [stripped to their underwear](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/video-photos-appear-to-show-detainees-stripped-to-underwear-in-gaza), and made to kneel on the ground.

The degradation of Palestinian women is all the more obscenely hypocritical, however, in light of the Israeli military’s condemnation of Hamas for its “discrimination” against women in the territory it controls. A section on the military’s English-language website devoted to “The Status of Women in Gaza” laments that “basic rights are often systematically denied” to females, who are faced with “decreased educational opportunities” as well as “limited employment opportunities” – a situation that is clearly best rectified by Israel’s bombing of [most such opportunities](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/20/gaza-essential-uninhabitable-as-infrastructure-damage-kills-job-market) to smithereens.

The website reports that “violence against women continues at alarming rates” in the Gaza Strip. With at least 9,500 women now killed by Israel in the past six months, you can say that again. And while the Israeli army’s co-ed nature enables the institution to portray itself as a bastion of women’s rights and female empowerment – read: equal-opportunity killing – there’s no shortage of intra-institutional sexism and gender-based oppression. A 2022 report by Israel’s State Comptroller, for example, found that approximately one-third of Israeli women performing mandatory military service had experienced sexual harassment the previous year.

The state of Israel has also weaponised the bikini-clad and otherwise half-naked bodies of its female fighting forces in order to effectively sexualise ethnic cleansing, as in the case of the 2007 Maxim magazine spread that tantalisingly wondered whether Israel’s female militants were not in fact “the world’s sexiest soldiers”.

As for the current lingerie tactic being deployed by social media-savvy troops in Gaza, the weaponisation of humiliation only compounds the suffering of Palestinian women – and men – who, forced to flee their homes, have already had their intimate space violated in every possible way.

And as the Israeli military simultaneously gets off playing with underwear and perpetrating genocide, it is a “dissonant visual record”, indeed.

“I live out by O’Hare. Every time a plane flies overhead at night, my hands shake. I’m looking for a place to hide. And then the sirens too – the police and ambulance sirens. I know they’re not there, but it feels like soldiers are just outside the windows. We used to watch them walk up and down the road by my grandparents’ house, and we weren’t to say anything. They’d harass everyone, beat people up, including my grandpa. We were supposed to stay inside. My cousin was killed,” my patient told me last November during a psychotherapy session in Chicago, home to the largest population of Palestinian people in the United States. “I haven’t felt like this, had nightmares like this, since I was a kid.”

Since the Israeli bombing and invasion of Gaza began last October, a long-simmering global movement has emerged, particularly from the Global South, in solidarity with the Palestinian people. At least tens of millions of people have marched through the cities of the world in protest of Israeli-perpetrated genocide. In the US, the ruling class and closely linked media have typically portrayed such expressions of solidarity, if acknowledged at all, as simply a matter of vague ideological kinship or abstract anti-US or anti-Israel sentiment, often taking recourse to misleading accusations of anti-Semitism to explain it all away. By doing so, they ignore its historical roots and the ongoing truth to which this movement testifies: There is a deep psychic and visceral connection that binds countless people from diverse backgrounds to the gruesome oppression of Palestinians and to the enabling indifference to it shown by so many North American and European observers.

“I’m trying not to watch it, to look at the videos and the pictures of little kids trying to wake up their dead siblings, but it’s impossible to avoid – and I don’t want to avoid it. It’s the truth. It’s their truth, but it’s also mine and my family’s. But I just can’t deal with it,” another patient said. Yet another explained, “You leave, thinking it’ll be better. But it doesn’t stop. It just changes. Now you get to watch and pay for it rather than be stuck underneath it. I don’t know which feels worse.”

When viewed through the psychiatric and psychoanalytic clinic, it’s clear that, for many, behind their solidarity with Palestinians today lies shared experiences of intergenerational suffering stemming from the legacy of ongoing American and European imperialism abroad and racism within. With social media allowing for an unprecedented level of worldwide proximity to an unfolding genocide after over four centuries of colonial violence has generated a compounding reservoir of trauma passed from generation to generation on every continent across the globe, the images and cries of devastation in Gaza evoke not just sympathy. They are triggering a profound sense of personal resonance. Many Pakistani, Iraqi, Afghan, Yemeni, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Myanma, Irish, Haitian, Rwandan, Somali, Black and Indigenous American, Filipino, Puerto Rican, South African, Colombian, etc. people are now, like my patient, experiencing planes above or cops on the streets as if they’re part of one big murderous machine that they too know very intimately.

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From my vantage as both a clinician and political anthropologist, the growing uprising against US-backed genocide in Gaza reflects an emerging revolutionary subjectivity born of massive trauma now coalescing around a singular stage of cruelty. This isn’t about individual empathy, an imagined identification with the other as if you are the same as them – a sentimental virtue so often celebrated by white liberalism to validate its sense of its own righteousness while conveniently erasing both history and the otherness of the other and evading any responsibility to act. It is instead about a collectivisation of otherness in a rejection of the Euro-American “rules-based international order” that has always depended upon the creation and subordination of supposedly threatening racial, ethnic, and sexual others to justify itself.

The identification at play in this collectivity is not with Palestinians nor Palestinian cultures, per se, but rather with the position of the paradigmatic other that the Palestinian people have for so long been forced by Euro-American hegemony – and the Israeli state it created and whose military it props up – to occupy. Consider, for instance, how the label “terrorist” has so frequently been indiscriminately thrown at Palestinians, from small children to poets, such that American commentators and Israeli officials can unabashedly dismiss via these terms the entire population of Gaza as deserving of death. For migrants vilified as rapists and drug smugglers or Black people called thugs in order to rationalise xenophobic violence and racist policing, for example, such practices are very familiar.

It is in this context that queer, trans, Indigenous, and Black communities in the US have joined together with diverse Arab, Muslim, Asian, and Jewish communities around the world, including within Israel, to protest Israeli violence and shameless support for it by the administration of US President Joe Biden. What unites these individuals and groups is not a shared religion, ethnicity, nor cultural worldview but an embodied knowledge of what it feels like to have one’s loved ones – present and past – be ostracised, demonised, and violated simply because they are marked as a threat to Euro-American power and associated white-supremacist norms. This deep knowledge that derives more from the truth of feeling than from any explicit ideology or identity is now fostering a shared ethical refusal to accept the perpetuation of such violence against others.

As the writer Viet Thanh Nguyen has noted, “otherness and its history demands grief.” Our ethical challenge in the face of colonial violence and its legacies is to expand grief, “to make it ever more capacious, rather than reducing it to a singular sorrow. Capacious grief acknowledges that the trauma of the other is neither singular nor unique – that there are other others out there with whom we can share the burden. Perhaps only by expanding our grief may we be able to leave our trauma behind. In sharing our burden … of otherness, we might also transform that burden into a gift.”

In accounts shared by my patients, students, colleagues, and friends, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, I see this revolutionary subjectivity and the solidarity it fuels taking shape and gaining force. It’s not just about acting on moral principles or historical knowledge of Israeli occupation and Euro-American complicity in a project of ethnic cleansing; it’s about reclaiming power over oneself, taking in one’s own family and communal history as confluent with the present, and reasserting the felt truth of one’s being and that of one’s ancestors in the face of radically dehumanising violence. It is a refusal to be passively swept along by the systems of oppression that surround us and to which the US government, in particular, continues to display a bipartisan commitment. The burgeoning internationalist movement dedicated to freeing Palestine from violent oppression is not a trendy, transient political cause, as some cynical observers have claimed. It is a collective ethical awakening and formation of an affective community derived from a growing postcolonial consciousness – a transnational reckoning with the still-reverberating legacy of colonial violence and neocolonial financial manipulations. It is a rekindling recognition that struggles for justice and freedom are necessarily interconnected in both space and time, spanning continents and generations. The voices rising and feet marching each weekend in solidarity with Gaza over a half-year into the slaughter of its communities are not only protesting the specific injustices perpetrated against Palestinians. They are challenging the very foundations of a global economic and associated moral order built on exploitation and the systematic devaluation of some lives to prop up the plainly false image of postcolonial Europe and North America as emblems of benevolence and freedom. The task of freeing Palestine is simultaneously a task of freeing ourselves, of making a world characterised by – in the words of the families of Israeli hostages beseeching Benjamin Netanyahu to end his violent campaign against Gaza – an ethics of “everyone for everyone.”

Despite the slogans, we are not all Palestinians. We are instead all radically different from one another, with unique life histories, places in the world, and ways of desiring and living. And it is because of the differences that constitute each one of us and how important it is to protect them that the struggle for Palestinian liberation has become the defining ethical and political matter of our era. Its consequences are already reverberating far beyond any single territory or people, and they will demarcate the lines of global ethical-political struggle for the coming generation – one that will not remember our present political leaders kindly.

For more than five months now, students across the United States have been rallying in support of Palestinians as they face genocide at the hands of the Israeli army. It is increasingly clear that more and more young Americans view advocacy for Palestine in the [same way](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/upfront/2023/10/27/angela-davis-palestine-is-a-moral-litmus-test-for-the-world) as Angela Davis does, as “a moral litmus test for the world”.

