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ColdType

Issue 251

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November 2023

Jonathan Cook, Chris Hedges
David Cromwell & David Edwards



Genocide in Gaza

Essays on the slaughter of
a country and its children

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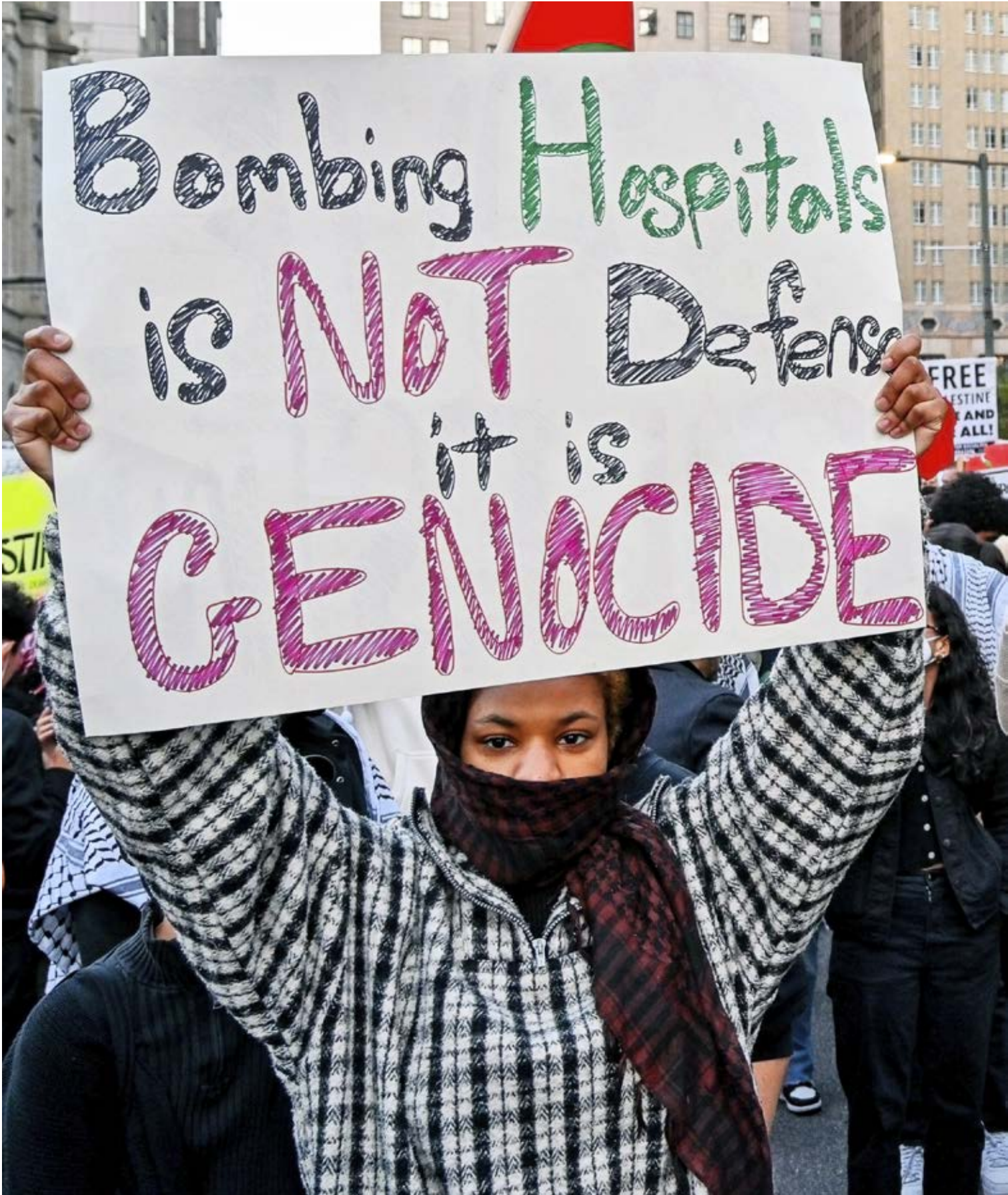
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Philadelphia, USA, October 21, 2023 – Photo: Joe Piette

This way for genocide

The failure of Washington and European governments to intervene to halt the carnage in Gaza threatens to ignite regional violence

I have been in urban warfare in El Salvador, Iraq, Gaza, Bosnia and Kosovo. Once you fight street by street, apartment block by apartment block, there is only one rule – kill anything that moves. The talk of safe zones, the reassurances of protecting civilians, the promises of “surgical” and “targeted” air strikes, the establishment of “safe” evacuation routes, the fatuous explanation that civilian dead were “caught in the crossfire,” the claim that the homes and apartment buildings bombed into rubble were the abode of terrorists or that errant Hamas rockets were responsible for the destruction of schools and medical clinics, is part of the rhetorical cover to carry out indiscriminate slaughter.

Gaza is such a small area – 25 miles in length and about 5 miles wide – and so densely populated that the only outcome of an Israeli ground and air assault is the mass death of those Israel’s Defense Minister Yoav Gallant calls “human animals” and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calls “human beasts.” Israeli Knesset member Tally Gotliv suggested dropping “doomsday weapons” on Gaza, widely seen as a call for a nuclear strike. Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Friday dis-

missed calls to protect Palestinian civilians. “It is an entire nation out there that is responsible ... this rhetoric about civilians not aware, not involved, it’s absolutely not true,” Herzog said. “They could’ve risen up, they could’ve fought against that evil regime that took over Gaza in a coup d’etat.” He added, “We will break their backbone.”

The demand by Israel that 1.1 million Palestinians – nearly half of Gaza’s population–evacuate northern Gaza, which will become a free fire zone, within 24 hours, ignores the fact that given the overcrowding and sealed borders there is no place for the displaced to go. The north includes Gaza City, the most densely populated part of the strip, with 750,000 residents. It also includes Gaza’s main hospital and the Jabalia and al-Shati refugee camps.

Israel, by employing its military machine against an occupied population that does not have mechanised units, an air force, navy, missiles, heavy artillery and command-and-control, not to mention a US commitment to provide a \$38 billion military aid package for Israel over the next decade, is not exercising “the right to defend itself.” This is not a war. It is the obliteration

The West refuses to intervene, as 2.3 million people, including a million children, are deprived of food, fuel, electricity and water, see their schools and hospitals bombed and are butchered and rendered homeless by one of the most advanced military machines on the planet

CHRIS HEDGES

is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who was a foreign correspondent for 15 years with the *New York Times*, where he served as Middle East bureau chief and Balkan bureau chief. He previously worked overseas for the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Christian Science Monitor* and NPR. He is host of the *Chris Hedges Report* – chrishedges.substack.com

of civilians trapped for 16 years in the world's largest concentration camp. Gaza is being levelled, flattened, destroyed, reduced to rubble. Hundreds of thousands of its impoverished residents will be killed, wounded or left homeless without food, fuel, water and medical help. Nearly 600 children are already dead.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has been forced to close 14 food distribution centres leaving half a million people without food relief. Gaza's only power plant has run out of fuel. The United Nations says 12 of its staff have been killed by Israeli air strikes, 21 out of 22 UNRWA health facilities in Gaza have been damaged and hospitals lack basic medicines and supplies.

Israel, as it has in the past, will block the dissemination of independent reporting and images once some 360,000 soldiers launch a ground assault. It cut internet service in Gaza on Saturday. The brief glimpses of Israeli atrocities that make it out will be dismissed by Israeli leaders as anomalies or blamed on Hamas. The West refuses to intervene, as 2.3 million people, including 1 million children, are deprived of food, fuel, electricity and water, see their schools and hospitals bombed and are butchered and rendered homeless by one of the most advanced military machines on the planet.

The gruesome images of Israelis gunned down by Hamas is the currency of death. It trades carnage for carnage, a macabre dance that Israel initiated with the massacres and ethnic cleansing that allowed for the creation of the Jewish state, followed by decades of dispossession and violence meted out to the Palestinians. The Israeli army, before the current assault, had killed 7,779 Pales-

tinians in Gaza since 2000 including 1,741 children and 572 women, according to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem. This figure does not include Gazans who died due to drinking contaminated water or being denied access to medical treatment. Nor does it include the rising number of Gazan youth who, having lost all hope and struggling with deep depression, have committed suicide.

I spent seven years reporting on the conflict, four of them as the Middle East Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*. I stood over the bodies of Israeli victims of bus bombings in Jerusalem by Palestinian suicide-bombers. I saw rows of corpses, including children, in the corridors in Dar Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. I watched Israeli soldiers taunt small boys who in response threw rocks and were then callously shot in the Khan Younis refugee camp. I sheltered from bombs dropped by Israeli warplanes. I climbed over the rubble of demolished Palestinian homes and apartment blocks along the border with Egypt. I interviewed the bloodied and dazed survivors. I heard the soul crushing wails of mothers keening over the corpses of their children.

I arrived in Jerusalem in 1988. Israel was busy discrediting and marginalising the secular, aristocratic Palestinian leadership of Faisal al-Husseini and driving Jordanian administrators from the occupied West Bank. This secular and moderate leadership was replaced by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Yasser Arafat. But Arafat, very likely poisoned by Israel, and the PLO were also ruthlessly pushed aside by Israel. The PLO was replaced by Hamas, which Israel openly fostered as a counterweight to the PLO.

The escalating savagery of Israel

against the Palestinians is reflected in the escalating savagery of the Palestinians. The resistance groups are Israel's doppelgängers. Israel believes that with the eradication of Hamas the Palestinians will become docile. But history has shown that once one Palestinian resistance movement is destroyed, a more virulent and radical one takes its place.

The killers feed off each other. I saw this in the ethnic wars in Bosnia. When religion and nationalism are used to sanctify murder there are no rules. It is a battle between light and dark, good and evil, God and Satan. Rational discourse is banished.

"The sleep of reason," as Francisco Goya said, "brings forth monsters."

The Jewish extremists, fanatic Zionists and religious bigots in the current Israeli government need Hamas. Revenge is the psychological engine of war. Those targeted for slaughter are rendered inhuman. They are not worthy of empathy or justice. Pity and grief are felt exclusively for one's own. Israel vows to eradicate a dehumanized mass that embodies absolute evil. The maimed and dead in Gaza, and the maimed and dead in Israeli towns and kibbutzim, are victims of the same dark lusts.

"From violence only violence is born," Primo Levi writes, "following a pendular action that, as time goes by, rather than dying down, becomes more frenzied."

The Biden administration has promised unconditional Israeli support and weapons shipments. The USS Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group has been deployed to the eastern Mediterranean Sea to "deter any actor" who might widen the conflict between Israel and Hamas. The carrier group includes the US Navy aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford; its eight squadrons of attack and support

aircraft; the Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Normandy; and the Arleigh-Burke class guided missile destroyers USS Thomas Hudner, USS Ramage, USS Carney and USS Roosevelt, according to a Pentagon statement.

The US, as in the past, ignores the far greater death and destruction, as well as the illegal occupation, meted out by Israel to the Palestinians or the periodic military campaigns – this is the fifth major military assault by Israel on Gaza in 15 years – against civilians.

Israel says it recovered 1,500 bodies of Hamas fighters after the incursion. This is a number greater than the 1,300 Israeli victims. Nearly all the dead Hamas fighters, I suspect, were young men born inside the Gaza concentration camp who had never seen the outside of the open-air prison until they burst through the security barriers erected by Israel. If Hamas fighters possessed Israel's technological arsenal of death, they would be able to do their killing more efficiently. But they do not. Their tactics are cruder versions of those Israel has used against them for decades.

I know this disease, the exaltation of race, religion and nation, the deification of the warrior, the martyr and violence, the celebration of victimhood. Holy warriors believe they alone possess virtue and courage, while their enemy is perfidious, cowardly and evil. They believe they alone have the right to revenge. Pain for pain. Blood for blood. Horror for horror. There is a fearsome symmetry to the madness, the abandonment of what it means to be humane and just.

T.E. Lawrence calls this cycle of violence "the rings of sorrow."

Once these fires are lit they can easily become a conflagration.

Israeli tanks and soldiers, to thwart an attack by Hezbollah in support of

The escalating savagery of Israel against the Palestinians is reflected in the escalating savagery of the Palestinians. The resistance groups are Israel's doppelgängers

it is not Israel's assault on Gaza I fear most. It is the complicity of an international community that licenses Israel's genocidal slaughter and accelerates a cycle of violence it may not be able to control

the Palestinians, have been deployed to the border with Lebanon. The Israeli forces killed fighters from Hezbollah, as well as a Reuters journalist, which saw Hezbollah fire a salvo of rockets in retaliation. Israel's National Security Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir announced he would distribute 10,000 assault rifles to Israeli settlers, who have carried out murderous rampages in Palestinian villages in the West Bank. Israel has killed at least 51 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank since Hamas launched its attack on October 7.

Psychologist Rollo May writes: "At the outset of every war ... we hastily transform our enemy into the image of the daimonic; and then, since it is the devil we are fighting, we can shift onto a war footing without asking ourselves all

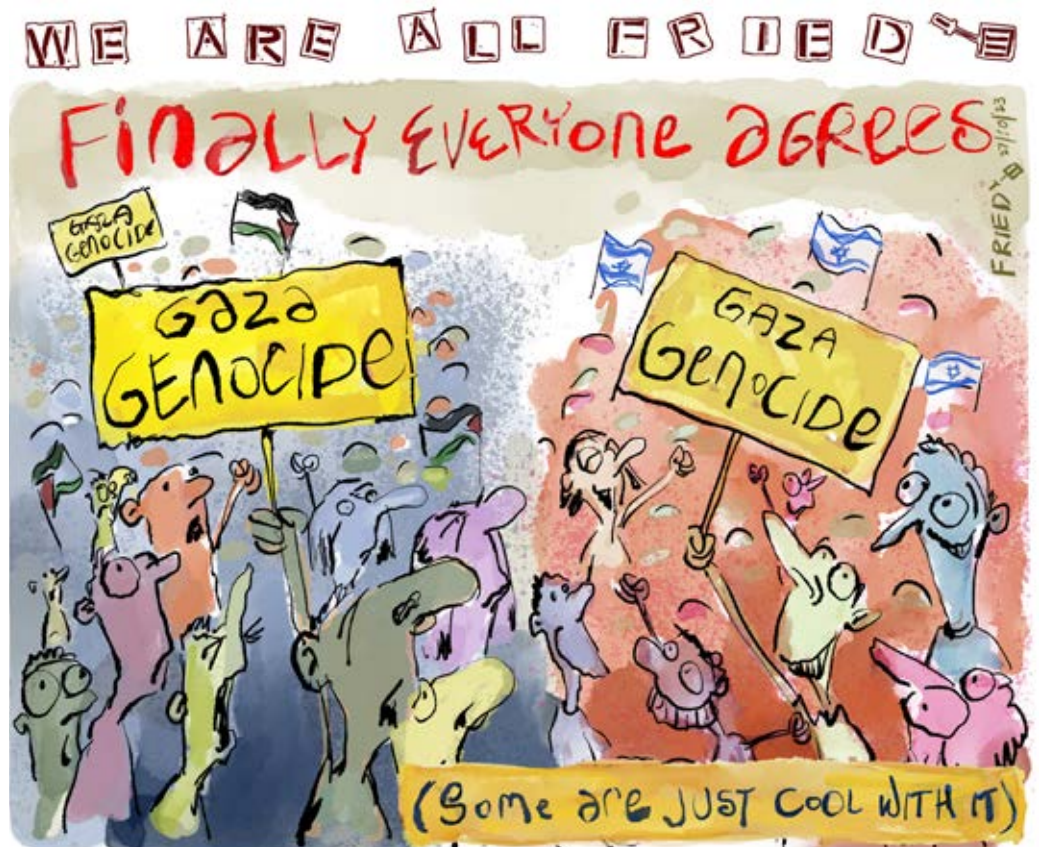
the troublesome and spiritual questions that the war arouses. We no longer have to face the realization that those we are killing are persons like ourselves.

"The killing and torture, the more they endure, contaminate the perpetrators and the society that condones their actions. They sever the professional inquisitors and killers from the capacity to feel. They feed the death instinct. They expand the moral injury of war."