Mobilisation is no easy task – students supporting Palestinian liberation have been stabbed, shot, run over and sprayed with chemicals used by the Israeli occupation forces. They have been suspended, arrested and disciplined. They have had to rely on their own labour and the limited funds they have been able to raise for their protest actions.

By contrast, pro-Israel students have well-established donor networks, campus Hillels, and the ear of mainstream media to amplify their complaints that pro-Palestinian activism is anti-Semitic.

College administrations, worried about donor money, have also bent over backwards to please powerful individuals and groups, who have denounced pro-Palestinian activism and have not hesitated to discipline students on their behalf. Vastly out-resourced and under-protected, advocates for Palestine have become savvy and creative, building alliances with communities that cut across races, classes and religions and employing a broad range of tactics and strategies. Their actions range from long-term plans to spontaneous eruptions, and everything in between.

Some organising has already borne some fruit. In the University of California system, there have been some notable successes. At the University of California Davis, pro-Palestinian campaigning resulted in a historic student government vote on February 15 to heed the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) call. As a result, the student body will refrain from spending any of its $20m budget on any company on the BDS list.

On the same day, the Graduate Student Association at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) called for divestment from Israel. On February 20, the UCLA student government voted unanimously to demand that the university divest student fees from “apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and genocide”.

On February 29, the Associated Students of UC Riverside also passed a resolution to fully divest from companies complicit in Israel’s genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. On March 6, the Associated Students of UC San Diego also voted in favour of a divestment bill.

Elsewhere, results have been mixed. At Stanford University, where I teach, students managed to maintain an around-the-clock sit-in for 120 days, demanding the university denounce Israeli apartheid and genocide, support Palestinian students, identify anti-Palestinian biases in teaching and research, and implement divestment initiatives. When the university abruptly demanded that the sit-in be dismantled, more than 500 students rallied to defend it with many staying overnight, daring the university to arrest them. While some administrators privately expressed some degree of sympathy, no concrete concessions have been made, so students have continued to demonstrate and disrupt campus life, and are mounting a campus-wide divestment campaign.

Although the Stanford administration has yet to make any meaningful changes, student organisers are quite aware of their achievements. “Obviously, it was a protest at the end of the day, but we also created a space for discourse. And it’s ironic because the university has been desperate to create a space like that, it has been desperate to create this kind of conversation – this was admitted to us by various administrators, including the president himself. What the sit-in did was do what the university had been trying to do,” Farah, a Stanford student organiser, told me in a recent interview for my podcast Speaking out of Place.

What both long-term campaigns and organic, eruptive takeovers have managed to do is to radically change campus environments. Besides the passionate and highly vocal exchanges between people with different views that we have seen at marches and demonstrations, deliberate and methodical divestment campaigns and protracted sit-ins have sustained conversations, debates and discussions over months.

Each of these actions involves bringing in guest speakers (often prominent Palestinian activists, artists and poets) that fill in gaps in education that US universities have been happy to leave unfilled. Students are therefore both learning from a broader spectrum of sources and are themselves serving to educate others.

In the months since October 7, the entire landscape of the US university has changed with regard to Palestine. Some have started to draw parallels with the antiwar student movement during the Vietnam War era. A report by a UC San Diego student newspaper about a pro-Palestine rally where more than 2,000 showed up said: “A turnout of this degree is unprecedented, even by the anti-Vietnam War student demonstrations in the 1960s and 70s.”

As someone who was a student at the University of California at Berkeley during the Vietnam War, and a participant in those demonstrations as well as in today’s rallies for Palestinian liberation, I am struck by some clear similarities.

First, in both cases, student protests challenged the mainstream media’s depiction of the wars and the official positions of their university administrations. Protest action has served to educate the public and expose the roles institutions of higher education play in national and [global power dynamics](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/12/24/gaza-us-universities-and-the-reproduction-of-power). University administrators were confronted with their complicity in the wars and their purposeful obstruction of certain kinds of knowledge and learning and could not hide behind “sins of omission”.

Second, these protests aligned the struggles for Vietnamese liberation and Palestinian liberation with both domestic and international struggles and featured broad multiracial and multiethnic coalitions that link together the local, national and international. These connections have meant that even those at geographically isolated, and smaller institutions do not feel detached or alone, but part of something much bigger. At the same time, I am struck by an important and impressive difference. American college students saw their personal lives as inextricably entangled in the Vietnam War. Many of us lost friends in Vietnam, some of us hid people avoiding the draft or federal investigation for their work in the movement. There was no lack of solidarity with the Vietnamese people, but there was not the same kind of focus on the personal that we see now with regard to the genocide in Gaza and the ethnic cleansing in the West Bank.

I never saw dozens and dozens of Vietnamese flags flying on campus, or other national symbols showcased by students like we see today. With flags, keffiyehs and other Palestinian symbols, students and other protesters are embodying Palestine in tremendously moving and powerful ways.

Beyond the consequences the genocide in Gaza might have on them personally, American college students are expressing historically unprecedented solidarity, empathy and care for the people of Palestine, and outrage that the United States has been a facilitator of Israel’s historical ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

There is no turning back in terms of campus discourse on Palestine. The specifics of the struggle against genocide and apartheid in Palestine have gained strength and amplitude precisely because the sensibilities that were developed in the US and elsewhere since the Vietnam era regarding racism, police and state violence, and other forms of discrimination and cruelty, have become permanent parts in our cultural and political memory.

No right-wing assaults on “critical race theory”, “diversity”, or “inclusion” will change that, and no silencing of critics of Israel under the charge of “anti-Semitism” is going to last.

If anything, the passion, energy and commitment of today’s young people has rekindled the political activist spirit and established intergenerational alliances as the new norm.

While it is hard to predict with certainty whether these movements on university campuses will have an effect on the broader national political landscape, I think it is safe to say this: Each of these actions on campus has not only drawn the attention of the local community, it has also drawn its participation.

And the outside community consists not only of individuals – it includes unions, church groups and other civil society groups to force political change. At this point, over a 100 municipalities have called for a ceasefire, and at least 85 members of Congress have done the same. While change is happening, it is happening much too slowly, which is why the next months will see no end to or diminishment of student activism for Palestinian rights.

The head of Israel’s military has said the country would [respond](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/4/15/bracing-for-the-worst-pride-and-fear-in-iran-after-attack-on-israel) to Iran’s weekend attack as several Western countries urged Israel to avoid an escalation of the conflict in the Middle East.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [summoned](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/4/15/israels-war-on-gaza-live-five-killed-in-nuseirat-as-israel-strikes-camps) his war cabinet for the second time in less than 24 hours on Monday over Iran’s missile and drone attack.

Israel’s military Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said his country would respond but did not provide details.

“This launch of so many missiles, cruise missiles, and drones into Israeli territory will be met with a response,” he said at the Nevatim Airbase in southern Israel.

Iran’s attack – launched in retaliation for an Israeli strike on its embassy compound in Damascus earlier this month – has increased fears of open warfare between Israel and Iran and heightened concerns that violence rooted in Israel’s war on Gaza is spreading further in the region.

“We’re on the edge of the cliff and we have to move away from it,” Josep Borrell, the European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, told Spanish radio station Onda Cero.

“We have to step on the brakes and reverse gear.”

French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and United Kingdom Foreign Secretary David Cameron made similar appeals, echoing calls for restraint by Washington and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

“Neither the region nor the world can afford more war,” Guterres [said](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/15/israel-iran-trade-barbs-at-un-meeting-as-guterres-urges-maximum-restraint) late on Sunday. “Now is the time to defuse and de-escalate.”

Russia has refrained from criticising its ally Iran in public over the strikes, but expressed concern about the risk of escalation on Monday and also called for restraint.

“Further escalation is in no one’s interests,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Belgium and Germany summoned the Iranian ambassadors over the attack, in which Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles that the Israeli military said were nearly all intercepted.

Most of the missiles and drones were shot down by Israel’s Iron Dome defence system and with help from the US, UK, France and Jordan.

The attack came in response to an Israeli air strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus on April 1, which killed seven members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, including two generals.

## Fears of regional escalation

Tehran’s retaliatory attack on Israel has heightened concerns that violence will spread further in the region.

Wary of the dangers, US President Joe Biden has told Netanyahu that Washington will not take part in any Israeli counteroffensive against Iran.

Since the start of Israel’s war on Gaza in October, clashes have erupted between Israel and Iran-aligned groups in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq.

Israel says it is seeking to destroy the Palestinian group Hamas after it led an attack on Israel on October 7, killing at least 1,139 people, mostly civilians, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on Israeli statistics, and taking around 250 others captive.

More than 33,500 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in the Israeli [assault](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/15/israels-war-on-gaza-list-of-key-events-day-192) on Gaza, according to Palestinian authorities, and large parts of the territory have been reduced to rubble. Aid agencies have warned that parts of Gaza are facing a looming famine amid severe Israeli restrictions on supplies of food and humanitarian aid.

With brutal wars unravelling in Ukraine and Gaza, and escalatory attacks between Iran and Israel, defending international law has never been more necessary. Many have argued that the West’s support for Ukraine, often couched in terms of respect for international law, has been undermined by the same countries’ lacklustre support for Gaza. This has given rise to a larger foreign policy debate about alleged double standards of the West. The claim is that Western countries are concerned with violations of international law only when it serves their own interests.

If I speak for my own country, Norway, I can say that the accusation is off the mark. We have been clear that a real commitment to international law demands condemning Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine but also calling out Israeli violations of international law in Gaza.

Avoiding double standards in our foreign policy has been a longstanding Norwegian priority. Successive Norwegian governments have, as a matter of principle, come to the defence of international law regardless of who violates it. Whether it is the ongoing war in Gaza, conflicts on the African continent, Israel’s illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, Britain’s violation of international law in the Chagos Archipelago or Russia’s illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, Norway has been principled and clear. We have not shirked from calling out any of these violations for what they are, regardless of who committed them. Is this the right approach? There are those who have been sceptical. It has been argued that countries should be careful not to criticise allies and partners when they violate international law. The argument is that the world is fraught with peril, and all states, perhaps especially smaller states such as Norway, should be careful not to alienate their allies and partners, even when they act inconsistently with international law.

This is, however, a mistaken approach. Real security depends ultimately on a peaceful international community equipped to resolve global challenges. That in turn requires that we work to ensure that international law is respected. Unless all countries are committed to international law, the system will eventually collapse. That would invariably lead to less security and more uncertainty for everyone.

A 100 years ago, Francis Hagerup, a prominent international lawyer and Norwegian prime minister, observed that the principle of sovereign equality of states was the Magna Carta of the world’s states. Still today, any move away from anything other than an unwavering commitment to international law would be disastrous for the international community. It is the very bulwark against a situation where might is right, against what the International Court of Justice called, in its first ruling after the second world war, “the manifestation of a policy of force”.

Could our consistent defence of international law, including in relation to Western allies, be misconstrued as acceptance of the narrative propagated by Russia and China that the West is hypocritical? Only if one deliberately tries to misunderstand. It is true that Western states, too, have committed violations of international law. The invasion of Iraq by the United States and Britain in 2003 is one example. In the face of such a policy of force, a country such as Norway must, as we did 20 years ago, have the courage of its convictions. Only then can we, with the benefit of real credibility, criticise states that truly and systematically base themselves and their foreign policy on double standards. It is only then that we can credibly punch holes in Russia’s narrative that it is the valiant advocate of international law on behalf of the Global South. There is apparently no limit to how appalled Russia has been by the killing of civilians under bombardment in Gaza, while Russia at the same time has been bombing schools and hospitals in Ukraine. As our Western allies are coming to understand, this cynical double standard can be countered effectively only if one is principled. Norway’s consistent stance as regards both Ukraine and Gaza allows us to point out such contradictions in a way that actually cuts through. The same is the case now with the attacks on the Iranian consulate in Damascus and Iran’s retaliatory strikes against Israel; having criticised Israel for the first event, which not all states were willing to do, Norway can, with the benefit of consistency and credibility, criticise Iran for the second.

Some have argued that it is unrealistic to be equally concerned about every violation of international law all of the time. Yet, Norway’s commitment to counteract conflicts and crises consistently does not preclude us from implementing a foreign policy based on realistic priorities. It is intuitively understandable that a war in a neighbouring country concerns people more than if it is taking place in a far-flung place on another continent. It is logical that it is particularly alarming for Norway that Russia, a country with which we share a long border, is attempting to annex Ukrainian territory through the illegal use of force. A war in our own neighbourhood inevitably has serious security policy implications likely to outweigh those of a conflict far away. Norway cannot, therefore, be accused of double standards for providing materiel to the Ukrainian defence struggle or for giving a historically large aid package to Ukraine. We must, however, be careful not to create the impression that Russia is assessed according to special rules. Accordingly, we have, in our criticism of Russia, as of other states, emphasised the violations of the United Nations Charter and of other universally accepted rules of international law.

Similarly, Norway has not shied away from being critical of Israel’s policy of annexation of the occupied Palestinian territory. Norway made this clear in its submissions in February 2024 before the International Court of Justice in the ongoing advisory opinion proceeding concerning Israel’s policies in the occupied Palestinian territory. In our oral submissions before the Court, we were clear that Israel’s actions in Gaza amount to indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force. We are now working to ensure that Palestine is granted full membership in the United Nations.

What is crucial for Norway – what underpins our foreign policy across the board – is that we insist that similar cases be treated similarly, and that all states be subject to the same rules.

This is a position that should inspire all states. Every state has a stake in upholding universally agreed rules on the use of force, free and fair trade, human rights and the uses of the oceans and their resources. Our common future depends on respect for international law. This requires countries in the Global North and the Global South to be able to see international law as a fair set of rules; in turn, this means that the rules must be applied consistently. All states must resist the temptation, based on short-term national interest, to violate the tenets of the international legal order.

If there was one common thread running through the works of Norway’s foremost playwright and poet, Henrik Ibsen, it was the insistent calling out of the double standards of polite society. Ibsen’s insistence may, at times, have irked those who felt called out; it was nevertheless the right position. For Norway, the position is clear. Our most important contribution to a peaceful and just world order – and to our own national security – is to avoid double standards in foreign policy and to work to ensure that other states do so too

Over the past few months, the International Criminal Court (ICC) under the leadership of Prosecutor Karim Khan has come under heavy criticism for not taking any concrete steps to prosecute the crime of genocide in Gaza.

In November, six of its state parties led by South Africa referred the situation in Palestine to the court and urged it to act. The same month, three Palestinian rights groups submitted a [communication](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/9/three-rights-groups-file-icc-lawsuit-against-israel-over-gaza-genocide) to the ICC, asking it to investigate the crimes of apartheid and genocide in Palestine.

In December, Khan visited Israel and made a short trip to Ramallah, where [he briefly met](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/12/9/alarming-palestinians-accuse-icc-prosecutor-of-bias-after-israel-visit) with victims of Israeli crimes. He then issued a [general statement](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/3/qatar-calls-for-international-probe-into-israeli-crimes-in-gaza) about investigating “allegations of crimes” that did not in any way refer to the mounting evidence of genocide being perpetrated in Gaza.

In January, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) declared that Israel is “plausibly” committing genocide in Gaza. That also did not spur the ICC into action. The court has not even attempted to justify why it has failed to investigate genocide or issue any arrest warrants. Last month, our organisation, Law for Palestine, made the first in a series of submissions to the ICC, characterising the crime of genocide committed by Israeli leaders against the Palestinian people. The [200-page document](https://law4palestine.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Joint-Communication-to-the-Office-of-the-Prosecutor-of-the-International-Criminal-Court-Regarding-the-Perpetration-of-the-Crime-of-Genocide-by-Members-of-the-Israeli-War-Cabinet-Law-for-Palestine.pdf), drafted by 30 lawyers and legal researchers from across the world and reviewed by more than 15 experts, makes a compelling case for the genocidal intent as well as for the prosecutorial policy that the court has followed in other cases.

If the ICC fails to act once again, it risks undermining its own authority as an institution of international justice and the international legal regime as a whole.

## Intent is hard to prove, but not in Gaza

The ICC is obliged to take immediate action on Gaza given the wealth of evidence supporting the accusations of genocide against Israel. Our submission highlights this reality.

In our filing, we focused specifically on the intent to commit genocide since it is considered the most difficult aspect to prove in a case of genocide.

We point to the numerous statements, including by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Issac Herzog, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, and members of the Knesset, as well as members of the public, where the intention to commit genocide is laid bare. We also refer to the [database](https://law4palestine.org/law-for-palestine-releases-database-with-500-instances-of-israeli-incitement-to-genocide-continuously-updated/) we have put together of more than 500 instances of Israeli incitement to genocide as additional proof.

While the statements form a substantial part of the intent component of the crime of genocide, the submission goes beyond and highlights the various actions and official policies that additionally prove intent. These include a pattern of targeting of medical facilities, deliberate destruction of agricultural land and water systems, and the obstruction of aid in order to cause starvation. We have also highlighted parallels between the well-documented Israeli policies of ethnic cleansing and similar atrocities in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, where international criminal tribunals have ruled on the crime of genocide.

We argue that Israeli attempts to “de-civilianise” Palestinian civilians in Gaza through the systematically and inaccurately employed human shields claim is a genocidal technique. We also outline Israel’s destruction of Palestinian culture, heritage, and education systems, ecocidal policies and practices, and domicidal policies and practices in Gaza, which also reflect genocidal intent.

Finally, we contend that Israel’s practice of apartheid creates an environment conducive to committing the crime of genocide, just like in the cases of Nazi Germany and Rwanda, and that the Israeli laws enacted to protect its leaders from prosecution also point to the intent to commit genocide.

When considered collectively, this evidence constitutes “reasonable grounds” to believe that Israeli leaders have a general genocidal intent. This should be more than enough for the ICC to proceed with necessary legal action.

## ICC cannot ignore its own genocide rulings

Beyond the availability of extensive and comprehensive evidence, the ICC should be compelled to act also because of previous precedents it has set.