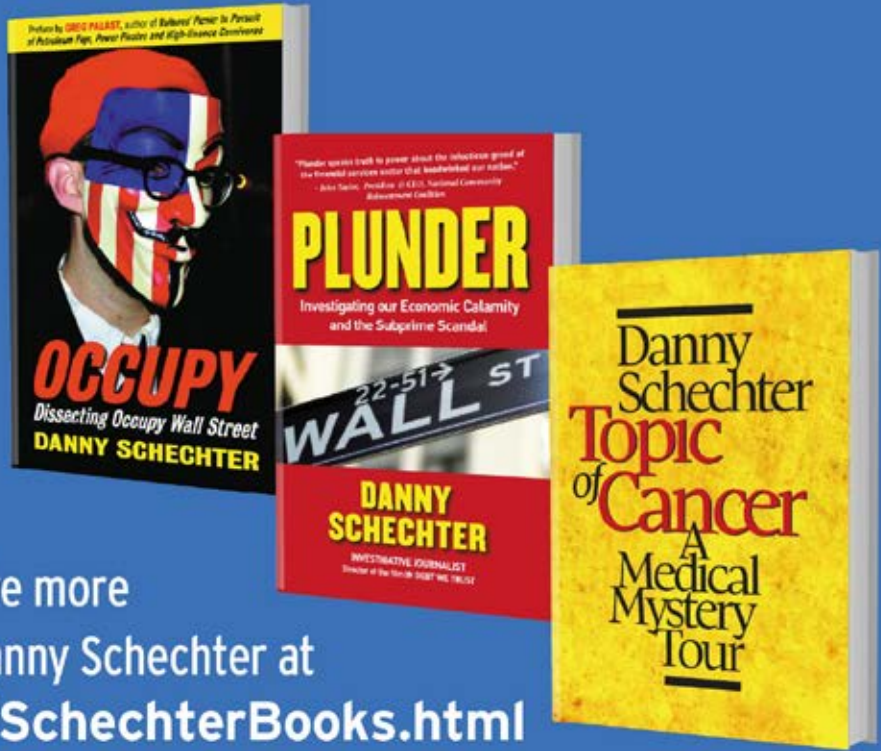
Israel taught the Palestinians to communicate in the primitive howl of hatred, war, death and annihilation. But it is not Israel's assault on Gaza I fear most. It is the complicity of an international community that licenses Israel's genocidal slaughter and accelerates a cycle of violence it may not be able to control.

CT

Greg Koenderman

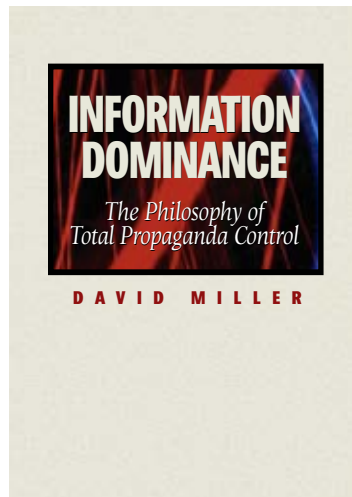
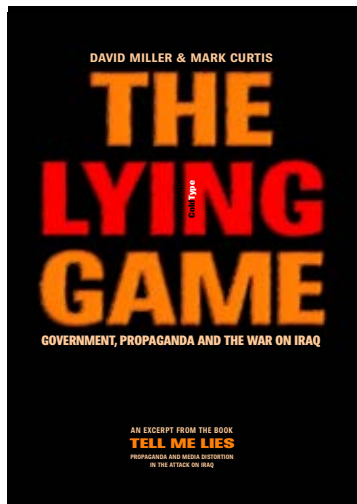


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London, England, October 28, 2023 – Photo: Alisdare Hickson

Media paving way to genocide

Catastrophe looms because journalists have failed to hold both Israel and their own governments to account

How did we get to the point where Israel can order half of Gaza's population – more than a million people – to move from the north of their tiny prison to the south of their tiny prison, in one of the most overcrowded places on Earth? Palestinians in Gaza were given 24 hours to do so or face dire consequences.

The depopulation order is being treated as “advance warning” – a concept Israel has played around with for many years to mangle international law and legitimise its targeting of civilians.

Anyone left in northern Gaza – children, the sick, the elderly, the disabled – will face a terrifying fate: either a rain of bombs or a ground invasion comprising hundreds of thousands of Israeli troops seeking vengeance for the death of more than 1,300 Israelis during Palestinian fighters' attack last weekend.

Western leaders talk a lot about the trauma of Jews – trauma their states were often responsible for – and the resulting need not to offend Jews by being critical of Israel. France and Germany have banned demonstrations in solidarity with Gaza, and the UK is close to following suit.

None of those leaders seem concerned that the families in Gaza currently being expelled live with the trauma of having been forced from their homes at gunpoint by Israel several times before, not least during the Nakba in 1948 and during the 1967 war.

This latest expulsion order forces them to relive that trauma – as well as the terror of living under Israel's bombs – not just in their imaginations but in the real world. They are being ethnically cleansed once more by their serial tormentor.

That is not hyperbole.

They have every reason to fear that this is not some temporary “relocation,” even assuming they can reach the “evacuation” zone and that the zone actually turns out to be safe.

This risks turning into another Nakba, except the footage this time is in high definition and colour.

For years, Israeli leaders have secretly worked with western allies to pressure Egypt to refashion the Sinai desert, next to Gaza, as a sham Palestinian state. Those machinations are one of the reasons Cairo has kept its short land border with Gaza so tightly closed.

Now 2.3 million Palestinians will be pressed up

The claim of beheaded babies made the front pages of several UK papers, even though the source was discredited the moment it came under scrutiny

Jonathan Cook

is an award-winning British journalist, who was based in Nazareth, Israel, for 20 years before returning to the UK in 2021. The author of three books on the Israel-Palestine conflict, Cook won the Martha Gelhorn Special Prize for Journalism in 2011. He previously worked for Britain's *Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers. His website is www.Jonathan-Cook.net

against that border, clamouring for an exit from the killing fields.

The path to how we got here was paved by western politicians and the establishment media. They have been giving the green light to Israel to do as it pleases.

Keir Starmer, the Labour opposition leader and Britain's likely next prime minister, forged the bipartisan political consensus in the UK last week by telling interviewers he supported Israel's "right to defend itself" by implementing a "complete siege."

The people of Gaza are being deprived of food, water and power, premised on the idea – articulated by Israel's defence minister Yoav Gallant – that they are "human animals".

In other words, Starmer gave Labour's backing to genocidal-style war crimes by Israel.

On Friday, Grant Shapps, secretary of state for defence, went even further, if that is possible, by giving every appearance that he supports Israel's right to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from northern Gaza.

The legal adviser for Human Rights Watch, Clive Baldwin, observed that the depopulation order was being made when "the roads are rubble, fuel is scarce, and the main hospital is in the evacuation zone". He added: "World leaders should speak up now before it is too late."

But part of the reason world leaders have been under no pressure to "speak up" is because the establishment media have made no effort to hold their feet to the fire, even as Israel tramples all over international law, making a mockery of it.

In fact, when a Channel 4 TV crew chased Jeremy Corbyn in the street to ask him to "condemn" Hamas, the firm

insinuation was that the former Labour leader was once again being outed as antisemitic – for reminding viewers that the rights of all civilians, including Palestinians in Gaza, should be protected.

The British media have at least pushed back a little as politicians have supported Israel's demands to depopulate half of Gaza. But this change of heart has been very late in coming.

The credulousness of the media has been especially flagrant in relation to claims that Hamas beheaded 40 babies in last weekend's attack. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence – but not, it seems, for media outlets when it comes to vilifying the Palestinian people.

The claim of beheaded babies made the front pages of several UK papers, even though the source was discredited the moment it came under scrutiny.

Journalists who had attended the tour of the small community near Gaza where the babies' bodies were supposedly found quickly walked back the claim, saying they had seen no beheaded corpses.

The best they could do was point to soldiers there making the claim. When pressed for evidence, the Israeli military fell unusually silent.

US President Joe Biden breathed further life into the story by claiming he had been shown the photos, only for the White House to quickly concede that the president had not seen any such photos and was relying on information, or possibly disinformation, from the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

But anyone who assumes this was a genuine mistake needs to be reminded of a few basics of journalism.

Disinformation campaigns are one of the chief battlefields in any war – some-

thing any serious journalist is only too aware of. And western powers and their allies have an appalling track record of lying to their own medias, even if we ignore the most infamous of those deceptions: the lie that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction was used to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Fabrications typically focus on particularly inflammatory issues to rile up popular sentiment in favour of atrocities against the enemy. Favourites include stories of babies and women being abused.

Kuwait, a close ally of the US, propagated the entirely false story in 1990 that invading Iraqi troops had ripped babies from hospital incubators and left them to die. That helped pave the way for the US to launch the 1991 Gulf war against Iraq, the 2003 invasion's prequel.

And in 2011 western officials claimed that Libyan troops fuelled on Viagra were preparing to carry out mass rapes in the opposition-held city of Benghazi. That lie was later exposed by a British parliamentary enquiry, but had served its purpose by then: the West had successfully overthrown Libya's troublesome ruler, Muammar Gaddafi.

Notably, the western press spread further unsubstantiated allegations against Hamas. It claimed that some of the partygoers had been raped – before once again being forced to walk back the claim.

A clue to the extent to which the media has been colluding in the manipulation of public sentiment was demonstrated by the *Times*' front page on Friday.

Under the splash headline “Israel shows mutilated babies” – itself misleading: Israel had done no such thing – was a photograph of bloodied small

children. But those children were not Israeli. They were Palestinian children, covered in rubble dust and blood from Israel's bombing of Gaza.

The juxtaposition was the ultimate cynical trickery: using images of wounded Palestinian children to add to the clamour for Israeli revenge – violence that would only create more wounded and dead Palestinian children.

The *Telegraph* joined the fray too, publishing a blurred image provided by Netanyahu's office, seemingly of a dead baby. There was no visible indication the baby had been beheaded.

It hasn't ended there – and was never intended to. Having spread the evidence-free claim that Hamas beheaded babies, the Israeli government is now using the claim as the basis for making a preposterous, self-serving comparison: that Hamas is the same as Islamic State group, the head-chopping death cult spawned by the US invasion of Iraq.

Once again, the western media – ever gullible in the service of western powers – has allowed itself to be played.

That was only too evident during a meeting with Netanyahu when US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin got away with declaring that Hamas' actions were “worse than what I saw with ISIS”.

If Hamas and Islamic State both cut off heads – and Hamas is worse because it decapitates babies – then don't they need to be treated in the same way? Or so the official logic implies.

If the false impression can be created in the minds of western publics that Hamas and Islamic State are comparable, then Israel and its allies will find it much easier to justify even grosser violations of international law in Gaza than are already taking place.

But it is not just these more extreme instances of media-regurgitated decep-

Under the splash headline “Israel shows mutilated babies” ... was a photograph of bloodied small children. But those children were not Israeli. They were Palestinian children, covered in rubble dust and blood from Israel's bombing of Gaza

Israel's 16-year blockade of Palestinians by land, sea and air, starving them and keeping them caged with snipers at their prison fence, is presented as some unfortunate act of god

tions that are rationalising Israeli violence to western publics. A deeper problem lies in the media's framing of events, presenting to audiences a woefully distorted picture of what is going on.

In the supposed interests of neutrality, the BBC publicly eschews referring to Hamas directly as a terrorist organisation. But like a nervous tic, the corporation repeats at every opportunity western governments' designation of it as a terror group.

No media organisation would ever refer to the Israeli government in equivalent terms: noting with every mention that Israel is designated by human rights organisations as an apartheid state and a serial violator of international law.

How is one qualification pertinent but not the other? Unless the aim is not balanced reporting, as professed, but the dissemination of state propaganda.

Similarly, when liberal media report on the catastrophe unfolding in Gaza, potentially another Nakba, they invariably frame it exclusively in the language of humanitarianism. Typifying this approach, the BBC's Lyse Doucet recently described the people of Gaza as facing a "dire humanitarian crisis" – as though they had just suffered an earthquake.

Israel's 16-year blockade of Palestinians by land, sea and air, starving them and keeping them caged with snipers at their prison fence, is presented as some unfortunate act of god.

In another glaring misrepresentation of the reality faced by Palestinians – all the more striking because it contrasts so starkly with the BBC's sensitivity to Israelis' suffering – presenter Clive Myrie described the mood of people in Gaza on Friday night as "anxious."

This was as more than one million

of them were being forced to leave their homes, pick their way through rubble to get south, as bombs rained down unpredictably, without food or electricity and no obvious destination or place to shelter safely.

The idea that these people were "anxious" – a feeling I had just from watching the pictures from Gaza – would have been laughable had it not been so profoundly offensive.

BBC journalists, after years of being exposed to criticism each time they use such prejudicial language in covering Israel's latest rampage through Gaza, still demonstrate they have learnt nothing. Their careers depend on them learning nothing.

BBC World News' website referred once again to Palestinians passively "dying" in Gaza, and compared them to Israelis who were being actively "killed."

Journalists still ludicrously refer to any act of Palestinian resistance as ending a "period of quiet" – a quiet enjoyed only by Israel.

Palestinians fighting against their occupation, and the blockade that has made them prisoners in an overcrowded tiny strip of land, are implicitly guilty of "escalating tensions." Apparently tensions only build when Israelis are suffering, not when Palestinians suffer. Why? Because Palestinians are always suffering. Their pain is the quiet.

Similarly, the exculpatory word "retaliation" is still reserved for violence from Israel – it is something only the occupier can seek.

Can one seriously imagine the BBC describing Hamas' bloody storming of a rave next to Gaza last weekend, killing hundreds of partygoers, as retaliation for years of blockade of Gaza by Israel, or for the thousands of Gaza protesters

left amputees by Israeli snipers shooting them in the leg, or for the children denied a future in an open-air prison Israel patrols by land, air and sea?

Of course not.

No one at the BBC, however, has second thoughts about describing as “retaliation” the daily massacre of hundreds of Palestinians, including children blasted to pieces by Israeli missiles raining down from the sky.

The only question for these journalists is whether it would be more “proportionate” to kill a slightly lower number each day – until, that is, “quiet” can be restored.

The challenges for Palestinian spokespeople to make their voices heard is all too obvious on the rare occasions they are given a platform in the West – usually only when Hamas makes headlines through violent resistance.

Last week journalists began every interview with Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian ambassador to the UK, insisting that he “condemn” Hamas. The barely veiled subtext was that any refusal to do so indicated approval of the violence.

Zomlot understands the discursive trap only too well, which is why he refuses to be drawn. It is designed to sidetrack him from giving voice to Palestinian suffering. It requires him to frame issues according to the western media’s script, ignoring the context of decades of much greater Israeli violence that helped to create Hamas.

In an interview dominated by the need to “condemn” Hamas, his five minutes of screen time will be entirely wasted. Viewers will have none of their preconceived ideas challenged or disrupted – ideas instilled in them by the flood of western propaganda they have been subjected to since childhood.

The role of that propaganda is to sub-

tly, and sometimes not so subtly, equate Israel with western values and Palestinians with a barbaric primitivism.

No one at the BBC would ever conceive of demanding from Israel’s ambassador to the UK that he condemn Netanyahu for approving either the indiscriminate bombing of Gaza, where half the population are children, or the ethnic cleansing of northern Gaza.

And yet the Israeli ambassador represents the government doing those things. Zomlot represents the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority, which opposes Hamas.

Because Zomlot refuses to step into the trap the BBC and other media lay for him, journalists appear quite happy writing a script for him: putting words into his mouth he has never said – but which they wish he would say to make their propaganda role easier.

Kay Burley did this twice on Sky News last week. She asserted that Zomlot had said of the massacre of Israeli civilians: “Basically the Israelis had it coming.” That “basically” was doing an extraordinary amount of heavy lifting in Burley’s precis of Zomlot’s interviews. It is a sentiment anyone familiar with his statements knows he would never utter.

What Burley meant is that Zomlot had refused to frame his comments in a way that suited journalists like herself who wish to peddle a simplistic, divisive and dangerous narrative – of Israel as central to western civilisation, and Palestinians as the barbarians at the gate. So she unilaterally decided to make up a quote.