Since its inception, the ICC has identified the existence of a reasonable basis for investigating cases of genocide, including ones with far lesser devastation to civilian lives and infrastructure than currently observed in Gaza. For instance, in the case of the genocide in Darfur, in a July 2010 decision, the court correctly identified that the threshold to issue an arrest warrant against Sudan’s then-President Omar al-Bashir for the crime of genocide was that “there are reasonable grounds to believe” that the intent exists.

This decision was a revision of the court’s initial decision of March 2009 where the threshold of inferring the intent was “the only reasonable conclusion to be drawn”. In its revised decision, the court stated that this threshold is only applicable later in the trial stage, not at the stage of issuing arrest warrants.

The spirit to investigate genocide was apparent in the ICC’s approach to the situation in Ukraine as well, despite facing greater challenges in establishing both the intent and the acts of genocide by Russia. The ICC, under Prosecutor Karim Khan, dispatched a [42-member investigative team](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/17/icc-sends-largest-ever-investigative-team-to-war-torn-ukraine) to Ukraine within three months of the full-scale Russian invasion. They collected enough evidence to allow the court to issue four arrest warrants so far.

It is also important to note the evaluation the current ICC prosecutor made in his previous role as special adviser and head of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD) in 2021. Based on UNITAD’s independent criminal investigations, he confirmed that there is “clear and convincing evidence that genocide was committed by ISIL against the Yazidi as a religious group”. He drew his conclusion based on the ideology as well as the practices of ISIL. Needless to say, the evidence on Israeli genocidal intent and its connection with ideology are extremely abundant and have been documented extensively, for decades. At the outset, the Zionist movement recognised itself as a settler colonial entity and viewed the elimination of the Indigenous population of Palestine as a necessity. Over the last few months, this link between genocidal intent and ideology has been repeated by several Israeli leaders in reference to the violence unleashed on Gaza, most prominently by Netanyahu in his call to “remember what Amalek has done to you”, referring to the biblical commandment to smite and destroy the Amalekites.

Furthermore, it is important to note that one of Khan’s predecessors, former ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo, clearly [stated](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9b8ddCxv2tg) that even the “siege of Gaza itself… is a form of genocide”.

Additionally, the serious risk of genocide or the plausibility of its commission by Israel, if not full perpetration, has been recognised by top official bodies and experts within the UN system. Besides the ICJ provisional measures and additional provisional measures, which clearly stated that there is a plausible case for genocide, a number of statements and warnings have been voiced out by UN special rapporteurs and working groups, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP), and UN staff members.

## The ICC is losing legitimacy

Proceeding from all this evidence and recognition, the case for the ICC announcing an investigation into genocide and issuing arrest warrants against Israeli leaders is indisputable, especially given its own standards of “reasonable grounds” as seen in the Bashir case.

The case for genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza is as compelling as any previously judicially successful case – if not more. Failure to announce an investigation into the crime of genocide will cause severe and long-lasting damage to the already seriously challenged image and legitimacy of the court.

Some would even argue that the ICC is heading for jurisprudential suicide by undermining the precedents set by the Darfur and Ukraine situations.

The question of Palestine is at the heart of the post-World War II international legal order and cannot be ignored. Amid the continuous erosion of the ICC’s legitimacy, the court and its prosecutor must urgently investigate the genocide unfolding in Palestine and issue arrest warrants against the Israeli war cabinet, if they are to restore the faith of the global majority in this institution of global justice.

There has been much discussion about South Africa’s landmark case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, accusing it of committing the crime of genocide. When it comes to tangible action, this case has been one of the few bright spots in an otherwise lackluster response from states around the world to the Israeli slaughter of the Palestinian people.

One of the lesser known parts of this story in Western public discourse generally, but more pertinently within activist spaces, is that the US empire is threatening to punish South Africa for bringing this much needed case against Israel.

Republican Representative John James and Democratic Representative Jared Moskowitz introduced in early February the [US-South Africa Bilateral Relations Review Act](https://james.house.gov/media/press-releases/john-james-introduces-us-south-africa-bilateral-relations-review-act) in the United States House of Representatives. This legislation would require a full review of the relationship between the US and South Africa on the baseless and spurious grounds that South Africa is supporting “terrorism”.

South African International Relations and Cooperation Minister Naledi Pandor [recently said](https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/south-africa-says-some-us-lawmakers-have-taken-very-negative-position-towards-country-after-icj-case/3154089) on a visit to Turkey: “In terms of responses, unfortunately, there are some legislators in the United States of America that have taken a very negative position against my country.”

Although this story has received little attention and many pro-Palestinian activists in the US, Canada, the United Kingdom and elsewhere have not even heard about it, it is part of the discourse in activist and scholarly circles in South Africa. Among other things, people are concerned about what these threats will mean to their economic wellbeing; funding for the arts; scholarly, community, social and cultural projects and initiatives; and the sustainability of funding models for nongovernmental organisations since many of these are economically dependent on various US institutions.

It is incumbent on activists across the world, but especially in the US, to speak up against the US threat to punish South Africa and demand that their government does not pursue such a path. This should become a protest demand along with the other demands that activists are currently making. South Africa has put its neck on the line for the Palestinian cause, and the least Palestinian supporters can do is to support South Africa against the threats of US imperialism in this moment.

It is also incumbent on middle powers across the world to begin forming a coalition to protect not just South Africa today but also themselves from US imperial power.

It is clear to any honest observer that without direct action from states to isolate the Israeli state economically and politically and place pressure on it legally, it will not depart from the path of genocide – not now, not in the future.

When pressed on the necessity of taking this course of action, one of the common off-the-record responses activists, policy analysts and scholars receive from government officials around the world, including South Africa, is: “We want to pursue more meaningful direct action to help the Palestinian people, but we cannot withstand a punishing reaction from the US.”

I do not see this response as a form of diversion, nor do I consider it cowardly. Government officials cannot so easily dismiss the economic hardships their country would face from a harsh US reaction.

But it is not good enough to end the conversation with this response. Since the US empire is a major obstacle to Palestinian rights, freedom, liberation and sovereignty as well as the sovereignty of middle powers, then middle power states have both a duty and a self-interest to plan and follow a path of action that deals with this problem.

Obviously, the best path forward is for countries around the world to become less dependent on US and Western imperial economic power. Although there are efforts to accomplish this goal, such as BRICS, it remains a long way from changing global economic structures. The Palestinian people cannot afford to wait this long.

Another more immediate path is to make it difficult for the US to respond harshly to states that cut off all diplomatic and economic ties to the Israeli state. The principle of this more immediate path is simple: There is strength and safety in numbers.

If a coalition of middle powers forms and together announces their severing of ties with Israel, then it will be more difficult for the US to punish them all because it would become too costly for the US itself to do so.

What might such a coalition look like? It can start with countries like South Africa, Turkey, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Egypt, Morocco, Spain, Norway, Ireland and others. Countries that already don’t claim any diplomatic and economic relations with Israel – such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and others – would also join the coalition to offer support and protection from the US. Lesser powers can also join when this momentum builds, adding pressure and making it virtually impossible for the US to target all of them.

Momentum can build, and countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium and others that understand that this is the right course of action but are either too cowardly or too unwilling to pursue it for reasons of economic self-interest and their role in the US imperial alliance might be pressured to join, even if partially, by imposing a full two-way arms embargo on Israel.

None of this will be easy. But it is necessary, and it can work. And here I think that activists should begin to speak to their government’s self-interest to pressure them towards forming such a coalition. Governments will only move so much on the basis of a “name and shame” strategy and electoral politics calculations. State self-interest has to also be addressed; activists, policy analysts and scholars can convince their governments that it is in their best interest to follow this policy path.

Challenging the US empire on the question of Palestine will have tremendous consequences for building a more democratic world order. Although some of the states listed above believe that by simply ignoring the plight of the Palestinian people, they can avoid clashing with the US, this is short-term thinking for two reasons.

First, just because they can avoid the wrath of the US on the question of Palestine does not mean that they will not face it on another issue in the future. It is never in the self-interest of middle powers to live under the subordination of a great superpower. Even if temporarily beneficial, at some point, there will be a price to pay for this subordination. So why challenge it now if they do not have to at this moment?

This is where the second reason comes in. There is currently grassroots momentum around the world to challenge US imperialism. Now is the time to seize the opportunity, draw on this energy and direct it towards a democratic world order that in fact stands up for human rights and freedoms for all.

It is critical to seize this moment and send a message to the US empire that business as usual, where US dominance determines international economic, political and cultural directions, is neither wanted nor tolerated. The US empire will either have to come around or itself become isolated. When we reach that stage, we will reach the end of Israeli settler colonialism. We will reach the end of apartheid and genocide, the two most lethal weapons in the Israeli settler colonial arsenal.

Once Israel is globally isolated, it will be forced to change its behaviour. Israelis will have no choice but to cease their settler colonial project. Palestinians and Israelis can then begin negotiating for true decolonial peace and justice under the banner of a one-state solution, under which all have equal rights and freedoms and the land and sovereignty can be shared between Palestinians and Israelis.

Such an outcome will not only be beneficial for Palestinians and Israelis, but it will also be a real signal that the US empire is no longer the empire that it once was and people from around the world, Americans included, can begin to build a real democratic world order that is no longer under the thumb of one superpower.