If the journalistic malpractice of this is not self-evident, consider an imaginary scenario in which Burley had made up a quote and ascribed it to Gallant, Israel’s defence minister. As previously noted, last week he stopped all food,

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The problem here is not so much the ignorance of journalists as it is their inability to remove the colonial blinkers they were raised with, from their mostly privileged upbringings and private schooling

water and power entering the Gaza strip, calling the 2.3 million inhabitants there “human animals.”

Can we imagine Burley asserting that Gallant “said basically that Israel was going to commit genocide against the population of Gaza?”

In fact, that would be a far fairer summary of Gallant’s sentiment than of Burley’s invented quote from Zomlot. But it is inconceivable she would ever dare misrepresent an Israeli official’s words, or that the rest of the media would treat it as entirely unremarkable, or that she would still have her job afterwards.

The problem here is not so much the ignorance of journalists as it is their inability to remove the colonial blinkers they were raised with, from their mostly privileged upbringings and private schooling.

They are ill-equipped to think from the point of view of the occupied, of the oppressed – and if by some miracle, they did manage it, they would not survive long in Britain’s state broadcaster, or in the billionaire-owned, advertising-driven press.

The imperative for these journalists is to uphold the pretence that we, the West, are the “good guys” and that

those who refuse to submit to the enforcement of our privileges and their own subjugation must, by definition, be the “bad guys”.

That paradigm is not just wrong. It is dangerous. It shores up ignorance among western publics, ignorance that western leaders then exploit to give Israel unquestioning backing as it commits atrocities against the Palestinian people.

Western publics may be largely in the dark about what is really happening in Gaza, but Israel’s neighbours are not.

Their media have been depicting the full horror. That not only incenses Arab publics, but puts pressure on their leaders to be seen to be doing something to help and protect the Palestinian people.

The West is sending warships to the region to let Israel carry out its crimes undisturbed, as well as supplying Israel with the weapons it needs to commit those crimes.

A countervailing pressure will build in the region for actors like Hezbollah to respond.

Catastrophe looms in many different arenas. And it is made all the more likely because western media have consistently failed to hold both Israel and their own governments to account – not just now, but for decades. **CT**

YOAV GALLANT, Israel’s Defence Minister

“I have ordered a complete blockade on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel. Everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly”

"A powerful, necessary indictment of efforts to disguise the human toll of American foreign policy."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

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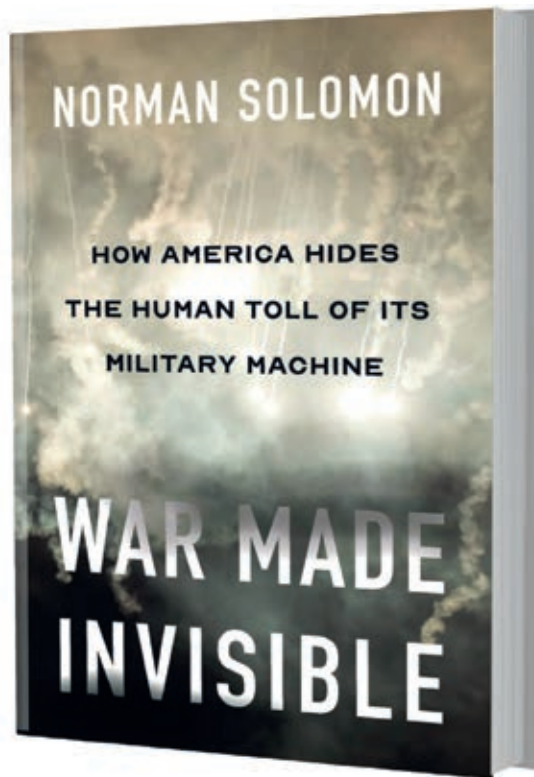
—**Amy Goodman**, *Democracy Now!*

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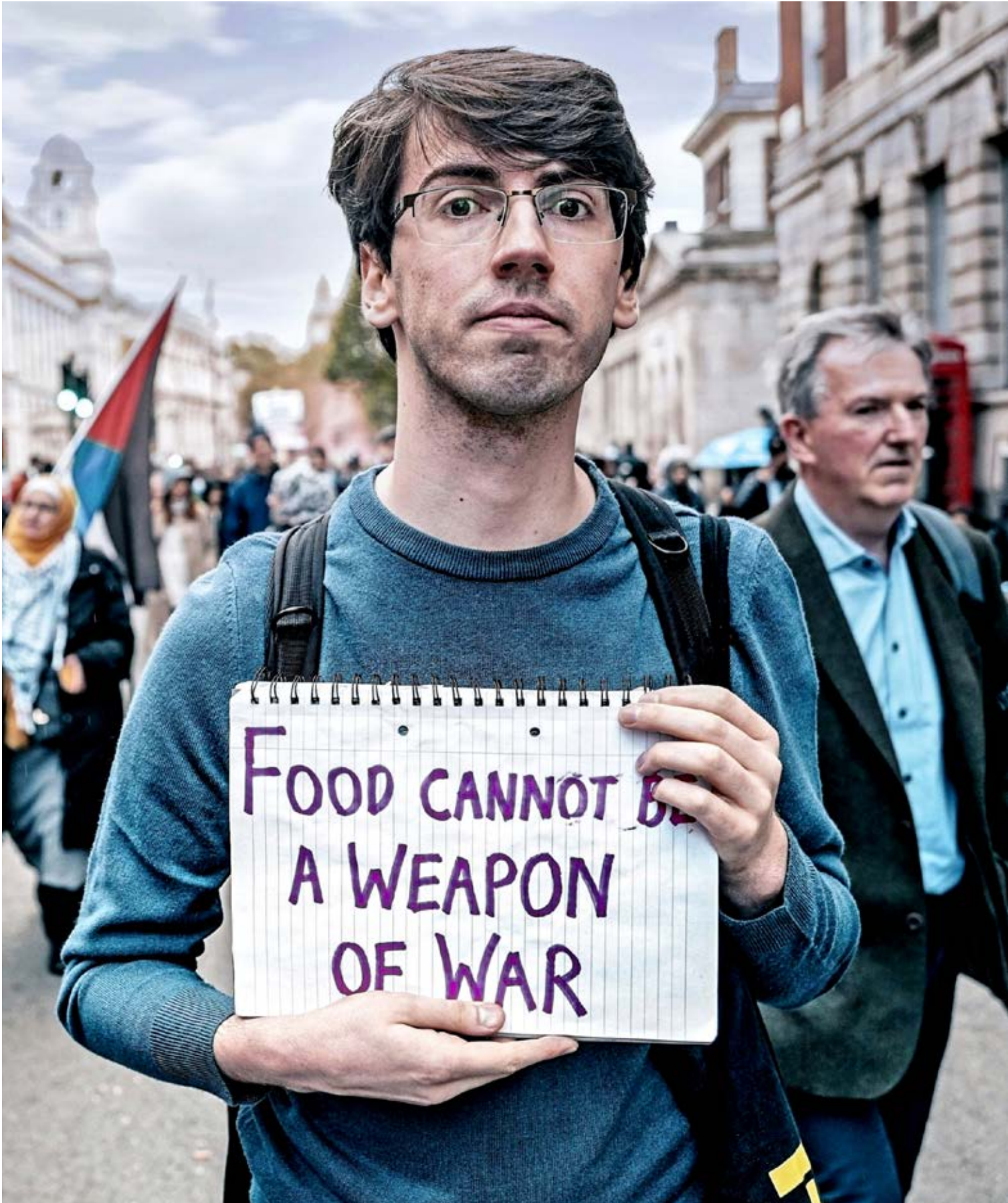


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—**Noam Chomsky**



thenewpress.com



London, England, October 28, 2023 – Photo: Alisdare Hickson

When war crimes become normal

How the mainstream media tries to persuade us that deaths reported by Palestinian authorities are less credible than those from Israeli sources

The attacks by Hamas fighters in southern Israel on 7 October, and the Israeli air attacks on Gaza that have followed, and now the unfolding humanitarian disaster there, once again expose fundamental bias in the state-corporate news media.

Does news coverage really convey the impression that all lives – Palestinian and Israeli – are of equal value? After all, they surely deserve the same level of humanity and compassion. Do the news media present heart-wrenching stories of individual victims and their grieving families from both sides? And is the full context and history explained in order for audiences to arrive at a proper understanding of events?

As Jack Mirkinson, an interim senior editor at *The Nation* magazine, wrote: “Who is allowed humanity, and who is not? Whose deaths are tragedies worth paying concerted attention to, and whose deaths can be dealt with in a matter of seconds? Whose children are worth learning about? Whose heartbreak is worth lingering over? And which people, when confronted by bloodshed, deserve to have the world put everything on hold and rush to their side? The answer is clear. Palestinians

are killed by Israel all of the time, including when they peacefully protest. But the world never puts itself on hold to bear witness to their heartbreak.”

On BBC Newsnight, host Kirsty Wark listened to Husam Zomlot, head of the Palestinian Mission to the UK, describe how six of his family members had been killed by Israeli air strikes. Wark reacted oddly: “I’m 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?”

This captures an essential element of western media coverage in the region: the death of Palestinians might be noted, but attention is swiftly brought back to the suffering of Israelis.

Mohammed El-Kurd, Palestine Correspondent at *The Nation*, explained how the mainstream media tries to persuade us that deaths reported by Palestinian authorities are less credible than those from Israeli sources: “Phrases like ‘Hamas-run’ [hospitals], ‘Hamas-controlled’ are designed to feed on your bias. You start to become apathetic to these patients. You dehumanise them and you think of them as less worthy victims.

“Such phrases cast doubt on the data coming out of

Israel claimed that it would maintain two 'safe routes' out of northern Gaza. But, Amnesty verified six videos of an Israeli attack on 13 October, resulting in civilian casualties along one of these 'safe' routes

these institutions and portray these institutions not as medical institutions run by healthcare professionals but rather as scary, untrustworthy institutions run by savages.”

At the time of writing, Al Jazeera reports that at least 2,800 people have been killed, including over 1,000 children, in Gaza in Israeli air attacks. An estimated 1,000 people are missing under rubble. In Israel, the number of people killed following Hamas's attack in southern Israel is around 1,400, including 286 soldiers. Forty babies and young children were killed in Kfar Aza kibbutz. Around 20 children were killed at Be'eri kibbutz. Hamas is also holding 199 Israeli hostages in Gaza.

The BBC reported in its usual “impartial” way that people were “killed” in Israel while in Gaza, Palestinians merely “died.” BBC News described intense Israeli bombing as “retaliatory air strikes,” conforming to the approved ideology that Israel only ever responds to violence, and never instigates it. The BBC did not describe the Hamas attacks as “retaliation” for years of brutal Israeli occupation, oppression and killing and torture of Palestinians, including children. According to the UN, between 2008 and 2023, Israeli airstrikes killed 6,407 Palestinians in the occupied territories, 5,360 of whom were in Gaza. Israel had 308 fatalities in that time period. In other words, 95 percent of the total casualties during this period were Palestinian.

Last Friday, Israel ordered all Palestinians in the northern half of the coastal strip – around 1.1 million people out of a total population of 2.3 million – to move south within 24 hours. Clive Baldwin, senior legal adviser of Human Rights Watch, warned that there is no safe place for them to go, even if they

were able to travel “when the roads are rubble, fuel is scarce and the main hospital is in the evacuation zone.”

He added: “World leaders should speak up now before it is too late.”

Oxfam said: “There is no single square metre in Gaza that is safe. It's all under attack.”

Indeed, Israeli strikes on southern Gaza last night, including near the Rafah border crossing, killed at least 49 people.

The UN warned of “devastating humanitarian consequences” should Israel insist that its demand be upheld. Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, called upon Israel to reverse its ultimatum, warning that “it would amount to the war crime of forcible transfer.”

But Israel has refused to rescind its order, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowing to “demolish” Hamas. Hamas – an acronym for “Islamic Resistance Movement” – is the governing body in Gaza. It came to power in parliamentary elections in 2006 (the last year that such elections were held in Gaza).

Israel claimed that it would maintain two “safe routes” out of northern Gaza. But, Amnesty verified six videos of an Israeli attack on 13 October, resulting in civilian casualties along one of these “safe” routes. A convoy, including a truck carrying around 30 people, eight cars and other nearby people, including women, children and people with disabilities, was attacked. Ambulances that arrived at the scene were hit in a second attack and rescuers injured. At least 70 people died.

The World Health Organisation strongly condemned Israel for its repeated orders for the evacuation of 22 hospitals treating more than 2000 in-

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They are co-authors of three books on the media:

Guardians of Power: The Myth of the Liberal Media, *Newspeak in the 21st Century*, and *Propaganda Blitz: How the Corporate Media Distort Reality*

patients in northern Gaza. This was “a death sentence for the sick and injured”. As three-time US presidential candidate Ralph Nader commented: “Where are people on ventilators receiving dialysis and babies in incubators going to evacuate to?”

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN Agency for Palestine Refugees, warned on 15 October that: “Gaza is being strangled and it seems that the world right now has lost its humanity.” He added: “There is not one drop of water, not one grain of wheat, not a litre of fuel that has been allowed into the Gaza Strip for the last eight days.”

Lazzarini said that an “unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe” is unfolding and that “no place is safe in Gaza.”

The UN agency warned that: “This is the worst we’ve ever seen. This is hitting rock bottom. This is Gaza being pushed into an abyss, there is tragedy unfolding as the world is watching.”

The Israeli order for over one million Palestinians to evacuate the northern part of Gaza came a few days after Israel had imposed a total embargo on electricity, water, fuel and food into Gaza. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant stated on 9 October: “We are putting a complete siege on Gaza. ... No electricity, no food, no water, no gas – it’s all closed.”

Gallant attempted to justify the move by describing Palestinians as “human animals” and “beastly people.”

This is collective punishment on a civilian population of two million people by the occupying power, Israel, and is a war crime according to the Geneva Conventions. In particular, Article 33 of the Geneva Convention IV states: “Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited.”

Collective punishments are also prohibited under customary international law, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Jonathan Cook, an experienced and insightful analyst of Israel and Palestine, wrote that: “Gaza is about as flagrant a violation of this prohibition as can be found. Even in ‘quiet’ times, its inhabitants – one million of them children – are denied the most basic freedoms, such as the right to movement; access to proper health care because medicines and equipment cannot be brought in; access to drinkable water; and the use of electricity for much of the day because Israel keeps bombing Gaza’s power station.”

Last October, Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the EU Commission stated that: “Russia’s attacks against civilian infrastructure [in Ukraine], especially electricity, are war crimes.

“Cutting off men, women, children of water, electricity and heating with winter coming – these are acts of pure terror.

“And we have to call it as such.”

Likewise, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had strongly condemned Russia: “Heat. Water. Electricity. For children, for the elderly, for the sick. These are President Putin’s new targets... This brutalisation of Ukraine’s people is barbaric.”

But when Israel does it to Gaza? Where are the widespread calls from senior US and European politicians to condemn the same acts by Israel as “pure terror” and “barbaric?” Certainly not from the UK’s Labour party.

When interviewed by British radio station LBC, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer did not agree that Israel’s cruel blockade of Gaza is a crime under international law. Instead, he actually

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UK's Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer actually claimed Israel has 'that right' to cut off water and electricity, adding it 'should be done within international law'. But cutting off water and electricity (and food and fuel) is not within international law

claimed Israel has “that right” to cut off water and electricity, adding it “should be done within international law.” But cutting off water and electricity (and food and fuel) is not within international law.

Starmer is a former human rights lawyer and must be well aware of the illegality of Israel's action. Instead, he could only robotically repeat that “Israel has a right to defend itself.” This was obviously the approved Labour line as it was repeated by Emily Thornberry, Labour's Shadow Attorney General, on BBC Newsnight.

She was asked: “Do you think cutting off food, water and electricity is within international law?”

Her evasive non-response? “I think that Israel has an absolute right to defend itself against terrorists.”