A democratic world order will decrease the chances of great wars, imperial wars and settler colonial conquests and help avoid the tremendous human suffering that the Palestinians today are experiencing.

The horrors that the Palestinian people have been facing for more than 100 years did not start with the Palestinians and will not end there. It is in everyone’s self-interest to avoid such suffering, and one way to do that is to build a more democratic world.

The great Nelson Mandela once said: “We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.” It is well past time that the rest of the world came to truly understand what this quote means and take tangible action to advance freedom from empire and colonialism.

Every year, April 17 marks [Palestinian Prisoner’s Day](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/17/what-is-palestinian-prisoners-day), a day dedicated to the thousands of Palestinian prisoners in Israel. Campaigners use the day to call for the human rights of such prisoners to be upheld and for those who have been detained without charge to be released.

On Monday, Israel released 150 Palestinian prisoners detained during the war in the Gaza Strip. These prisoners, including two Palestine Red Crescent Society workers, said they suffered abuse during their 50 days in Israeli prison, according to a report by the Reuters news agency.

## What is Palestinian Prisoner’s Day?

The Palestinian National Council chose April 17 as Palestinian Prisoner’s Day in 1974 because it was the date that Mahmoud Bakr Hijazi was released in the first prisoner exchange between Israel and Palestine in 1971.

Hijazi, who had been serving a 30-year prison sentence on charges of trying to blow up the Nehusha Water Institute in central Israel in 1965, was released by Israel in exchange for a 59-year-old Israeli guard named Shmuel Rozenvasser.

How many Palestinians are in Israeli prisons and how are they treated?

In the occupied Palestinian territories, [one in every five](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/why-are-so-many-palestinian-prisoners-in-israeli-jails) Palestinians has been arrested and charged at some point. This rate is twice as high for Palestinian men as it is for women – two in every five men have been arrested and charged.

There are 19 [prisons in Israel](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/why-are-so-many-palestinian-prisoners-in-israeli-jails) and one inside the occupied West Bank that hold Palestinian prisoners. Israel stopped allowing independent humanitarian organisations to visit Israeli prisons in October, so it is hard to know the numbers and conditions of people being held there.

As of Tuesday, about 9,500 Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank were in Israeli captivity, according to estimates from Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, a rights group based in the West Bank city of Ramallah that supports Palestinian prisoners. The organisation works with human rights groups and families of prisoners to gather information about the situation of the prisoners.

Palestinian prisoners who have been released have reported being [beaten](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/28/freed-palestinian-prisoners-report-physical-abuse-in-israeli-jails) and humiliated before and after the start of the war on Gaza on [October 7](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/21/october-7-forensic-analysis-shows-hamas-abuses-many-false-israeli-claims).

Prisoners released into Gaza on Monday have complained of ill-treatment in Israeli prisons, according to the Reuters report. Many of those released said they had been beaten while in custody and had not been provided with medical treatment.

“I went into jail with two legs, and I returned with one leg,” Sufian Abu Salah told Reuters by phone from a hospital in Gaza, adding that he had no medical history of chronic diseases. “I had inflammations in my leg, and they [the Israelis] refused to take me to hospital. A week later, the inflammations spread and became gangrene. They took me to hospital where I had the surgery,” said Abu Salah, adding that he had also been beaten by his Israeli captors.

Permission for family members of prisoners to visit them has been suspended since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Gaza and since December 2020 in the West Bank, according to HaMoked, a human rights NGO assisting Palestinians subjected to human rights violations under the Israeli occupation. HaMoked added that minors being held in prisons were allowed a 10-minute phone call to their families once every two weeks during 2020. How many Palestinian prisoners are being held without charge?

About 3,660 Palestinians being held in Israel are under [administrative detention](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/29/jailed-without-charge-how-israel-holds-thousands-of-palestinian-prisoners), according to Addameer. An administrative detainee is someone held in prison without charge or trial.

Neither the administrative detainees, who include women and children, nor their lawyers are allowed to see the “secret evidence” that Israeli forces say form the basis for their arrests. These people have been arrested by the military for renewable periods of time, meaning the arrest duration is indefinite and could last for many years. The administrative detainees include 41 children and 12 women, according to Addameer.

## Why are Palestinian children held in Israeli prisons?

According to Addameer, 80 women and 200 children are currently being held in Israeli prisons. In 2016, Israel introduced a new law allowing children between the ages of 12 and 14 to be held criminally responsible, meaning they can be tried in court as adults and be given prison sentences. Previously, only those 14 or older could be sentenced to prison. Prison sentences cannot begin until the child reaches the age of 14, however [[PDF](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/dpal/dv/4d_dci-p_new_israeli/4d_dci-p_new_israelien.pdf)].

This new law, which was passed on August 2, 2016, by the Israeli Knesset, enables Israeli authorities “to imprison a minor convicted of serious crimes such as murder, attempted murder or manslaughter even if he or she is under the age of 14”, according to a Knesset statement at the time the law was introduced.

This change was made after [Ahmed Manasra](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/13/calls-grow-release-palestinian-prisoner-ahmad-manasra) was arrested in 2015 in occupied East Jerusalem at the age of 13. He was charged with attempted murder and sentenced to 12 years in prison after the new law had come into effect and, crucially, after his 14th birthday. Later, his sentence was commuted to nine years on appeal.

## What sort of trials do Palestinians receive?

Controversially, Palestinian prisoners are tried and sentenced in military courts rather than civil courts.

International law permits Israel to use military courts in the territory that it occupies.

A dual legal system exists in Palestine, under which [Israeli settlers](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/6/who-are-israeli-settlers-and-why-do-they-live-on-palestinian-lands) living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are subject to Israeli civil law while Palestinians are subject to Israeli military law in [military courts](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/2/26/israels-military-courts-humiliating-charade-for-palestinians) run by Israeli soldiers and officers.

Biden made his remarks hours after a statement by the White House calling out “physical intimidation targeting Jewish students and the Jewish community”.

“While every American has the right to peaceful protect, calls for violence and physical intimidation targeting Jewish students and the Jewish community are blatantly antisemitic, unconscionable, and dangerous – they have absolutely no place on any college campus, or anywhere in the United States of America,” White House Deputy Press Secretary Andrew Bates said.

“And echoing the rhetoric of terrorist organisations, especially in the wake of the worst massacre committed against the Jewish people since the Holocaust, is despicable.”

New York City Mayor Eric Adams and New York State Governor Kathy Hochul have also condemned reports of harassment and intimidation at the protests.

Columbia, one of the most prestigious universities in the US, has emerged as a hotbed of student activism since the start of Israel’s war in Gaza following the October 7 attacks.

On Thursday, the New York Police Department arrested more than 100 pro-Palestinian protesters after its officers swarmed the campus and cleared an encampment set up by students.

Some students involved in the protests said they had been suspended from Columbia and its associate institution, Barnard College, including Isra Hirsi, the daughter of Democratic Congresswoman Ilhan Omar.

On April 22, students set up an encampment at the University of Michigan to demand the university’s complete and total divestment from genocidal Israel. They thus joined dozens of other universities across the United States in standing up in solidarity with the Palestinian people who are facing genocide at the hands of the Israeli army. Israeli forces have killed more than [34,500 Palestinians](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/23/by-the-numbers-200-days-of-israels-war-on-gaza), including 14,500 children, in Gaza and nearly 490, including 124 children, in the occupied West Bank.

What I have seen at Michigan as a member of the encampment is inspiring. The protest has been joined by students of various ethnic and religious backgrounds, including Palestinians and Jews, people of Arab and South Asian descent and others. Many community members are spending time in and around the camp: to protect it, distribute food, and learn.

The encampment has become a site of mutual aid and support, discussion, and political education. Students are learning to organise together, setting up rotating schedules of patrol, medical and food services. Over the last week, students have held teach-ins on topics ranging from problematic university investments to environmental colonialism, solidarity with other Indigenous groups like the Armenians, and poetry readings by Palestinians. Films, such as Israelism and The Present, are screened to bring awareness to current political schemes and realities of oppression. Like in other universities, we also set up a Palestine library where anyone can borrow books on Palestinian history or political thought and learn more about the liberation movement. Thus far, the only disturbances by pro-Israel students have been sparse, their counterprotests garnering three to 10 attendees. They hold their Israeli flags proudly in the face of pickets that show the faces of killed Palestinians.The encampment organisers have established their own police liaisons and legal observers with the belief that “we protect each other”. This has prevented any altercations that could lead to police intervention. The Michigan University administration has let the encampment be as long as it does not “disturb” graduation next week. Clearly, the murder of Palestinians is not considered disturbing.

Despite the non-violent nature of our encampment and similar ones across the country, accusations of [anti-Semitism](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/22/biden-condemns-blatant-anti-semitism-at-columbia-pro-palestine-protests) have been thrown at us, just as they have at all other protest actions on campuses across the country. But branding anti-genocide protests as anti-Semitic is not just absurd, it is dangerous.

Such a label conflates Judaism, a peaceful religion, with Zionism, a political ideology created in the 19th century. The conflation is dangerous, as it falsely maintains that all Jewish people support what the Israeli government and settlers are doing, denying the diversity within the community and feeding into “dual loyalty” conspiracy theories. As our encampments illustrate, this false equivalence cannot be further from the truth. On many campuses, Jewish groups have been at the centre of pro-Palestinian mobilisation.

We, Palestinians, did not pick the identity of our oppressors, and yet we are constantly asked to address the fears of anti-Semitism spreading. Do children in Gaza care what the religion is of the pilots in the Israeli fighter jets that rain bombs on them, killing their mothers and fathers? We should not forget that white supremacy, has been, and continues to be, the biggest problem facing the Jewish community in the US and beyond. It is a simple fact that American officials and institutions continue to ignore.

We see more reaction from them over students protesting genocide than there was over “terrorists” killing innocent people at the Tree of Life Synagogue, or white supremacists strolling through the streets of Charlottesville and shouting anti-Semitic chants. Why? Because if students of privilege are willing to throw themselves on the line for a Palestinian future at schools meant to curate the next generation of imperialists, then that means the colonial chokehold on Palestine, on American youth, on Western society as a whole is failing – and that frightens those who stand to benefit for Palestinian colonisation and colonisation across the Global South. If students are ready to fight for Palestine so vehemently, then they will not stop at that.

That is why, brute force has been used across the US to crack down on protests across campuses: from [Columbia University](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/4/24/columbia-faculty-furious-over-student-arrests-at-gaza-protests) and New York University to [Emory University](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/4/26/professors-arrested-as-police-use-violence-to-clear-university-camp), the [University of Texas](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/4/25/police-crack-down-on-protest-camps-at-us-universities) in Austin and the University of Southern California.

However, rather than quell the uprising, the brutalisation of students and faculty has galvanised young people not just in the US but in [other countries](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/4/26/australian-students-join-protests-for) as well. With every arrest, every suspension, and every attempt to silence us, official institutions and university administrations have only broadened support for the Palestinian cause. What is happening in Palestine is arguably the human rights issue of our time, and the US response to pro-Palestinian protests has made it the free speech issue of our time. Each student, each protester takes honour in advocating for Palestinian liberation, fighting US complicity in Israeli atrocities, and resisting colonialism.

Yet, we are under no illusion that what we are enduring during the struggle on campus compares in any way to the Israeli occupation.

Our peers in Gaza have not only lost family, friends, professors and fellow students, but they have also lost all their universities. Until their universities reopen, until they have the freedom to learn again, we will make our campuses the platforms of their voices to educate the world on their plight. Our tents, much like Palestine itself, are not going anywhere, remaining steadfast in the face of adversity until victory: total divestment from Israel and ultimately, the liberation of Palestine.

The smear campaign accusing us of anti-Semitism and police brutality will continue. But as these make headlines, we must remind ourselves and our supporters: all eyes must remain on Gaza.

The constant coverage of the student movement should not be allowed to divert attention from the systematic war crimes happening in Gaza. The focus must stay on the mass graves that continue to be discovered across the Gaza Strip, including at [al-Shifa](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/4/16/mass-grave-discovered-at-gaza-hospital-occupied-by-israeli-forces) and [Nasser hospitals](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/24/uncovering-of-mass-grave-at-gazas-nasser-hospital-what-you-need-to-know); on the forced starvation of the Palestinian people as Israel continues to pretend to “increase” aid, but in reality is using it as a weapon of war; on the continuing Israeli bombardment which is killing children, women and men at a shocking rate on a daily basis; on the looming invasion of Rafah and Israeli attempts to cover up the crimes it is going to commit by pretending to have plans to “evacuate” the civilian population. Amid these dark times, what is happening across US campuses fills me with inspiration and hope. This is what a Palestinian future can look like: Jews performing Passover rituals along Muslims praying Maghrib; community members of all creeds breaking bread together; people of all backgrounds taking part in collective liberation – a Palestine that existed before the British Mandate.

I dream of my homeland where I can sit in the shade of the trees my grandparents planted and see freedom, feel freedom. And this dream is moving closer to fulfilment every day.

In a fast-expanding global battleground, enablers and opponents of Israel’s genocidal assault on Gaza are facing off in an unusual landscape: courtrooms. Over the past six months, lawyers, activists, organisations and states who believe that international law and conventions that prohibit genocide actually mean something and must be implemented have submitted an unprecedented number of lawsuits and motions to national and international courts.

This new frontier in the century-old battle between Palestinian Arabism and Zionism is significant because it promises a more level playing field where traditional military-political strengths and weaknesses are neutralised or even reversed. This extraordinary legal mobilisation is already [worrying](https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahus-office-hosts-emergency-talks-on-feared-icc-warrants-for-pm-ministers/) the Israeli government, which is seeking help from Western allies to fend off the accusations. Meanwhile, the Israeli army has established an international law department to handle the flood of new legal challenges to Israel’s conduct in the Gaza Strip. And yet, mainstream Western media is mostly staying away from covering this important story in depth.

Perhaps it is because the United States and many other Western governments are charged as complicit main backers of the crime of genocide in these cases. Or perhaps it is because an ally of the West is accused of such heinous crimes.

Whatever the reason, the lack of diligent coverage says much about where the Western media’s heart is. It is consistent with the longstanding convergence between the Israeli position, US government policy and mainstream media coverage – or lack of it.

One of the pivotal developments in the legal fight to stop Israeli genocide is the ongoing South African case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). During the initial January hearing in The Hague, most Western outlets did not cover [South Africa’s arguments](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/11/icj-hears-south-africas-genocide-case-against-israel-over-gaza-war) in the case in full, likely because they revealed many uncomfortable truths about Israel’s ongoing assault on Gaza and the 75 years of Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

On January 26, the ICJ found it is “plausible” Israel committed acts in Gaza that violate the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Israel and its Western allies ignored it while much of the Western media downplayed it or emphasised the positive spin for Israel – that the ICJ did not order a halt to Israeli attacks.

For the rest of the world, though, the ruling was an important victory. It provided new momentum in the struggle to stop governments and corporations from assisting Israel’s assault on Gaza. Its findings encouraged many around the world who have launched their own legal challenges to Israel’s savage war on Gaza. In February, Nicaragua urged the governments of the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Canada to immediately halt the supply of arms, ammunition, technology and/or components to Israel. It gave them written notice that it would adopt all appropriate legal measures, including recourse at the ICJ, “to guarantee respect for these fundamental international texts and customary international law”.

In early April, Nicaragua did take Germany to the ICJ, [accusing](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/8/icj-to-hear-nicaragua-case-against-germany-for-facilitating-gaza-genocide) it of “facilitating the commission of genocide” in Gaza. It formally requested the court to order the German government to stop supplying weapons to Israel.

Various parties have also approached the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has the mandate to try individuals and entities accused of atrocities.

In early March, Australian lawyers [referred](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/3/5/israels-war-on-gaza-live-israeli-attacks-on-aid-seekers-continue) Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to the ICC for possible complicity in genocide. The submission points to Australian government actions, such as the freezing of $6m in United Nations aid funding for the Palestinians, the export of arms to Israel and the provision of military aid and other actions as grounds for the referral.

A few weeks later, Law for Palestine, supported by the Independent Commission for Human Rights – Palestine and 15 Arab and international groups [sent](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/4/21/the-icc-can-no-longer-ignore-the-genocide-in-gaza) a communication to the ICC demanding the court investigate accusations of Israeli war crimes and genocide.

In most cases, only local news outlets covered these novel developments, which collectively represent a dramatic new phase in what has become a global battle between pro-Israel states and anti-colonial and anti-apartheid activists in the Global South. In parallel, legal challenges in national courts across the Western world highlight the growing links between human rights advocates in the West and the Palestinians.

In November, the respected Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) filed a lawsuit in a California court on behalf of Palestinian families in Gaza and the United States, accusing President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin of [failure to prevent and complicity](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/14/us-president-biden-sued-for-complicity-in-israels-genocide-in-gaza) in the Israeli genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. They sought a court decision to order the US government to end military and diplomatic support to Israel while the genocide continues.

The court found that Israeli actions “plausibly constitute genocide” and implored Biden to examine the unwavering US support for it but decided it was unable to rule on the matter because foreign policy is an executive branch prerogative.

In March, CCR filed an appeal supported by more than 100 attorneys, experts and human rights organisations, arguing that stopping genocide is legally mandatory, not optional, in US and international law. The appeals court is set to hold an initial hearing in June.

CCR Senior Staff Attorney Diala Shamas, who works on the organisation’s anti-genocide cases and was in The Hague for the ICJ sessions, told me in an interview last week that different parties are exploring using a variety of legal avenues to halt the genocide as quickly as possible.

“The law’s promise is precisely to stop this kind of criminal action. What’s significant about the genocide issue is how states are required to act on the fundamental international norm,”. Belief in this promise and this legal requirement to act has driven other actors to file legal challenges aimed at halting Western support for the Israeli genocide.

In December, the Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq and the UK-based Global Legal Action Network asked the UK’s High Court to prohibit the granting of licenses for weapons exports to Israel because it commits atrocities in Gaza. The court dismissed the case, but Al-Haq vowed to seek another court hearing on the issue.