The “absolute right” to commit war crimes, including intensive bombing of the densely-populated Gaza strip and the collective punishment of two million civilians there? In effect, Labour is colluding with Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people, as is the UK government which has declared that it stands “unequivocally” with Israel. Recall that Labour is ostensibly the party of opposition to the Tory government.

A mealy-mouthed *Guardian* editorial on 16 October observed: “It should not be hard to condemn Hamas and name its actions as evil, while also condemning war crimes committed by Israeli forces.”

There was no criticism naming Starmer, his Labour colleagues or the UK government for their support for Israel's collective punishment of Gaza.

The shameful approach of Labour was highlighted yet again when David Lammy, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, refused to state during a BBC interview

whether a siege of a civilian population was a breach of international law. His appalling response was that the UN Human Rights Commissioner is “entitled to his point of view.” Lammy said: “I'm not here as an international lawyer.”

He should have been there as a thinking, feeling human being with a moral compass watching the commission of an appalling war crime with his party's open support. Labour under Starmer has utterly discredited itself.

Even when Starmer was asked on Sky News if he had any support or sympathy for the besieged citizens of Gaza, he ignored the question and repeated his condemnation of Hamas: “We have to be clear where responsibility is. Responsibility [lies] with Hamas.”

Alex Nunns, author and a former speechwriter for Jeremy Corbyn, commented: “I saw this [Sky News interview with Starmer] yesterday but keep thinking about it. Asked if he has any sympathy for Palestinian civilians facing hell, he can't manage a single word.

“It could be he's a psychopath, incapable of empathy, but I sense he's actually scared he won't look tough.”

Journalist Peter Osborne, formerly the *Daily Telegraph's* chief political commentator, warned: “In moments of crisis, it's the job of a statesman to resolve problems, not inflame them. It's their job to show wisdom, to ignore popular clamour, to remind all parties of their obligations under international law, to emphasise our common humanity, and to look for long-term solutions that avoid a return to past horrors.”

Osborne was especially critical of Starmer after his LBC interview supporting Israel's “right” to impose collective punishment on Gaza, in contravention of international law: “There's a terrible risk here. These remarks from a

man seen as the British prime minister-in-waiting have given a green light for future war crimes.”

Putting both the UK government and Labour “opposition” to shame, Tory MP Crispin Blunt, former Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, was clear: “If you are encouraging a party to undertake a war crime, you become complicit in that crime yourself.”

As he pointed out: “It’s absolutely clear now that what is happening in Gaza does amount to a war crime.”

Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn also strongly defended international law: “I utterly condemn the attacks on civilians, Israeli and Palestinian. And I plead with politicians across the globe to do all they can to stop any further loss of human life.”

He added: “I wonder, if Gaza is wiped off the face of the earth, whether our politicians will look back and reflect on the reality of their unwavering support. If they had any integrity, they would mourn the innocent Palestinian lives that have been erased in the name of self-defence. They should be ashamed of their cowardice, knowing that others will pay the price for the war crimes they refuse to oppose.”

Corbyn concluded with these moving words: “‘Gaza has casualties ... mothers who cry ... let’s use this emotion, we are two nations from one father, let’s make peace, a real peace.’

“Those were the words of an Israeli father whose daughter had been so cruelly taken hostage by Hamas. I cannot fathom the agony he must be feeling. Yet in the depths of unimaginable darkness, he found the courage to call for peace. Why can’t we?”

Given Corbyn’s lifelong support of Palestinian human rights, is it any wonder that the Israel lobby, along with the

establishment as a whole, worked so hard to prevent him becoming Prime Minister?

Media coverage of Israel and Palestine has long been dominated by the “both sides” narrative. Conflict in the region has been historically presented as “fighting” between two roughly equal forces where Palestinian “provocation” is met by Israeli “retaliation.” It is rarely made crystal clear in news reporting that Israel, one of the world’s most technologically advanced and powerfully-armed nations, has imposed a military occupation on Palestinians.

As Canadian media analyst Gregory Shupak explained there is a false equivalence in state-corporate media of the occupied and the occupier. But, in fact: “Israel, and its forerunners in the Zionist movement, have been carrying out a war against Palestinians for over 100 years, so Israeli self-defense against Palestinians is a logical impossibility (*Electronic Intifada*, 7/26/18). As an occupying power, Israel does not have a legal right to claim self-defence against the people it occupies (*Truthout*, 5/14/21). Israel has been subjecting Gaza to a military siege for 12–14 years, depending on the metric one uses to determine the starting point, which has left the territory effectively unlivable (*Jacobin*, 3/31/20); a siege is an act of war, so the party enforcing it cannot claim to be acting defensively in response to anything that happened subsequent to the start of the blockade.”

Palestinians have suffered decades of intense Israeli oppression, violence and torture going all the way back to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948 – known as the Nakba or “Palestinian Catastrophe” – when the state of Israel was declared.

Since 2007, the year after Hamas

Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said, ‘I wonder, if Gaza is wiped off the face of the earth, whether our politicians will look back and reflect on the reality of their unwavering support. If they had any integrity, they would mourn the innocent Palestinian lives that have been erased in the name of self-defence’

The UN and international human rights groups have condemned Israel's blockade, describing Gaza as 'the world's largest open-air prison.' Residents of Gaza are surrounded by concrete walls and barbed wire fences, unable to leave without Israeli-approved permits

came to power in Gaza, Israel has imposed an air, land and sea blockade on the territory, claiming it was necessary to prevent attacks by Hamas. But the UN and international human rights groups have condemned the blockade, describing Gaza as “the world’s largest open-air prison.” Residents of Gaza are surrounded by concrete walls and barbed wire fences, unable to leave without Israeli-approved permits.

In recent years, human rights groups – including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Israel’s own B’Tselem – have described Israel as an apartheid state.

The brutal mass killings of Israeli civilians by Hamas on 7 October after breaking through the fence separating Gaza from Israel has rightly been condemned by leaders around the world. But, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres pointed out, the violence “does not come in a vacuum” but “grows out of a long-standing conflict, with a 56-year long occupation and no political end in sight.”

In a video less than eight minutes long, Mnar Adley, *Mint Press* founder, provided vital context that is conspicuously absent from mainstream reporting. One vital fact is that the US pumps \$3.8 billion in military “aid” to Israel every year, fueling profits for weapon manufacturers including Lockheed, Martin and Raytheon.

Adley added: “The problem is not Hamas; rather the decades-long colonial apartheid project that Israel has subjected Palestine to, making a violent outburst inevitable.”

Without the massive flow of US arms, money and diplomatic support, Israel would not be able to pursue its “foundational government policy of using strategies of ‘terror and expulsion’ in an effort

to expand its territory by killing and displacing Palestinians,” as Noam Chomsky explained in this 2021 interview.

Whenever Hamas is mentioned in the state-corporate media, we are told it has been designated as a “terrorist organisation” by many governments, including the UK. By contrast, despite endless breaches of international law and the commission of numerous war crimes against Palestinians, Israel’s government, military forces or security agencies are not designated as terrorist organisations.

What happened during the 7 October Hamas attacks on Israel was terrible enough, but many newspaper headlines and front pages carried shocking claims that Hamas fighters had “beheaded babies” in Kfar Aza, a kibbutz in southern Israel. But was it true? Turkish news agency Anadolu reported that an Israeli army spokesperson told them they had no confirmation that it had happened.

Dominic Waghorn, Sky News international affairs editor, cautioned: “The story about babies being beheaded at Kfar Aza is based on one live report by one Israeli reporter and has not been corroborated by officials but it has been reported as fact around the world by experienced journalists who should know better.”

Lowkey, the British rapper and political activist, observed via Twitter/X that the source for the “beheaded babies” claim was Israeli channel i24 News, adding: “A *Haaretz* investigation previously found that *i24 News* functions as a proxy for the Netanyahu family, with directives coming directly from the Israeli Prime Minister’s office at times.”

The day after numerous lurid front pages had appeared, CNN reported that: “Israeli official says government cannot confirm babies were beheaded

in Hamas attack.”

Dave Reed of *Mondoweiss* reported that the single source for the claim was the Israeli soldier David Ben Zion who is a radical settler “with a history of espousing calls for genocidal violence against Palestinians.”

The discredited “beheaded babies” story recalls the fiction of “babies snatched from incubators” by Iraqi soldiers in a Kuwaiti hospital during the 1990 Persian Gulf War. Likewise, First World War claims of German soldiers bayoneting children is another myth in a long line of war atrocity propaganda.

Orly Noy, an Israeli journalist, provided some much-needed perspective: “It is important not to minimise or condone the heinous crimes committed by Hamas. But it is also important to remind ourselves that everything it is inflicting on us now, we have been inflicting on the Palestinians for years. Indiscriminate firing, including at children and older people; intrusion into their homes; burning down their houses; taking hostages – not just fighters but civilians, children and older people.”

Noy continued: “... we have not only brought Gaza to the brink of starvation, we have brought it to a state of collapse. Always in the name of security. How much security did we get? Where will another round of revenge take us?”

Human Rights Watch has reported the use of white phosphorus in Gaza and Lebanon by Israeli forces, a war crime when civilians are put at unnecessary risk. This certainly applies in Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Lama Fakih, HRW’s Middle East and North Africa director said: “Any time that white phosphorus is used in crowded civilian areas, it poses a high risk of excruciating burns and

lifelong suffering. White phosphorous is unlawfully indiscriminate when airburst in populated urban areas, where it can burn down houses and cause egregious harm to civilians.”

Last Thursday, the Israeli Air Force boasted in a tweet that it had dropped 6,000 bombs on “Hamas targets.” As the Australian political writer Caitlin Johnstone observed, “Hamas targets” is a convenient propaganda term. What does it even mean in such a highly densely-populated area as Gaza?

On 13 October, she wrote: “The phrase ‘Hamas targets’ has been all over the news media the last few days in reference to the ongoing attacks on Gaza, which have as of this writing killed over 1,500 Palestinians, a third of them children.

“‘Israel conducts large-scale strikes on Hamas targets,’ reads a CNN headline.

“‘Israel conducts ‘large-scale strike’ on Hamas targets,’ reads the title of a segment for ABC News.

“‘Israel says it dropped 6,000 bombs so far against Hamas targets,’ reads a report by the *Washington Post*.”

Johnstone added: “Israel must have really great visibility into Gaza to know that each of those 6,000 bombs was aimed at ‘Hamas targets’ and not just civilian buildings. Where was this 20/20 vision when Hamas was preparing for an attack using motorised paragliders, drones and motorboats in an enclosed strip of land the size of Philadelphia? How did Israeli intelligence fail to detect preparations for this attack even after Egyptian intelligence warned them that it was coming? How did they fail so spectacularly that even Hamas was reportedly surprised by the scale of their operation’s success? Is it really reasonable to believe they were blind as moles

To avert a humanitarian crisis of truly appalling dimensions, massive international pressure needs to be exerted on Israel to stop bombing Gaza and to withdraw its troops that are currently poised to invade

'Any time that white phosphorus is used in crowded civilian areas, it poses a high risk of excruciating burns and lifelong suffering. White phosphorous is unlawfully indiscriminate when airburst in populated urban areas, where it can burn down houses and cause egregious harm to civilians'

to Hamas activity last week but have the eye of the eagle this week?"

On 16 October, as Israel continued to pummel the tiny enclave of the Gaza strip with heavy loss of life, Jonathan Cook pointed to the huge imbalance in the *Guardian's* coverage that day. The running order of *Guardian* headlines read thus:

"Number of known Israeli hostages grows

"Blinken starts diplomacy to limit coming death toll

"UK government urges restraint

"Might Egypt open its border?

"US deploys another aircraft carrier to Middle East

"Israelis vow to rebuild kibbutz destroyed by Hamas

"Jewish-Arab solidarity projects offer hope

"Frankfurt book fair cancels talk by Palestinian writer

"Antisemitic attacks on rise in parts of UK

"TikTok to curb disinformation about Israel and Hamas"

Cook noted: "The only things on offer are details of how the genocide in Gaza is to be organised and why it's justified.

"The genocide itself, and the Palestinians being massacred, are bit players – the background noise to excitement over the coming ground invasion.

"Simply astonishing."

The website version of the paper made the pro-Israel "balance" even more explicit. In doing this, the *Guardian* was normalising the unthinkable – a new massive catastrophe for the Palestinian people.

As mentioned earlier, BBC News and other major outlets repeatedly broadcast that Hamas has been labelled a "terrorist organisation." They also state

over and over that Hamas is "committed to the destruction of Israel." Noam Chomsky was asked about this by Amy Goodman in 2014 in an interview on *Democracy Now*: "You hear repeatedly, Hamas has in its charter a call for the destruction of Israel ... how do you guarantee that these thousands of rockets that threaten the people of Israel don't continue?"

Chomsky replied: "Very simple. First of all, Hamas charter means practically nothing. The only people who pay attention to it are Israeli propagandists, who love it. It was a charter put together by a small group of people under siege, under attack in 1988. And it's essentially meaningless. There are charters that mean something, but they're not talked about. So, for example, the electoral programme of Israel's governing party, Likud, states explicitly that there can never be a Palestinian state west of the Jordan River. And they not only state it in their charter, that's a call for the destruction of Palestine, explicit call for it. And they don't only have it in their charter, you know, their electoral programme, but they implement it. That's quite different from the Hamas charter."

In fact, as Chomsky pointed out: "Hamas leaders have repeatedly made it clear that Hamas would accept a two-state settlement in accord with the international consensus that has been blocked by the US and Israel for 40 years."

In other words, Hamas has declared its readiness to negotiate a long-term ceasefire with the Jewish state within its pre-1967 borders. But Israel has always rejected the offer, just as it rejected the Arab League peace plan of 2002; and just as it has always rejected the international consensus for a peaceful solution in the Middle East. Why? Because the threat of such "peace offensives"

would involve unacceptable concessions and compromises. Israeli writer Amos Elon has written of the “panic and unease among our political leadership’ caused by Arab peace proposals. (Cited, Noam Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*, Pluto Press, London, 1999, p.75)

The Palestinians are seen as an obstacle by Israel’s leaders; an irritant to be subjugated or even removed. Chomsky commented: “Traditionally over the years, Israel has sought to crush any resistance to its programmes of takeover of the parts of Palestine it regards as valuable, while eliminating any hope for the indigenous population to have a decent existence enjoying national rights.”

Chomsky summarised the brutal reality: “The key feature of the occupation has always been humiliation: they [the Palestinians] must not be allowed to raise their heads. The basic principle, often openly expressed, is that the ‘Araboushim’ – a term that belongs with ‘nigger’ or ‘kike’ – must understand who rules this land and who walks in it with head lowered and eyes averted.” (Chomsky, op. cit., p. 489)

To avert a humanitarian crisis of truly appalling dimensions, massive international pressure needs to be exerted on Israel to stop bombing Gaza and to withdraw its troops that are currently poised to invade.

So, what is the way forward? Daniel Levy, a former Israeli adviser, and Zaha Hassan, a former Palestinian adviser, believe – rightly – that one must accept “the humanity and equality of all people without discrimination or distinction.” Three truths therefore follow:

“First, the militant attack on Israeli civilians was unconscionable, inhumane and in violation of international law. Second, Israel’s collective punishment against Palestinian civilians and its actions in Gaza are unconscionable, inhumane and a violation of international law. And, third, one must address the context of occupation and apartheid in which this is unfolding if one is to maintain integrity and be able to plot a strategy going forward in which both Palestinians and Israelis can live in freedom and security.”

Reason combined with compassion is the only route to peace. **CT**

As Chomsky pointed out: ‘ Hamas leaders have repeatedly made it clear that Hamas would accept a two-state settlement in accord with the international consensus that has been blocked by the US and Israel for 40 years’

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU, Israel’s Prime Minister

Our war against Hamas is a test for all of humanity. It is a struggle between the axis of evil of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas and the axis of freedom and progress. “We are the people of the light, they are the people of darkness and light shall triumph over darkness”



London, England, November 11, 2023 – Photo: Alisdare Hickson

Let them eat concrete

Israel has unleashed its Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.
And it has given Gazans two choices: Leave Gaza or die

Israel is not only decimating Gaza with airstrikes but employing the oldest and cruellest weapon of war – starvation. Israel’s message, on the eve of a ground invasion, is clear: Leave Gaza or Die. The Biden administration, slavishly doing Israel’s bidding, is fueling the madness. The US was the only country to veto the UN Security Council resolution calling for humanitarian pauses to deliver food, medicine, water and fuel to Gaza. It has blocked proposals for a ceasefire. It has proposed a draft UN Security Council resolution that says Israel has a right to defend itself. The resolution also demands Iran stop exporting arms to “militias and terrorist groups threatening peace and security across the region.”

The US and its Western allies are as morally bankrupt and as complicit in genocide as those who witnessed the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews and did nothing.

The conflict, which has taken the lives of 1,400 Israelis and at least 4,600 Palestinians in Gaza, is widening. Israel carried out a second airstrike on two airports in Syria. It daily trades rocket barrages with Hezbollah militias. US military bases in Iraq and Syria have been attacked by Shia militias. The USS Carney, a guided missile destroyer, shot down three cruise missiles on Thursday, apparently

launched by the Houthis in Yemen and heading towards Israel.

Israel is also struggling to quell daily violent clashes in the occupied West Bank. It carried out an airstrike on Sunday on a mosque in the Jenin refugee camp – the first air strike in the West Bank for two decades – that killed at least two people. Armed Jewish settlers have been rampaging through Palestinian towns in the West Bank. At least 90 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed by armed settlers or the Israeli military since the Oct. 7 incursion into Israel by Hamas and other resistance fighters, according to the UN’s humanitarian office. Some 4,000 workers from Gaza and 1,000 Palestinians in the West Bank have been arrested in the past two weeks, doubling the number of Palestinian prisoners to 10,000 held by Israel, over half of whom are political prisoners

“Many of the prisoners have had their limbs, hands and legs broken ... degrading and insulting expressions, insults, cursing, tying them with handcuffs to the back and tightening them at the end to the point of causing severe pain ... naked, humiliating and group search of the prisoners,” the Palestinian Authority’s Commission for Detainees’ Affairs, Qadura Fares, said at a press

A doctor from al-Shifa hospital in Gaza reported in an interview Saturday, “We are collapsing.” He spoke of a lack of oxygen, light and medical supplies, no water in some departments, concerns about cholera and the loss of doctors killed by Israeli airstrikes

conference.

B’Tselem, the Israeli human rights organization, told the BBC that since the Oct. 7 attack, it had documented “a concerted and organised effort by settlers to use the fact that the entire international and local attention is focused on Gaza and the north of Israel to try to seize land in the West Bank.”

Inside Israel, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and Jerusalem IDs are being harassed, detained, arrested and expelled from jobs and universities in what is described as a “witch hunt.” More than 152,000 Israelis have been evacuated from towns and villages near the borders of Gaza and Lebanon.

The US, in an effort to thwart a military response by Iran that could trigger a regional war, is deploying an additional 2,000 troops to the Middle East. It will redeploy one of its strike groups to the Persian Gulf and send additional air defense systems to the region. The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and its strike group – which last weekend was being deployed to the eastern Mediterranean Sea to join the USS Gerald R. Ford – has been redirected to the Persian Gulf. A Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile battery, and Patriot missile defense system battalions, have also been sent to the Persian Gulf.

Israel has unleashed its Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – Death, Famine, War and Conquest. It has given Gazans two choices. Leave Gaza or die.

Palestinians will be killed not only from the bombs and shells, and eventually, with the ground invasion, bullets and tank shells, but from hunger and epidemics such as cholera. Without water, fuel and medicine and with the breakdown of sanitation, diseases will spread swiftly. The UN states that

hospitals in Gaza “are on the brink of collapse.” Thousands of patients will die once fuel runs out for hospital generators.

A doctor from al-Shifa hospital in Gaza reported in an interview Saturday, “We are collapsing.” He spoke of a lack of oxygen, light and medical supplies, no water in some departments, concerns about cholera and the loss of doctors killed by Israeli airstrikes, including a dentist killed in Israel’s bombing of an Orthodox church that left at least 18 dead, including several children.

The handful of trucks, 37 so far, of aid into Gaza is a cynical public relations gimmick demanded by the Biden administration. It will do little to alleviate the Israeli-engineered humanitarian crisis. The UN says it needs at least 100 aid trucks a day. Gaza’s last functioning seawater desalination plant shut down on Sunday because of a lack of fuel.

Israel has no intention of lifting the total siege on Gaza. It announced it will increase its airstrikes. It will continue, as it has for the past two weeks, to extinguish the lives of Palestinians and terrorise and starve them into leaving Gaza.

The ground assault on Gaza will not be quick. It will involve weeks, perhaps months, of street fighting. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin compared the looming battle in Gaza to the US assault on the Iraqi city of Mosul, held by ISIS, in 2014. It took the US nine months to recapture Mosul. When Israel says this will be a “long war” they are, for once, telling the truth.

Israel has requested more military aid from Washington, \$14.3 billion including \$10.6 billion for air and missile defence. It will get it. Israel is rapidly depleting its stocks as it pounds Gaza, including in the south of Gaza where hundreds of thousands of displaced families from the

north have fled.

Israel will not permit the distribution of the \$100 million in US aid pledged for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, at least not until their scorched earth campaign is finished. But by then, Gaza will be unrecognisable. Israel will have annexed part or all of it. Maybe the money can go to building more illegal Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank. And pledging aid is not the same as appropriating it. So perhaps that, too, is part of the illusion.

Egyptian officials are acutely aware of what comes next. Up to half, maybe more, of the 2.3 million Palestinians will be pushed by Israel into Egypt on Gaza's southern border and never be allowed to return. "What is happening now in Gaza is an attempt to force civilian residents to take refuge and migrate to Egypt, which should not be accepted," Egyptian president Abdulfattah al-Sisi warned.

Reports out of Egypt contend that Washington has promised to forgive much of Egypt's massive \$162.9 billion debt, as well as offer other economic incentives in exchange for Egypt's acquiescence to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. The refugees, once they cross the border into Egypt, will be left to rot in the Sinai.

"There is a grave danger that what we are witnessing may be a repeat of the 1948 Nakba, and the 1967 Nakba, yet on a larger scale. The international community must do everything to stop this from happening again," said Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967.

Israel has long used war to justify the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Government officials have openly called for another Nakba, or "catastrophe," the term for the events of 1947-1949 when

over 750,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from historic Palestine and driven into refugee camps to create the state of Israel. During the 1967 war, which led to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel ethnically cleansed another 300,000 Palestinians during the Nakba, or "day of the setback," which is commemorated every year by Palestinians.

Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, however, is not limited to wars. There has been an ongoing slow motion ethnic cleansing as Israel has steadily built more Jewish-only colonies and incrementally seized Palestinian land. Palestinians, denied basic civil liberties in Israel's apartheid state, have been robbed of assets, including, often, their homes. They have faced mounting restrictions on their physical movements. They have been blocked from trading and business, especially the selling of produce. They have found themselves increasingly impoverished and trapped behind walls and security fences erected around Gaza and the West Bank. At the same time, they have endured periodic Israeli airstrikes, targeted assassinations and near daily attacks by armed Jewish settlers and the Israeli army.

Israel prevented Palestinians who left the West Bank and Gaza Strip from returning at the rate of about 9,000 Palestinians per year following the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, until the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1994, according to the Israel human rights group HaMoked. Israel has also revoked the residency permits for some 14,000 Palestinians who lived in East Jerusalem since 1967 according to B'Tselem.

Israel demolished 9,880 structures, including over 2,600 inhabited residential buildings, displacing over 14,000

Israel will not permit the distribution of the \$100 million in US aid pledged for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, at least not until their scorched earth campaign is finished. But by then, Gaza will be unrecognisable

Israel makes no secret about its intentions. Israel's defense minister, Yoav Gallant, told troops preparing to enter Gaza, "I have released all the restraints"

people and affecting 233,681 in the West Bank alone between Jan. 1, 2009 and 7 Oct. 7, 2023, according to data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Since the Oct. 7 attack, a further 38 homes and other structures were demolished in the West Bank affecting an additional 13,613 people and displacing at least 73.

Less than 2.2 percent of Palestinian requests for construction permits made between 2009 and 2020 were approved, according to data from Peace Now and the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*.

The number of Israeli colonists in the occupied territories, however, has gone from zero before the June 1967 war, to between 600,000 to 750,000 spread out across at least 250 settlements and outposts throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, all of them in violation of international law.

Israel makes no secret about its intentions. Israel's defense minister, Yoav Gallant, told troops preparing to enter Gaza, "I have released all the restraints."

Knesset member Ariel Kallner, part of Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, called on X, formerly known as Twitter, for "a Nakba that will overshadow the Nakba of 48."

The Israeli army mobilised Ezra Yachin, a 95-year-old army veteran, to "motivate" the troops. Yachin was a member of the Lehi Zionist militia that carried out numerous massacres of Palestinian civilians, including the Deir Yassin massacre on April 9, 1948, where over 100 Palestinian civilians, many women and children, were slaughtered.

"Be triumphant and finish them off and don't leave anyone behind. Erase the memory of them," Yachin said addressing Israeli troops.

"Erase them, their families, mothers and children," he went on. "These ani-

mals can no longer live."

"Every Jew with a weapon should go out and kill them," he said. "If you have an Arab neighbour, don't wait, go to his home and shoot him."

Where are our humanitarian interventionists? The ones who wept crocodile tears about the human rights of Ukrainians, Iraqis, Syrians, Libyans and Afghans, to justify massive arms shipments and war? Where is the old anti-war wing of the Democratic Party and the liberal class? What has happened to the public intellectuals who used to decry the slaughter of innocents and the US war machine? Where are the jurists who uphold the rule of international law? Why are the few lonely voices speaking out about Israel's genocide of the Palestinians attacked, censored and doxxed?

"The previous president wanted to ban us and probably put us in concentration camps," said Michigan Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, who is of Palestinian descent, at a rally in support of a ceasefire on Oct. 20 in Washington in front of the US Capitol. "This one wants us just to die. That's how it feels. Shame on them."

Israel will not halt its genocidal campaign in Gaza against the Palestinians until there is a US arms embargo on Israel. Our weapons systems, munitions and attack aircraft sustain the slaughter. We must terminate the \$3.8 billion in military aid that the US gives to Israel each year. We must support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and demand suspension of all free trade and other agreements between the US and Israel. Only when these props are knocked out from under Israel will the Israeli leadership be forced, as was the apartheid regime in South Africa, to integrate Palestinians into one state with equal rights. As long as these props remain, the Palestinians are doomed. **CT**

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Philadelphia, USA, October 21, 2023 – Photo: Joe Piette

Driving Gaza into Sinai

As the UK and US back the carnage in Gaza, are they also about to assist Israel's ethnic cleansing plan for a "Greater Gaza" – in Egypt?

As Israel masses its forces along the fence encircling Gaza, waiting for a green light from the United States for a ground invasion, the question few are asking is: What is the ultimate endgame for Israel? Instead, British and US politicians, backed by their media, have limited themselves to amplifying Israel's bogus rationales for indiscriminately bombing men, women and children in the tiny coastal enclave and preparing to send in troops. Only 80 or so British MPs, out of 650, have so far called for a ceasefire.

Israeli strikes are known to have killed more than 7,000 Palestinians, nearly half of them children, with many times that number seriously injured. They are being treated in hospitals without medicines or electricity. The United Nations estimates at least 600,000 Palestinians are homeless from the bombing.

At first, Western establishments justified the carnage as Israel's "right to defend itself" – a right Palestinians had been denied for the previous 16 years while Israel enforced a brutal military siege of the enclave that prevented basic goods and medicines from entering.

Israel's supposed "right to self-defence" – the offi-

cial line from both sides of the political aisle in Britain – serves as western cover for, and complicity in, the crimes against humanity Israel has been committing: mass killing and wanton destruction; a "complete siege" of Gaza, starving it of food and water; and attacks on community infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, mosques, and UN compounds.

But now, as the death toll becomes increasingly obscene, the rationale has shifted. In chorus, British and US politicians say Israel must be given the time and space to "destroy Hamas."

That requires a ground invasion by Israeli troops – many of them religious extremists from illegal settlements in the West Bank – who are certain to be seeking vengeance for Hamas' attack on October 7. The atrocities are only likely to intensify.

But there is method in Israel's military madness. And the main goal is not the one being promoted. Israel has much larger ambitions than "destroying Hamas."

Israel knows enough history to understand that occupied and oppressed peoples never come to accept their subjugation. They continue to find ways to resist. Even if Hamas can be wiped out, a new, more fearsome adver-

Poverty, malnutrition, unclean water, overcrowding and lack of housing, as well as the trauma of being engaged and intermittently bombed by Israel to subdue any resistance, was slowly turning Gaza from a prison into a death camp

sary will emerge among the next generation currently being traumatised by Israel's bombs.

In fact, after Israel removed its physical presence from Gaza by pulling out settlers and soldiers in 2005, it began to understand that it had boxed itself into a strategic corner.

It was still occupying the enclave, but at arm's length. This was the rationale for the blockade that tightly limited what was allowed in and out of the strip. Gaza had been turned into an open-air prison, controlled by Israel through intensive surveillance via drones, eavesdropping and local collaborators.

In practice, however, Israel found it much harder to police Gaza from afar. Hamas managed to create a much more sophisticated resistance movement in the small spaces left inside the prison that Israel could not surveil, such as a network of underground tunnels.

The results became fully apparent in the preparation and execution of Hamas' attack on 7 October.

Israel's strategic problem was compounded by the humanitarian crisis it had created by penning such a large and growing population into a tiny area with no resources.

Poverty, malnutrition, unclean water, overcrowding and lack of housing, as well as the trauma of being engaged and intermittently bombed by Israel to subdue any resistance, was slowly turning Gaza from a prison into a death camp. The UN had warned that the enclave would be effectively "uninhabitable" by 2020.

The solution to this – one that accorded with Israel's long settler colonial ambitions to replace the Palestinians in their own homeland – was clear. Israel needed to create a consensus in the West justifying the expulsion of the Pal-

estinians from Gaza.

And the only realistic place for them to go was into the neighbouring Egyptian territory of Sinai.

Behind the scenes, Israeli officials term their latest ethnic cleansing proposal a "Greater Gaza Plan." Details first leaked in the Israeli media in 2014, although reports indicate that the origins date to 2007, when the Bush administration was apparently brought on board following Hamas' election victory in Gaza a year earlier.

At the time, Israel's secret plan relied on carrots more than sticks. The idea was to attach Gaza to Sinai, erasing the border between the two. Washington would help secure international funding for a free trade zone in Sinai.

With unemployment at over 60 per cent, massive overcrowding in the enclave and little clean water to drink, the expectation was that Palestinians in Gaza would gradually move the centre of their lives to Sinai, settling there or moving to distant Egyptian cities.

Following the leaks, Egyptian and Palestinian officials hurriedly denounced the plan as "fabricated". However, there were plenty of clues that Egypt had begun facing pressure from 2007 onwards.

In response to the Israeli media leaks of 2014, an official close to former president Hosni Mubarak admitted that the screws had been turned on him in 2007 to agree to annex Gaza.

Five years later, according to the same source, Mohamed Morsi, who led a short-lived Muslim Brotherhood government, sent a delegation to Washington. There, the Americans proposed that "Egypt cede a third of the Sinai to Gaza in a two-stage process spanning four to five years." Morsi too refused.

Suspicions that Egypt's current presi-

dent, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, was close to capitulating in 2014 were fuelled at the time by Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas. In an interview on Egyptian TV, he said Israel's Sinai plan had been "unfortunately accepted by some here [in Egypt]. Don't ask me more about that. We abolished it."

The Greater Gaza plan received another boost in 2018 when it was reportedly considered for inclusion in Donald Trump's "deal of the century" Middle East "peace" plan. The hope was it would be financed by Gulf states as part of their normalisation with Israel.

That summer, Hamas even sent a delegation to Cairo to learn about the proposals.

The gains for Israel in moving Palestinians from Gaza to Sinai, whether voluntarily under the Greater Gaza Plan or by force during a ground invasion, are obvious. Egypt's military dictatorship would inherit the problem of crushing Palestinian resistance groups like Hamas – largely out of view – rather than Israel. Hamas would not be likely to fare well, given the Egyptian military's repression of the country's own political Islamist movements.