In February, in a similar case brought by Oxfam Novib, Pax Nederland and The Rights Forum, a Dutch court of appeals [ordered](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/12/court-orders-netherlands-to-halt-delivery-of-fighter-jet-parts-to-israel) the government to stop the delivery to Israel of spare parts for the F-35 fighter jet, citing a clear risk of violations of international law.

In early April, Berlin-based lawyers filed an urgent application on behalf of Palestinian families in Gaza to stop the German government from approving contracts for weapons sales to Israel, which they believe uses them in violation of laws against genocide and war crimes, including the terms of the German Arms Control Act.

Meanwhile, Palestine Speaks and Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East filed a lawsuit against former German parliamentarian Volker Beck, the head of the German-Israeli Society, for suspected incitement of hate and denial of war crimes in Israel’s war on Gaza.

What this moment reveals, Shamas told me, is how national and international legal systems operate in parallel, not in a hierarchy. The genocide charge is so significant that it opens up new legal and other avenues of action to stop it, such as public demonstrations, petitions, lobbying in Washington, and activism. “The intersection of politics, law, and activism is on full display,”. Also important to note is that there is no statute of limitation for the crime of genocide. So as facts are unearthed and verified in Gaza or in foreign capitals that support the charge of genocide against Israel, legal cases can be initiated around the world at any time.

“We may be only seeing the beginning of litigation against governments, individuals or corporations. Weapons manufacturers, energy companies and others could be charged, and many individuals associated with the genocide accusations should be worried,” Shamas said.

Legal cases are one of the most powerful means of bringing facts to the attention of the world, exposing criminal behaviour and seeking redress for gross injustices. This arena should be a natural ally to the media, which ideally should disseminate facts and credible analysis.

As the legal challenges to Israel’s genocide keep growing around the world and implicate Western governments, officials and companies as accomplices, it is no surprise that the mainstream Western media continues to ignore or downplay them. But a time will come when Western complicity in the Israeli genocide of the Palestinians will become impossible to cover up. Media organisations would do well now to at least report honestly on the surge of global litigation against Israel’s genocide. Otherwise, they run the risk of being swept up in the tide of the many political and corporate accomplices now being named in courts around the world.

Earlier this month, the Israeli occupying forces withdrew from my hometown of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, presumably to prepare for an attack on nearby Rafah. Now, those civilians who won the lottery of life and death are on a trail of broken dreams back to Khan Younis. It is a pilgrimage – hajj in Arabic – but one of grief not of faith.

Danger still lurks in every corner, but my cousin Ikram and her husband, Awad, felt compelled to join the hajj and venture to the al-Qarara area in the north of Khan Younis to check on Awad’s brother Mohammad and his family.

What they discovered was beyond comprehension. Mohammed, his wife, Manar, and their seven children – Khaled, Qusai, Hadya, Said, Ahmad, Ibrahim and Abed, all under the age of 15 – had been brutally killed by an Israeli air strike on their home. Their house lay in ruins and their bodies lay decomposing, stray dogs and cats trying to gnaw at them. Ikram and Awad dug shallow graves and buried them.

This was the second time Ikram and Awad had to bury nephews and nieces. In October, they had to take care of the bodies of Tasneem, Yasmeen, Mahmoud and Ilyas, the children of Awad’s other brother, Ibrahim, who were killed along with their mother, Nancy, by an Israeli bombardment. This time, the pain proved too unbearable. Upon her return home, Ikram, overcome by grief, suffered a sudden loss of vision. The cause of this tragic affliction remains unknown, leaving us all bewildered and devastated.

Meanwhile, in the west of Khan Younis, which now resembles a ghost town, some of my husband’s family embarked on a similar journey of anguish. Their destination: the ruins of their homes, not far from what remains of al-Amal Hospital.

The entire block, including the three multi-storey buildings where my brothers-in-law and more than 70 other people used to live, was destroyed. The young men of the family took pictures, videos and salvaged what little remained of their former lives. Then they made the journey back to al-Mawasi, once a vibrant hub of life on the beach of Khan Younis, now transformed into a tent camp, a wasteland of desperation, where they have been displaced for the past four months.

Upon returning to their tents, they shared the pictures and clips of the ruins of their homes with their parents and siblings. For my sister-in-law Nima, the news and images of her home proved too much to bear. She kept weeping while looking at the images. The next morning, Nima was found unresponsive.

Her family rushed her to the nearest hospital, al-Amal, which ironically translates to “hope”, only to find no hospital and no hope. One of the heroic doctors who remained there declared her dead. She simply could not withstand the anguish. Overwhelmed by grief and despair, Nima had suffered a stroke.

Nima’s husband, Suleiman, and his children struggled to complete the funeral arrangements, to wash the body in the correct way, to find material for a coffin and to reach out to Rabab, Nima’s eldest daughter, who had sought refuge in Rafah. As they cried and mourned, Israeli bombs continued to fall on residential areas in Rafah, Nuseirat refugee camp, Deir al-Balah, Maghazi refugee camp and Beit Hanoon, resulting in hundreds of casualties. In Rafah’s Yibna refugee camp, a bomb killed members of the Abu Al Hanoud family – Iman; her mother, Ibtisam; her husband, Mohammed; and their four young children: Taleen, Alma, Lana and Karam.

During this heavy bombardment, Suleiman made the decision not to inform Rabab, fearing for her and her children’s safety. They buried Nima without her. The choice was devastating, but the risks of travelling to Rafah and back were too high. The drone strikes, shelling or ship bombardments were relentless.

On the day they buried Nima, the Israeli army bombarded the market at Maghazi camp, [killing](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/4/16/israeli-airstrike-hits-crowded-gaza-refugee-camp) 11 people, many of them women and children.

This was not the first time that immense pain had resulted in such an untimely death in the family. In 1967, Suleiman’s father, Abdullah, suffered a stroke when the harsh reality of the Israeli military occupation dawned.

Having lost his home in the Nakba of 1948, the terror that the Israeli army unleashed onto the Palestinian population of Gaza in 1967 came as another shock. But ultimately, what proved too much to bear was Israeli soldiers kidnapping his son, Suleiman, who was a 16-year-old child at that time.

Knowing nothing about Suleiman’s fate and unable to accept the thought of losing him, Abdullah succumbed to grief, and a stroke ravaged his body, leaving him paralysed. He endured the misery of life in Khan Younis camp for seven years before passing away the week after Suleiman’s return to Gaza.

Grateful that his wife, Nima, did not suffer the same prolonged pain as his father, Suleiman thanked Allah and asked his children to recite Surah al-Fatiha for her.

Nima is just one of the more than 10,000 Palestinian women who have died so far in this war. She was an excellent host and a fantastic cook who dreamed one day of making the pilgrimage to Mecca, meticulously saving every spare shekel for the trip.

Nima’s death extinguished not only her dreams but also the warmth and generosity that defined her essence, the Palestinian essence. She leaves behind a void filled only with heartache and loss.

Like my children, I started to wonder who will be there and what will be there when we visit Gaza next?

The missiles from an Israeli-made Hermes drone can pierce Gaza’s unshielded airspace and destroy lives in seconds. The so-called “fire and forget” missiles can hit targets at a distance of more than 2.5km (1.5 miles) in the sky, so when they are fired, no one on the ground knows they are coming. Civilians going about their business are killed instantly because there is no one and nothing to protect them.

Not one Jordanian, British, French or American warplane was deployed in defence of the 50 women killed every day for the past 200 days by Israel. But they all scrambled to protect Israel from Iranian drones that took eight hours to reach its territory, many did not even make it that far. The only slower method of delivery of the Iranian strikes would have been to transport the weapons by camels through the desert.

But now the world has shifted its focus to Iran. Israel has been made into the victim again. No one speaks about the right to self-defence of Palestinian civilians living through genocide and crimes against humanity.

“Fire and forget” in Gaza appears to be a global policy.

But my resolute cry is that the world must never forget. Good people the world over [are working](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/4/23/watching-the-watchdogs-the-media-downplays-a-big-legal-story-at-its) to ensure that those responsible for these crimes and those who supplied them the weapons will face trial and be haunted by the spectre of justice for the rest of their days.

Israel, which has threatened for weeks to launch an all-out assault on the city, saying its goal is to destroy Hamas’s remaining battalions there, stepped up air attacks on [Rafah](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/2/18/displaced-bombed-by-israel-rafahs-kids-seek-warmth-in-hospital-coveralls) last week.

Western countries, including Israel’s closest ally the US, have pleaded with it to hold back from attacking the southern city, which abuts the Egyptian border and is sheltering more than a million Palestinians who fled Israel’s seven-month-long assault on much of the rest of Gaza.

Advertisement

Abbas said that even a “small strike” on Rafah would force the Palestinian population to flee Gaza.

“The biggest catastrophe in the Palestinian people’s history would then happen,” he said.

Abbas reiterated that he rejects the displacement of Palestinians into Jordan and Egypt and said he is concerned that once Israel completes its operations in Gaza, it will then attempt to force the Palestinian population out of the occupied West Bank and into Jordan.Al Jazeera’s Zein Basravi, reporting from Ramallah, said that Abbas’s remarks were significant as it was the first time a senior leader in the PA made such a statement, but added that the Palestinians expect more from the leader of the PA.