The costs of confining and policing Gaza would shift from Israel to the Arab world and international community. Once inside Sinai, ordinary Palestinians could be expected to seek alleviation from their poverty and suffering by integrating into wider Egyptian society, eventually moving to big cities like Cairo and Alexandria. They would be stripped of their right in international law to return to their homes.

In a generation or two, their children would identify as Egyptian, not Palestinian.

Meanwhile, the West Bank would be even more isolated and vulnerable

to attacks from Jewish settlers, backed by Israeli soldiers. And Abbas would no longer be able to claim to represent the Palestinian cause, undermining his campaign to win recognition for statehood.

The problem is that no Egyptian leader has dared to accept such a plan, however much international arm-twisting and bribery was involved.

None wanted to be seen conspiring in Israel's ethnic cleansing and final dispossession of the Palestinian people, one of the gravest and longest-running grievances shared by populations across the Middle East.

Which brings us to Israel's current bombing campaign, which accords with no conceivable principle of proportionality, and its imminent ground invasion. Far from targeting Hamas, Israel has every incentive to use the Hamas attack of October 7 as a pretext to wreak as much damage on Gaza as possible.

Israel's goal is to speed up the process of making Gaza uninhabitable.

Israel needs Palestinians in Gaza so desperate to leave that they will ethnically cleanse themselves, and Egypt under so much opprobrium for not opening the border to Sinai that it finally relents.

With its current bombing campaign, Israel has moved from carrots to a very large stick.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is aware that he has only a limited time-window to effect enough carnage to realise Israel's plan.

Notably, back in 2018, veteran Israeli reporter Ron Ben-Yishai revealed that the Israeli military was considering a new strategy towards Gaza that involved invading it and dissecting it in two, with Israel occupying the northern half.

At the same time the US was said to

Once inside Sinai, ordinary Palestinians could be expected to seek alleviation from their poverty and suffering by integrating into wider Egyptian society, eventually moving to big cities like Cairo and Alexandria

In Israel's cold, cynical calculations, its military is rolling the toothpaste tube tightly, before opening the top to see the toothpaste pour out

be willing to deepen Gaza's humanitarian crisis by withholding funds from UNRWA, the UN's relief agency.

Israel is currently achieving both through its bombing rampage and its demand that northern Gaza's population "evacuate," supposedly for their own safety, to southern Gaza.

The aim appears to be to squeeze Palestinians into the tiny space of Gaza's south, next to the border with Sinai, destroy all civilian infrastructure, and bomb and terrorise Palestinians in the south too.

Palestinians are already clamouring to be allowed into Sinai, while Sisi is presumably coming under the sever-

est pressure behind the scenes to back down and open the border.

In Israel's cold, cynical calculations, its military is rolling the toothpaste tube tightly, before opening the top to see the toothpaste pour out.

If Gaza can be emptied, Israel will hope to establish a precedent the international community will condone. West Bank Palestinians will be pressured to join family or compatriots in Sinai.

Having been embarrassed by the festering wound of the Palestinians' dispossession for more than 75 years, the West and Arab world will be only too happy finally to bury the Palestinian cause for good.

CT

Greg Koenderman



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Cleveland, Ohio, USA, October 2023 – Photo: Paul Becker

Israel is ready to 'cleanses' Gaza

All the signs are that Israel is once again considering a massive ethnic cleansing operation, conducted at lightning speed with US assistance

Israeli forces began making limited ground incursions into northern Gaza over the weekend, reports proliferated that Israel was readying plans to expel much or all of the enclave's population into the neighbouring Egyptian territory of Sinai.

In part, those fears were fuelled by a report last week, published in the Israeli outlet *Calcalist*, of a leaked policy draft from the intelligence ministry outlining just such an ethnic cleansing plan for Gaza.

Further concerns were raised by a report in the *Financial Times* on Monday that Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, had lobbied the European Union on the idea of driving the strip's Palestinians into Sinai under cover of war.

Some EU members, including the Czech Republic and Austria, were said to have been receptive and floated the idea at a meeting of member states last week. An unnamed European diplomat told the *FT*: "Now is the time to put increased pressure on the Egyptians to agree."

According to the leaked Israeli intelligence ministry document, after their expulsion, Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians would initially be housed in tent cities, before permanent communities could be built in the penin-

sula's north. A military "sterile zone," several kilometres wide, would prevent any return to Gaza. Longer term, Israel would encourage other states – especially Canada, European countries such as Greece and Spain, and North African countries – to absorb the Palestinian population in Sinai.

The ministry reportedly believes the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza into Sinai would be "liable to provide positive and long-lasting strategic results."

For Palestinians, on the other hand, it has traumatic echoes of Israel's mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland at Israel's creation in 1948 – what Palestinians call their Nakba, or Catastrophe.

The leaked document was quickly dismissed as speculative. But, in fact, Israel has had just such an ethnic cleansing plan for Gaza on the drawing board, approved by the United States, since at least 2007. That was shortly after Hamas won Palestinian elections and took control of the enclave.

After a series of failed, secret diplomatic efforts over the past 16 years to arm-twist Egypt into accepting this so-called "peace plan" – known officially as the Greater Gaza Plan – Israel may be tempted to exploit the current

At that time, pushing Palestinians into Sinai was dressed up as a “peace plan.” Now, should Israel succeed, it will be the endgame in a violent ethnic cleansing operation

moment to implement a much crueller version of it by force.

That would certainly explain Israel’s current devastating bombing campaign in Gaza – which officials are positively comparing to the horrifying firebombing of civilians in the German city of Dresden in the Second World War – as well as Israel’s order to one million Palestinians to ethnically cleanse themselves from northern Gaza.

On Sunday, Israel bombed buildings all around al-Quds hospital in northern Gaza, filling wards with clouds of toxic dust. Administrators received repeated warnings that the hospital had to be evacuated immediately. Staff said that was impossible because too many patients were far too sick to be moved.

The concentration of Palestinians into southern Gaza – where they are also being bombed and deprived of power, food, water and communications, with hospitals and aid compounds unable to function – has created an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe.

The pressure is building day by day on Egypt’s military ruler Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to open the Rafah crossing on humanitarian grounds and let Palestinians flood into Sinai.

Hamas’ attack on Israeli communities next to Gaza on 7 October may have provided the pretext Israel needs to dust off its ethnic cleansing plan. With Washington and Europe on board, and the western media still focused primarily on Israel’s trauma rather than Gaza’s, Netanyahu cannot wait too long before his window for action closes.

The Greater Gaza Plan first came to light in 2014, after leaks to Israeli and Egyptian media – apparently part of a pressure campaign on Sisi, then recently installed with US backing. The Egyptian military had

overthrown an elected Muslim Brotherhood government the previous year.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas confirmed the plan’s existence at that time by insisting he had quashed it. He told an interviewer that it had been “unfortunately accepted by some here [in Egypt]. Don’t ask me more about that. We abolished it, because it can’t be.”

Middle East Eye was one of the very few western media outlets to report on these developments at the time.

As concern grew among Egyptians and Palestinians, a former aide to Hosni Mubarak, who ruled Egypt until 2011, came forward to state that the administration of George W Bush had pressured Mubarak to accept the plan as far back as 2007.

The next president, Mohamed Morsi, of the Muslim Brotherhood, was also reportedly leaned on in a similar manner in 2012. The source quoted Mubarak as saying in response to the plan: “We are fighting both the US and Israel. There is pressure on us to open the Rafah crossing for the Palestinians and grant them freedom of residence, particularly in Sinai. In a year or two, the issue of Palestinian refugee camps in Sinai will be internationalised”.

At that time, pushing Palestinians into Sinai was dressed up as a “peace plan.” Now, should Israel succeed, it will be the endgame in a violent ethnic cleansing operation.

As *MEE* noted back in 2014, the Greater Gaza Plan envisioned transferring 1,600 sq km of Sinai – five times the size of Gaza – to the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank, headed by Abbas. “The territory in Sinai would become a demilitarised Palestinian state – dubbed ‘Greater Gaza’ – to which returning Palestinian refugees would be

assigned... In return, Abbas would have to give up the right to a state in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.”

The hope was that Abbas would agree to rule a mini Palestinian state in Sinai, where most Palestinian refugees in the region could be settled, stripping them of their right of return under international law.

Most Palestinians in Gaza are refugees, or descended from refugees, from Israel’s ethnic cleansing operations of 1948.

The idea of creating a Palestinian state outside historic Palestine – in either Jordan or Sinai – has a long pedigree in Zionist thinking. “Jordan is Palestine” has been a rallying cry on the Israeli right for decades. There have been parallel suggestions for Sinai.

The scheme became the centrepiece of the 2004 Herzliya conference, an annual meeting of Israel’s political, academic and security elites to exchange and develop policy ideas. It was enthusiastically adopted by Uzi Arad, the conference’s founder and long-time adviser to Netanyahu.

Moshe Feiglin, the speaker of the Israeli Knesset and then a member of Netanyahu’s Likud party, called for Gaza’s inhabitants to be expelled from their homes under cover of the operation and moved into Sinai, in what he termed a “solution for Gaza”.

The Greater Gaza Plan received a further shot in the arm in 2018 from the Trump administration, when reports suggested it was considered for inclusion in the US president’s “deal of the century” plan to bring about normalisation between Israel and the Arab world.

Israel’s rationale for the Sinai option between 2007 and 2018 was that it undermined Abbas’ campaign at the United Nations to seek recognition of Pales-

tinian statehood.

Notably, Israel’s large-scale military attacks on Gaza – in the winter of 2008, 2012 and again in 2014 – coincided with reported Israeli and US efforts to turn the screws on successive Egyptian leaders to concede parts of Sinai.

Destruction of Gaza, intensifying the humanitarian catastrophe there, seems to have been part of that pressure campaign.

All of that is the context for interpreting Israel’s unprecedented current rampage through Gaza, as well as the similarly unprecedented fallout from political and military crises in Israel caused by Hamas’ 7 October attack.

The Greater Gaza Plan was originally intended to provide the Palestinian leadership with a sweetener, offering some kind of state – though not in historic Palestine. Sinai would host new Palestinian cities, a free-trade zone, a power plant, and a seaport and airport.

The main sticking point for Egypt – apart from being seen to collude with Israel in erasing the Palestinian national cause – was concern that Hamas would gain a base inside Egypt, and strengthen Egypt’s home-grown Islamist movements.

There are plenty of indications that Israel’s determination to drive Palestinians into Egypt has intensified since the 7 October attack, and that the Hamas breakout has provided an opportunity to achieve by force what could not be achieved through diplomacy.

Israeli leaders now sound in no mood to take account of Egyptian concerns.

A week into its military operations, a spokesman for the Israeli military, Amir Avivi, told the BBC that Israel could not ensure the safety of civilians in Gaza. He added: “They need to move south, out to the Sinai Peninsula.”

A variation of the “Sinai is Palestine” option was revived by the right during Operation Protective Edge, Israel’s 50-day attack on Gaza in the summer of 2014

Giora Eiland, a former national security adviser, has said the goal is to “create conditions where life in Gaza becomes unsustainable.” As a result, “Gaza will become a place where no human being can exist”

The next day, a former Israeli ambassador to the US, Danny Ayalon, a Netanyahu confidant, amplified the point: “There is almost endless space in the Sinai Desert... This is not the first time it has been done... We and the international community will prepare the infrastructure for tent cities.”

He concluded: “Egypt will have to play ball.”

These officials have presented this as a temporary move during Israel’s bombing campaign and ground invasion. But all the signs are that Israel has far larger ambitions.

Benny Gantz, a former general who now sits in a unity government with Netanyahu, has said Israel has a plan to “change the security and strategic reality in the region.”

Giora Eiland, a former national security adviser, has said the goal is to “create conditions where life in Gaza becomes unsustainable.” As a result, “Gaza will become a place where no human being can exist.”

Sisi is more than aware of the pressure Israel is bringing to bear on Egypt. At a press conference on 18 October, he warned that Israel’s bombing of Gaza was creating a humanitarian crisis that “could spiral out of control”.

He added: “What is happening now in Gaza is an attempt to force civilian residents to take refuge and migrate to Egypt, which should not be accepted.”

The scenario Sisi fears is a repeat of events in 2008 when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians broke through the barrier between Gaza and Sinai to get food and fuel because of Israel’s siege of the enclave. To prevent a recurrence, Egypt has repeatedly bolstered security measures along its short border with Gaza.

Nonetheless, Cairo reportedly has

made preparations for just such a development. Its plans include the rapid setting up of tent cities next to the Sinai towns of Sheikh Zuwayed and Rafah.

Sisi said that, if Palestinians were driven into Sinai, Egyptians would “go out and protest in their millions”.

Cairo’s concerns about Israeli intentions are shared by United Nations’ official Francesca Albanese, a special rapporteur on the occupied territories.

Referring to Israel’s two main historic ethnic cleansing operations, she observed: “There is a grave danger that what we are witnessing may be a repeat of the 1948 Nakba, and the 1967 Nakba, yet on a larger scale. The international community must do everything to stop this from happening again.”

The US, which has long backed the Greater Gaza Plan, has its own forms of leverage – including financial pressure – to encourage Sisi to comply.

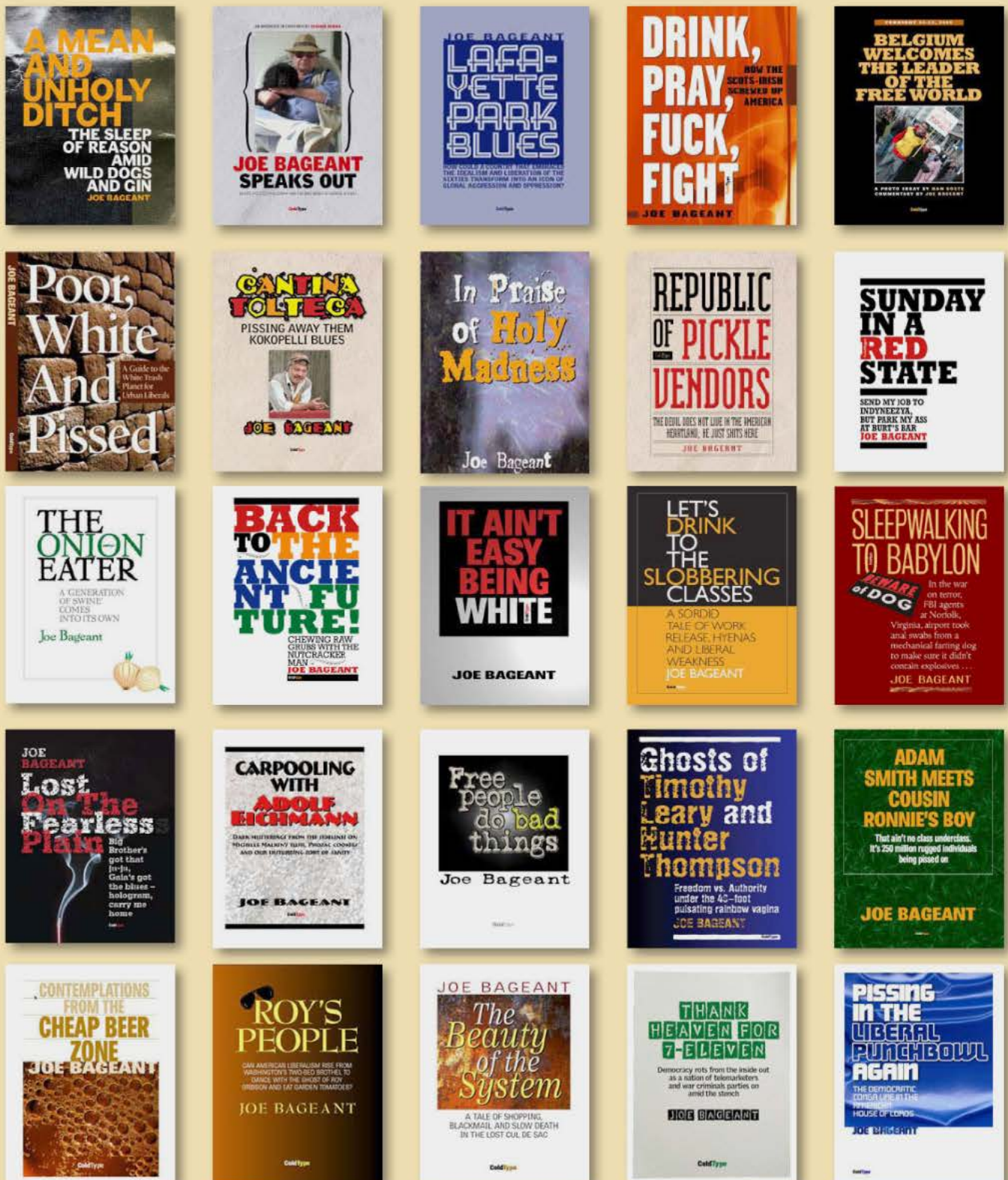
Egypt is mired in an unprecedented debt crisis of more than \$160bn, plus spiralling inflation, as Sisi heads into a presidential election.