“Abbas is simply echoing the things that the Palestinians we have been speaking to said for the last six months,” he said.

“The reaction to Abbas’s remarks on the Palestinian streets is likely to mirror a broader political response. The people we have been speaking to say that what they see is a speech from their leader, far too late and far too weak.”

Israel launched its offensive in Gaza after Hamas led an attack on southern Israel on October 7 in which Israel said 1,139 people were killed and 253 taken captive.

More than 34,400 Palestinians have since been killed, according to the Gaza health ministry, and most of the population is displaced.

Hundreds of thousands of people sheltering in Rafah have nowhere to flee in the face of [Israel’s offensive](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/4/28/israels-war-on-gaza-live-israel-says-rafah-invasion-on-negotiation-table) that has levelled large swaths of the urban landscape in the rest of the territory.United Nations officials and human rights groups warn that an attack on Rafah will be catastrophic.

Activists in the United States demanding an end to Israel’s war on Gaza have rallied outside a hotel hosting the annual White House correspondent’s dinner, condemning President Joe Biden for his support of the military campaign and “under-coverage” of the conflict by Western news outlets.

However, Biden, who attended Saturday’s event in Washington, DC and delivered a 10-minute speech, made no mention of the war in Gaza or the grave humanitarian crisis there.

Protests at the gala event – which is normally devoted to presidents, journalists and comedians taking outrageous pokes at political scandals and each other – took place as antiwar demonstrations also spread through US college campuses, with students pitching encampments and withstanding police sweeps in an effort to force their universities to divest from companies enabling Israel’s military campaign on Gaza.

The protests in the US capital forced Biden’s motorcade to take an alternate route from the White House to the Washington Hilton, where more than 100 protesters, some of them waving Palestinian flags, shouted “shame on you” at guests hurrying inside.

At one point, the crowds chanted, “Western media we see you, and all the horrors that you hide”, while some protesters sprawled motionless on the pavement, next to mock-ups of bloodied flak vests with “press” insignia.

The crowds also cheered when someone inside the Washington Hilton – where the dinner has been held for decades – unfurled a Palestinian flag from a top-floor hotel window.

Since Israel’s war on Gaza began last October, the Israeli military has killed 142 media workers and arrested at least 40 Palestinian journalists, according to the Government Media Office in Gaza.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has said 2023 was the deadliest year for those in the profession in a decade, with some 75 percent of those killed worldwide being Palestinians reporting on the war in Gaza.

In his speech, Biden offered a toast for “press freedom and democracy around the world”, but failed to speak about the suffering in Gaza. He spent most of his address poking fun at his main rival in this year’s presidential race, Donald Trump, as well as the two men’s advanced age.

His speech remained focused on what he believes is at stake this election, speaking about how another Trump administration would be more harmful to the country than his first term.

“We have to take this seriously. Eight years ago we could have written it off as ‘Trump talk’, but not after January 6,” he told the audience, referring to the supporters of Trump who stormed the US Capitol after Biden defeated Trump in the 2020 election.

One of the few mentions of Gaza came from Kelly O’Donnell, president of the White House Correspondents’ Association (WHCA), who briefly noted some 100 journalists have been killed in Israel’s war on Gaza

In advance of the event, more than two dozen Palestinian journalists published a letter calling for their colleagues to boycott the gala, accusing the Biden administration of being complicit in Israel’s systematic killing of media workers in Gaza.

“The toll exacted on us for merely fulfilling our journalistic duties is staggering,” the letter stated. “We are subjected to detentions, interrogations, and torture by the Israeli military, all for the ‘crime’ of journalistic integrity.”

One organiser complained that the WHCA – which represents the hundreds of journalists who cover the president – has largely been silent since the first weeks of the war about the killings of Palestinian journalists. The WHCA did not respond to a request for comment.

American-Palestinian journalist Ahmed Shihab Eldin, one of the signatories of the letter,  it is “unacceptable” for media workers to stay silent for fear of endangering job security.

“We are seeing journalists in Gaza continuing to be, not just killed, but detained, tortured, and even their families killed,” he said.

Sandra Tamari, executive director of Adalah Justice Project, a US-based Palestinian advocacy group that helped organise the letter from journalists in Gaza, said, “It is shameful for the media to dine and laugh with President Biden while he enables the Israeli devastation and starvation of Palestinians in Gaza.” In addition, the Adalah Justice Project started an email campaign targeting 12 media executives at various news outlets expected to attend the dinner who previously signed onto a letter calling for the protection of journalists in Gaza.

“How can you still go when your colleagues in Gaza asked you not to,” a demonstrator asked guests heading in. “You are complicit.”

Israeli officials are growing wary that they could face prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC) over the war in Gaza.

After days of conjecture in Israeli media, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said late on Sunday that it has issued warnings to senior political and military officials that they could soon face arrest warrants

The ministry said it has informed Israeli missions of “rumours” concerning prosecutions.

The ICC has given no indication that warrants are imminent and has made no comment on the claims.

Israeli officials have referred in recent days to an ICC probe launched three years ago into possible war crimes committed by Israel and Palestinian fighters going back to the 2014 Israel-Hamas war. The investigation is also charged with looking at Israel’s construction of settlements in occupied territory such as the West Bank.

## ‘Anti-Semitism’

Senior Israeli officials have demanded assurances from the ICC that Israel will not be targeted, suggesting any action might constitute “anti-Semitism”

Foreign Minister Israel Katz pushed on Sunday for the ICC to waive any threat that it could target Israelis over the war, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians and pushed hundreds of thousands towards famine.

“We expect the court [ICC] to refrain from issuing arrest warrants against senior Israeli political and security officials,” Katz said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Friday that Israel “will never accept any attempt by the ICC to undermine its inherent right of self-defence”.

Israel launched its latest war on the Gaza Strip on October 7 after Hamas carried out attacks in southern Israel, killing 1,139 people.

“The threat to seize the soldiers and officials of the Middle East’s only democracy and the world’s only Jewish state is outrageous. We will not bow to it,” Netanyahu posted on the social media platform X.

Israel is not a member of the court and does not recognise its jurisdiction, but the Palestinian territory was admitted with the status of a member state in 2015.

In October, ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan said the court had jurisdiction over any potential war crimes committed by Hamas fighters in Israel and by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip.

Khan has said his team is investigating whether any crimes have been committed in Gaza and those who are in breach of the law will be held accountable. The investigation at the ICC – which tries individuals on allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide – is separate from [a genocide case](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/28/icj-orders-israel-to-take-action-to-address-famine-in-gaza) launched against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), also based in The Hague.

The ICJ, also known as the World Court, is a United Nations court that deals with disputes between states.

Hundreds of students have been arrested across universities in the United States, with scuffles reported between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian demonstrators at UCLA, as rallies for [a ceasefire](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/4/27/from-la-to-new-york-student-protests-in-support-of-palestine-grow-strong) in Gaza and divestment from companies linked to Israel spread across US campuses.

The pro-Palestinian encampment at the University of California at Los Angeles has expanded in recent days, but counter-protesters have also become increasingly vocal and visible.

On Sunday, the mood turned ugly when some demonstrators broke through a barrier that had been set up to separate the two factions, according to Mary Osako, UCLA’s vice chancellor for strategic communications.

People from both sides then pushed and shoved each other, shouting slogans and insults and in some cases trading punches. Campus police armed with batons eventually separated the sparring groups

Osako said the university was “heartbroken” about the violence and had introduced additional security measures. Northeastern said that “Kill the Jews” had been heard at the protests, and that such chants “crossed the line”, making it necessary to clear waht it said was an “unauthorized encampment” that had been “infiltrated” by professional organisers with no affiliation to the university.In Bloomington in the Midwest, the Indiana University Police Department arrested 23 people as they cleared a campus protest camp, the Indiana Daily Student newspaper reported.

On the opposite side of the country, the Arizona State University Police Department arrested 69 people for trespassing after the group set up an “unauthorised encampment” on campus.

Arizona state officials said a protest group, “most of whom were not ASU students, faculty or staff”, set up a camp on Friday and ignored repeated orders to disperse.

Meanwhile, at Washington University in St Louis, at least 80 people were arrested, including US presidential candidate Jill Stein and her campaign manager.

Across the US, university leaders have tried, and largely failed, to quell the demonstrations, which have often seen the police intervening violently, with videos emerging from different states showing hundreds of students – and even faculty members – being forcefully arrested.

The protesters have demanded amnesty for students and faculty members disciplined or fired for protesting. About a week ago at [Columbia University](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/27/columbia-universitys-shafik-rebuked-over-gaza-crackdown-but-avoids-censure) in New York, more than 100 pro-Palestinian activists were arrested.

What started at the Columbia campus has turned into a nationwide showdown between students and administrators over pro-Palestine protests and the restrictions on free speech.

In the past 10 days, hundreds of students have been arrested, suspended, put on probation and, in rare cases, expelled from colleges, including Yale University, the University of Southern California, Vanderbilt University and the University of Minnesota.

A few universities have had to cancel graduation ceremonies, while others have seen their buildings occupied by the protesters.