Egyptian officials reportedly believe Washington will try to use a debt write-off as an incentive to accept refugees from a renewed Israeli ethnic cleansing operation.

Only three days after the Hamas attack, Biden administration officials publicly declared that they had made arrangements with unnamed third countries to offer safe passage out of Gaza for Palestinian civilians.

All the signs are in place that Israel is once again seriously considering a massive ethnic cleansing operation, conducted at lightning speed and with US assistance, to override international objections.

The question is, is anyone ready, or able, to stop them? **CT**



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Canberra, Australia, October 27, 2023 – Photo: Leo Bild

What the BBC fails to tell us

It is journalistic malpractice for the media to still be repeating so credulously the Israeli military's account of that day

The BBC's Lucy Williamson was taken once again this week to view the terrible destruction at a kibbutz community just outside Gaza attacked on October 7. As we have been shown so many times before, the Israeli homes were riddled with automatic fire, both inside and out. Sections of concrete wall had holes in them, or had collapsed entirely. And parts of the buildings that were still standing were deeply charred. It looked like a small snapshot of the current horrors in Gaza.

There is a possible reason for those similarities – one that the BBC is studiously failing to report, despite mounting evidence from a variety of sources, including the Israeli media. Instead the BBC is sticking resolutely to a narrative crafted for them, and the rest of the western media, by the Israeli military: that Hamas alone caused all this destruction.

Simply repeating that narrative without any caveats has by now reached the level of journalistic malpractice. And yet that is precisely what the BBC does night after night. Just a cursory look at the wreckage in the various kibbutz communities that were attacked that day

should raise questions in the mind of any good reporter. Were Palestinian militants in a position to actually inflict physical damage to that degree and extent with the kind of light weapons they carried?

And if not, who else was in a position to wreak such havoc other than Israel?

A separate question that good journalists ought to be asking is this: What was the purpose of such damage? What did the Palestinian militants hope to achieve by it?

The implicit answer the media is supplying is also the answer the Israeli military wants western publics to hear: that Hamas engaged in an orgy of gratuitous killing and savagery because ... well, let's say the quiet part out loud: because Palestinians are inherently savage.

With that as the implicit narrative, western politicians have been handed a licence to cheerlead Israel as it murders a Palestinian child in Gaza every few minutes. Savages only understand the language of savagery, after all.

For this reason alone, any journalist who wishes to avoid colluding in the genocide unfolding in Gaza ought to be increasingly wary of simply repeating the Israeli military's claims about what happened on October 7. Certainly, they should not credulously regurgitate the

Israel has a long-standing policy of seeking to prevent Israeli soldiers from being taken captive – chiefly, because of the high price Israeli society insists on paying to ensure soldiers are returned

latest agitprop from the IDF press office, as the BBC is so evidently doing.

What we know from a growing body of evidence gleaned from the Israeli media and Israeli eyewitnesses is that the Israeli military was completely blindsided by that day's events. Heavy artillery, including tanks and attack helicopters, was called in to deal with Hamas. That appears to have been a straightforward decision in regard to the military bases Hamas had overrun.

Israel has a long-standing policy of seeking to prevent Israeli soldiers from being taken captive – chiefly, because of the high price Israeli society insists on paying to ensure soldiers are returned. For decades, the military's so-called "Hannibal procedure" has directed Israeli troops to kill fellow soldiers rather than allow them to be taken captive. For the same reason, Hamas expends a great deal of energy in trying to find innovative ways to seize soldiers.

The two sides are essentially engaged in a brutal tango in which each understands the other's dance moves. Given Hamas' situation, effectively managing the Israeli-controlled concentration camp of Gaza, it has limited resistance strategies available to it. Capturing Israeli soldiers maximises its leverage. They can be traded for the release of many of the thousands of Palestinian political prisoners held in jails inside Israel in breach of international law. In addition, in the negotiations, Hamas usually hopes to win an easing of Israel's 16-year siege of Gaza.

To avert this scenario, Israeli commanders reportedly called in the attack helicopters on the military bases overwhelmed by Hamas on October 7. The helicopters appear to have fired indiscriminately, despite the risk posed to the Israeli soldiers in the base who

were still alive. Israel's was a scorched-earth policy to stop Hamas achieving its aims. That may, in part, explain the very large proportion of Israeli soldiers among the 1,300 killed that day.

But what about the situation in the kibbutz communities? By the time the army arrived and was in position, Hamas was well dug in. It had taken the inhabitants as hostages inside their own homes. Israeli eyewitness testimony and media reports suggest Hamas was almost certainly trying to negotiate safe passage back into Gaza, using the Israeli civilians as human shields. The civilians were the Hamas fighters' only ticket out, and they could be converted later into bargaining chips for the release of Palestinian prisoners.

The evidence – from Israeli media reports and eyewitnesses, as well as a host of visual clues from the crime scene itself – tell a far more complex story than the one presented nightly on the BBC.

Did the Israeli military fire into the Hamas-controlled civilian homes in the same fashion as it had fired into its own military bases, and with the same disregard for the safety of Israelis inside? Was the goal in each case to prevent at all costs Hamas taking hostages whose release would require a very high price from Israel?

Kibbutz Be'eri has been a favoured destination for BBC reporters keen to illustrate Hamas' barbarity. It is where Lucy Williamson headed again this week. And yet none of her reporting highlighted comments made to the Israeli *Haaretz* newspaper by Tuval Escapa, the kibbutz's security coordinator. He said Israeli military commanders had ordered the "shelling [of] houses on their occupants in order to eliminate

the terrorists along with the hostages.”

That echoed the testimony of Yasmin Porat, who sought shelter in Be’eri from the nearby Nova music festival. She told Israeli Radio that once Israeli special forces arrived: “They eliminated everyone, including the hostages because there was very, very heavy crossfire.”

Are the images of charred bodies presented by Williamson, accompanied by a warning of their graphic, upsetting nature, incontrovertible proof that Hamas behaved like monsters, bent on the most twisted kind of vengeance? Or might those blackened remains be evidence that Israeli civilians and Hamas fighters burned alongside each other, after they were engulfed in flames caused by Israeli shelling of the houses?

Israel will not agree to an independent investigation so a definitive answer will never be forthcoming. But that does not absolve the media of their professional and moral duty to be cautious.

Consider for a moment the stark contrast in the western media’s treatment of events on October 7 and its treatment of the strike on the car park at Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in northern Gaza on October 17, in which hundreds of Palestinians were reported killed.

In the case of Al-Ahli, the media were only too ready to cast aside all the evidence that the hospital had been hit by an Israeli strike immediately Israel contested the claim. Instead journalists hurriedly amplified Israel’s counter-allegation that a Palestinian rocket had fallen on the hospital. Most of the media moved on after concluding, “The truth may never be clear,” or even less credibly, that Palestinian militants were the most likely culprits.

In telling contrast, the western media have not been willing to raise even a single question about what

happened on October 7. They have enthusiastically attributed every horror that day to Hamas. They have ignored the reality of utter chaos that reigned for many hours and the potential for poor, desperate and morally dubious decision-making by the Israeli military.

In fact, the media have gone much further. In advancing the narrative of “Hamas as savages,” they have promoted obvious fictions, such as the story that “Hamas beheaded 40 babies.” That piece of fake news was even taken up briefly by US President Joe Biden, before it was quietly walked back by his officials.

Similarly, it is still a popular throwaway line among the western commentariat that “Hamas carried out rapes,” though once again the allegation is evidence-free so far.

We should be clear. If Israel had serious evidence for either of these claims, it would be aggressively promoting it. Instead, it is doing the next best thing: letting innuendo gently sink into the audience’s subconscious, settling there as a prejudice that cannot be interrogated.

Hamas undoubtedly committed war crimes on October 7 – not least, by taking civilians as human shields. But that kind of crime is one we are familiar with, one “ordinary” enough that the Israel military has been regularly documented carrying it out, too. The practice of Israeli soldiers taking Palestinians as human shields goes under various names, such as the “neighbour procedure” and the “early warning procedure.”

Worse atrocities may have happened too, especially given the unexpected scale of Hamas’ success in breaking out of Gaza. Large numbers of Palestinians escaped the enclave, some of them

Are the images of charred bodies presented by Williamson, accompanied by a warning of their graphic, upsetting nature, incontrovertible proof that Hamas behaved like monsters, bent on the most twisted kind of vengeance?

The media's uncritical promotion of Israel's " Hamas as savages " ... has been used to demonise a whole people, presenting them either as barbarians or as the willing protectors and enablers of barbarism

doubtless armed civilians with no connection to the operation. In such circumstances, it would be surprising if there were no examples of the headline-grabbing atrocities being committed.

The issue is whether such atrocities were planned and systematic, as Israel claims and the western media repeats, or examples of rogue actions by individuals or groups. If the latter, Israel would be in no position to judge. Israel's own history is littered with examples of such crimes, including the documented case of an Israeli army unit taking captive a Bedouin girl in 1949 and repeatedly gang-raping her.

Savagery would certainly not be a uniquely Hamas trait. Following the October 7 attack, videos have been emerging of systematic abuses of any Hamas fighters captured, whether alive or dead. Images show them being beaten and tortured in public for the gratification of onlookers, when there is clearly not even the pretence of information gathering. Others show the bodies of Hamas fighters being defiled and mutilated.

No one can claim the moral high ground here. What the media's uncritical

promotion of Israel's " Hamas as savages " narrative has achieved is something sinister – and all too familiar from the West's long colonial history. It has been used to demonise a whole people, presenting them either as barbarians or as the willing protectors and enablers of barbarism.

The " savages " narrative is being weaponised by Israel to justify its mounting campaign of atrocities in Gaza. Which is why it is so important that journalists don't simply allow themselves to be spoonfed. Far too much is at stake.

Hamas committed war crimes on October 7 on a scale that is unprecedented for any Palestinian group. But there is little more than Israeli narrative spin so far to suggest that there was an unparalleled depravity to Hamas' actions. Certainly from what we know, it is hard to see that anything Hamas did that day was worse, or more savage, than what Israel has been doing daily in Gaza for weeks.

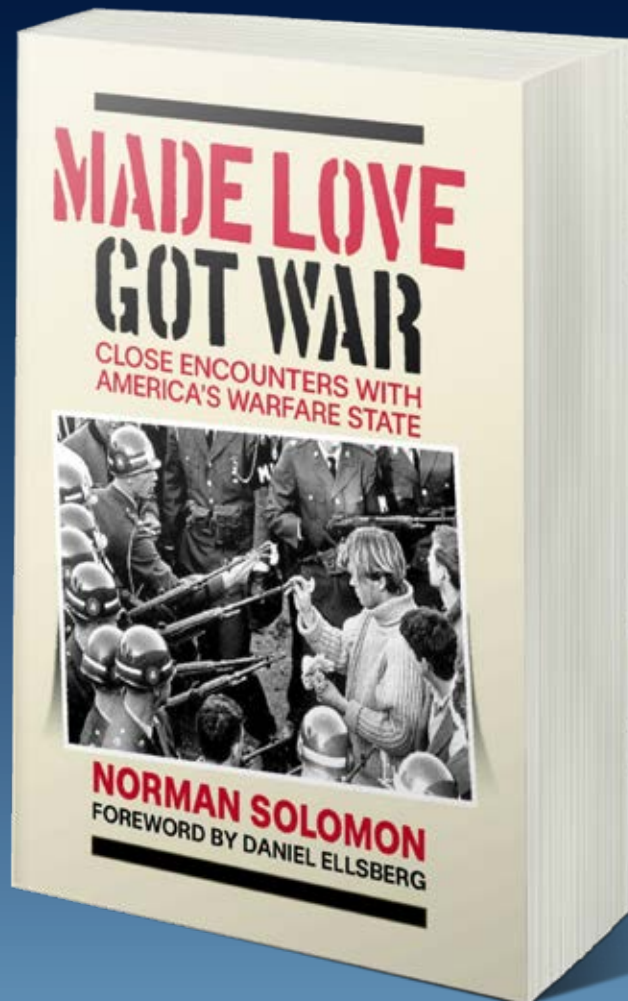
And Israel's actions – from bombing Palestinian families to starving them of food and water – has the blessing of every major western politician. **CT**

DAVID BEN-GURION, Israel's first Prime Minister

"If I were an Arab leader, I would never sign an agreement with Israel. It is normal – we have taken their country. It is true God promised it to us, but how could that interest them? Our God is not theirs. There has been anti-semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They see but one thing – we have come and stolen their country. Why would they accept that?"

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Cleveland, Ohio, USA, October 2023 – Photo: Paul Becker

‘A textbook case of genocide’

Gaza is becoming a graveyard for children. Hundreds of girls and boys are reportedly being killed or injured every day”

An authentic democracy cannot be psychopathic because most people are not psychopaths. Most people would not vote to kill, wound and displace hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians for power, profit or territorial gain. Most people do not accept the great lie of “pragmatism”: that “the anarchical society” of international relations mandates psychopathic violence: If “we” don’t behave as psychopaths, somebody else will.

Most people don’t believe the world can be divided between Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s “children of light” and “children of darkness.” You don’t need to be a mystic to know that love, kindness, compassion – “light” – arise naturally in all human beings allowed to live in freedom and peace.

We know from our own experience that we are wonderfully happy when overflowing with love and desperately miserable when overflowing with hate. We know, therefore, that love is suited to human nature and well-being in a way that hatred is certainly not. We know that when hate arises in large numbers of people it is born of suffering, not of some ‘evil’ disposition. We know that

the real answer to hate is not violence but justice that alleviates suffering and hate.

Because we are not psychopathic, it is deeply important for us to believe that we are not living in a psychopathic society. When this human need clashes with political reality, examples of cognitive dissonance abound – psychopathic circles have to be squared, $2 + 2$ must make 5. This is the task of the propaganda system comprised of the ‘respectable’ political, media and religious institutions of our society.

In an interview with Channel 4 News, the Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, supplied a particularly stark example. Welby began by affecting a transcendent spiritual impartiality, as one might expect: “I’m not pointing fingers,” he said.

Alas, Welby came back to earth with a bump: “I do point fingers at Hamas and say this is terrorism at its most extreme and most evil.”

Okay, but then was he also pointing fingers at the Israeli government raining hellfire on Gaza? Welby fell silent, hesitated: “It’s not ... You can do the ... You can say something which in different circumstances might

“More journalists are reportedly being killed over a four-week period than in any conflict in at least three decades. More United Nations aid workers have been killed than in any comparable period in the history of our organisation”

be useful at a time that just makes everything worse ... Let’s not run to judgement and blame straight away.”

The archbishop’s power-friendly ethical dissonance becomes even clearer when we recall that, last December, Welby told the BBC that “justice demands that there is defeat” of “an evil invasion” in Ukraine. It was right, he said, for the West to send billions of dollars of weaponry to support a “victim nation” that is “being overrun by aggression.” After all, the international community had a “duty of care” to protect weaker nations.

Welby’s failure to condemn any “evil” committed by Israel came long after it had become clear that Israel had been criminally targeting Gaza’s civilian population with collective punishment cutting off water, food and electricity. And by razing whole apartment blocks, indeed whole residential areas, to the ground.

From satellite imagery, *The Economist* estimated (30 October) that ‘over a tenth of Gaza’s housing stock has been destroyed, leaving more than 280,000 people without homes to which they can return’. The magazine noted: “Even Russia, during its siege of Mariupol in Ukraine between February and May 2022, negotiated humanitarian pauses in which some civilians were permitted to leave. Israel has thus far rejected calls, by the European Union and others, for such pauses.”

More recently, the health ministry of the Palestinian Authority has estimated that more than 50 percent of Gaza’s housing units have been destroyed, nearly 70 percent of its population has been displaced, 16 out of 35 hospitals that can take in-patients have stopped functioning, 42 UN Relief Agency buildings have been damaged, along with at

least seven churches and 55 mosques. According to the World Health Organisation, there have been more than 100 strikes on health facilities. Since 7 October, more than 200 schools have been damaged in Gaza – around 40 percent of the total number – about 40 of them very seriously, according to UNICEF data.

By any standards, this is an awesome level of destruction. In its first 563 days, Russia’s war on Ukraine killed 9,614 Ukrainian civilians, 554 of them children. In its first 25 days, Israel’s war on Gaza killed 8,796 Palestinian civilians, 3,648 of them children. Since the 7 October attacks by Hamas, at least 1,400 Israelis have been killed, including 1,033 civilians and 31 children.

The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres puts the immensity of Israel’s violence in perspective: “Gaza is becoming a graveyard for children. Hundreds of girls and boys are reportedly being killed or injured every day. More journalists are reportedly being killed over a four-week period than in any conflict in at least three decades. More United Nations aid workers have been killed than in any comparable period in the history of our organisation.”

On 28 October, Craig Mokhiber, one of the world’s leading international lawyers, director of the UN’s New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, resigned to protest the organisation’s handling of what he called a “textbook case of genocide.”

In his resignation letter, Mokhiber wrote: “As a human rights lawyer with more than three decades of experience in the field, I know well that the concept of genocide has often been subject to political abuse. But the current wholesale slaughter of the Palestinian people, rooted in an ethno-national-

ist settler colonial ideology, in continuation of decades of their systematic persecution and purging, based entirely upon their status as Arabs, and coupled with explicit statements of intent by leaders in the Israeli government and military, leaves no room for doubt or debate. In Gaza, civilian homes, schools, churches, mosques, and medical institutions are wantonly attacked as thousands of civilians are massacred. In the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem, homes are seized and reassigned based entirely on race, and violent settler pogroms are accompanied by Israeli military units.

“This is a textbook case of genocide. The European, ethno-nationalist, settler colonial project in Palestine has entered its final phase, toward the expedited destruction of the last remnants of indigenous Palestinian life in Palestine. What’s more, the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, and much of Europe, are wholly complicit in the horrific assault. Not only are these governments refusing to meet their treaty obligations ‘to ensure respect’ for the Geneva Conventions, but they are in fact actively arming the assault, providing economic and intelligence support, and giving political and diplomatic cover for Israel’s atrocities.”

In an interview with *Al Jazeera* English, Mokhiber made a further key point: “Usually, the most difficult part in proving genocide is intent, because there has to be an intention to destroy, in whole or in part, a particular group. In this case, the intent by Israel’s leaders has been so explicitly stated, and publicly stated, by the prime minister, by the president, by senior cabinet ministers, by military leaders, that that is an easy case to make. It’s on the public record.”

Our ProQuest media database search

for “Craig Mokhiber” and “Gaza” delivered four mentions, all in the *Guardian*. One of these was a smear, another was a single-sentence mention in passing buried in a news piece, a third substantial piece of 667 words, and an additional mention yesterday buried in the penultimate paragraph of an opinion piece. There were no mentions found in any other newspaper and there are none on the BBC website.

On Channel 4 News, Matt Frei asked Welby: “What do you say to those demonstrators on the streets of London who are saying this is Israeli genocide against the Palestinians?”

Welby’s sage reply: “I say you’ve no understanding of what you’re saying.”

When asked if Israel was acting within international law, Labour’s chivalrous knight, Sir Keir Starmer, said: “As to whether each and every act is in accordance with the law, well that will have to be adjudicated in due course. Um, I think it’s unwise for politicians to stand on stages like this, or to sit in television studios, and pronounce day by day which acts may or may not be in accordance with international law.

“I think it’s not the role of politicians. I don’t think it’s wise to do it. I come with the benefit of a lawyer of having litigated about issues like this in the past. And in my experience, it’d often take weeks or months to assimilate the evidence and to then work out whether there may or may not have been a breach of international law.

“So, I think the call for politicians to look at half a picture on the screen without the full information and form an instant judgement as to whether it’s this side of the line or the other side of the line is extremely unwise. I’m not going to get involved with that kind of exercise.”

“Usually, the most difficult part in proving genocide is intent, because there has to be an intention to destroy, in whole or in part, a particular group. In this case, the intent by Israel’s leaders has been so explicitly stated, and publicly stated, by the prime minister, by the president, by senior cabinet ministers, by military leaders, that that is an easy case to make. It’s on the public record”

Britain's veteran warmongers have been queuing up to persuade the public of the rightness of Starmer's complicity in genocide

If this sounds like an in-depth, heartfelt response, last year, Starmer was asked: "Is Vladimir Putin a war criminal?"

Starmer's reply: "Yes."

On 8 February, Starmer told the House of Commons: "Before I entered this House, I had responsibility for fighting for justice in the Hague for victims of Serbian aggression. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that when the war in Ukraine is over, Putin and all his cronies must stand at the Hague and face justice?"

Again, completely contradicting everything he is now saying, Starmer said on 7 March: "Vladimir Putin and his criminal cronies must be held to account for their illegal invasion of Ukraine. The UK government must do all it can to ensure the creation of a special tribunal to investigate the crime of aggression.

"The Ukrainian people deserve justice as well as our continued military, economic, diplomatic, and humanitarian assistance."

Notice, Starmer was not calling for a "no-fly zone" or a ceasefire – completely unthinkable in relation to Gaza – he was endorsing continued intervention in the form of massive military support for the Ukrainian war effort.

On 17 March, Starmer said: "I welcome the International Criminal Court's decision to open war crime cases against Vladimir Putin and other senior Russian figures for their barbaric actions in Ukraine."

There is nothing random, or naïve, about Labour's hypocrisy and servility to power. *Declassified UK* reports: "Some 13 of the 31 members of Labour's shadow cabinet have received donations from a prominent pro-Israel lobby group or individual funder, it can be

revealed.

"The list of recipients includes party leader Keir Starmer, his deputy Angela Rayner, shadow foreign secretary David Lammy, and even the former vice-chair of Labour Friends of Palestine, Lisa Nandy, who is now shadow international development minister."

Britain's veteran warmongers have been queuing up to persuade the public of the rightness of Starmer's complicity in genocide. Arch-Blairite former Labour MP Peter Mandelson said: "As for Keir Starmer, I would just say this – I think what he's doing is demonstrating to the British people the sort of toughness and mettle that he would display, if he were to become prime minister of this country. He has been very tough, very realistic..."

In a separate interview, as if reading from the same script, former Tory MP and Thatcherite Michael Portillo opined: "I'm amongst those who think that Keir Starmer has done exactly the right thing and has shown a great deal of mettle, which I think will be quite widely admired. And that's important, I think, for a domestic audience that wonders whether he's up to being prime minister."

Dissidents are viewed and treated quite differently. Responding to home secretary Suella Braverman's suggestion on X (formerly Twitter) that, "It is entirely unacceptable to desecrate Armistice Day with a hate march through London," BBC sports commentator Gary Lineker posted: "Marching and calling for a ceasefire and peace so that more innocent children don't get killed is not really the definition of a hate march."

Nile Gardiner, a foreign policy analyst, former aide to Margaret Thatcher and contributor to the *Telegraph*, responded: "Gary Lineker's knowledge

of foreign and national security policy is practically zero. His vast narcissism and ego as a BBC football pundit is matched only by his sheer ignorance.”

In reality, of course, narcissism would mean Lineker keeping his head down, banking his huge salary, avoiding the inevitable torrent of abuse, and thus keeping his reputation safe and sound, like so many people do.

It is quite astonishing to reflect that, in 2011, NATO deployed 260 aircraft and 21 ships, launching 26,500 sorties destroying “over 5,900 military targets including over 400 artillery or rocket launchers and over 600 tanks or armoured vehicles” in response, not to the mass murder of civilians, but to a merely alleged threat of mass murder posed by Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi.

Not that there had been a call for a humanitarian “pause,” or a ceasefire, or the introduction of UN peacekeepers – the widespread demand was for massive military intervention.

In reality, the NATO “no-fly zone” that instantly became a bombing campaign obliterating Gaddafi’s army was based on a lie. A 9 September 2016 report into the war from the foreign affairs committee of the House of Commons commented: “Despite his rhetoric, the proposition that Muammar Gaddafi would have ordered the massacre of civilians in Benghazi was not supported by the available evidence ... Muammar Gaddafi’s 40-year record of appalling human rights abuses did not include large-scale attacks on Libyan civilians.”

In February 2011, the *Times* insisted that “there is incontrovertible evidence” that demonstrators in Benghazi “are being blown apart by mortar fire.” Even if accurate, this would have been a pinprick compared to Israeli actions now.

This was the response to the Libyan government proposed by the *Times*: “British officials and private citizens must do all they can to cajole, pressure and exhort it out of power.” (Leading article, “In bombing its own civilians, Libya stands exposed as an outlaw regime,” the *Times*, 23 February 2011)

By contrast, on 25 October, the *Times* praised Starmer’s “initially assured response to the outbreak of violence that followed Hamas’s terror attacks on Israel on October 7,” which “correctly emphasised his party’s unconditional support for the Jewish state’s right to self-defence.”

This was a reference to Starmer’s appalling declaration that Israel “does have that right” to inflict collective punishment on Palestinian civilians by cutting off water, food and electricity.

On 22 March 2011, with NATO bombing of Libya underway, the *Guardian*’s Jonathan Freedland published a piece titled, “Though the risks are very real, the case for intervention remains strong.” He meant military intervention, of course – war – insisting that “in a global, interdependent world we have a ‘responsibility to protect’ each other.” Freedland now warns against such “binary thinking,” as he baulks even at the idea of a ceasefire:

“It seems such a simple, obvious remedy. Until you stop to wonder how exactly, if it is not defeated, Hamas is to be prevented from regrouping and preparing for yet another attack on the teenagers, festivalgoers and kibbutz families of southern Israel.”

Freedland’s article was titled: “The tragedy of the Israel-Palestine conflict is this: underneath all the horror is a clash of two just causes.” In *Manufacturing Consent*, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky commented on their analysis

BBC sports commentator Gary Lineker posted: “Marching and calling for a ceasefire and peace so that more innocent children don’t get killed is not really the definition of a hate march”

When it comes to Gaza in November 2023, the famous “responsibility to protect” has vanished from thinkable thought. Today, even the responsibility to protest is under legal threat

of media treatment of victims deemed “worthy” and “unworthy” by the West: “While the coverage of the worthy victim was generous with gory details and quoted expressions of outrage and demands for justice, the coverage of the unworthy victims was low-keyed, designed to keep the lid on emotions and evoking regretful and philosophical generalities on the omnipresence of violence and the inherent tragedy of human life.” (Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, Pantheon Books, 1988, p.39)

The *Guardian*’s Polly Toynbee also rejected calls for a ceasefire, obfuscating with a tangled web of Welby-style verbiage: “That word ‘ceasefire’ has become a symbol and a semantic roadblock, as events rush on and words get left behind. ‘Ceasefire’ has become an ideology rather than a practicality.”

When it comes to Gaza in November 2023, the famous “responsibility to

protect” has vanished from thinkable thought. Today, even the responsibility to protest is under legal threat. As for the British government’s response, Peter Osborne describes the shocking truth: “Meanwhile, not one government minister, as far as I can see, has condemned the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians in Gaza, or uttered a word of condemnation of the wave of settler attacks including displacement of Palestinian communities – war crimes – across the West Bank. Nor the genocidal language used by too many Israeli leaders.”

In describing the conflict, the BBC is content to use the pro-Israel propaganda construct “Israel-Hamas War.”

Israel’s murderous bombardment of Gaza was described by the BBC’s Jeremy Bowen as Israel “still pushing forward.” Bowen noted: “Palestinians call this genocide.”

It is not just the Palestinians though, as Bowen well knows. **CT**

AMICHAEL ELIYAHU, Israel’s Heritage Minister

“Anyone waving a Palestinian flag shouldn’t continue living on the face of the earth”

ITAMAR BEN GIVIR, Israel’s Security Minister

“To be clear, when we say that Hamas should be destroyed, it also means those who celebrate, those who support & those who hand out candy – they’re all terrorists, and they should also be destroyed!”



“

**Allowing Julian
Assange to be
extradited sends
a chilling message to
journalists the world
over**

#FreeAssangeNOW

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 



Melbourne, Australia, October ?? – Photo: Matt Hrkac

A letter to the children of Gaza

We have failed you. This is the awful guilt we carry.
We tried. But we did not try hard enough

Dear Child.

Dt is past midnight. I am flying at hundreds of miles an hour in the darkness, thousands of feet over the Atlantic Ocean. I am travelling to Egypt. I will go to the border of Gaza at Rafah. I go because of you.

You have never been in a plane. You have never left Gaza. You know only the densely packed streets and alleys. The concrete hovels. You know only the security barriers and fences patrolled by soldiers that surround Gaza. Planes, for you, are terrifying. Fighter jets. Attack helicopters. Drones. They circle above you. They drop missiles and bombs. Deafening explosions. The ground shakes. Buildings fall. The dead. The screams. The muffled calls for help from beneath the rubble. It does not stop. Night and day. Trapped under the piles of smashed concrete. Your playmates. Your schoolmates. Your neighbours. Gone in seconds. You see the chalky faces and limp bodies when they are dug out. I am a reporter. It is my job to see this. You are a child. You should never see this.

The stench of death. Rotting corpses under broken con-

crete. You hold your breath. You cover your mouth with cloth. You walk faster. Your neighbourhood has become a graveyard. All that was familiar is gone. You stare in amazement. You wonder where you are.

You are afraid. Explosion after explosion. You cry. You cling to your mother or father. You cover your ears. You see the white light of the missile and wait for the blast. Why do they kill children? What did you do? Why can't anyone protect you? Will you be wounded? Will you lose a leg or an arm? Will you go blind or be in a wheelchair? Why were you born? Was it for something good? Or was it for this? Will you grow up? Will you be happy? What will it be like without your friends? Who will die next? Your mother? Your father? Your brothers and sisters? Someone you know will be injured. Soon. Someone you know will die. Soon.

At night you lie in the dark on the cold cement floor. The phones are cut. The internet is off. You do not know what is happening. There are flashes of light. There are waves of blast concussions. There are screams. It does not stop.

When your father or mother hunts for food or water you wait. That terrible feeling in your stomach. Will they

We are going to the border crossing at Rafah ... We are going because we have children. Like you. Precious. Innocent. Loved. We are going because we want you to live

come back? Will you see them again? Will your tiny home be next? Will the bombs find you? Are these your last moments on earth?

You drink salty, dirty water. It makes you very sick. Your stomach hurts. You are hungry. The bakeries are destroyed. There is no bread. You eat one meal a day. Pasta. A cucumber. Soon this will seem like a feast.

You do not play with your soccer ball made of rags. You do not fly your kite made from old newspapers.

You have seen foreign reporters. We wear flak jackets with the word PRESS written on it. We have helmets. We have cameras. We drive jeeps. We appear after a bombing or a shooting. We sit over coffee for a long time and talk to the adults. Then we disappear. We do not usually interview children. But I have done interviews when groups of you crowded around us. Laughing. Pointing. Asking us to take your picture.

I have been bombed by jets in Gaza. I have been bombed in other wars, wars that happened before you were born. I too was very, very scared. I still have dreams about it. When I see the pictures of Gaza these wars return to me with the force of thunder and lightning. I think of you.

All of us who have been to war hate war most of all because of what it does to children. I tried to tell your story. I tried to tell the world that when you are cruel to people, week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade, when you deny people freedom and dignity, when you humiliate and trap them in an open-air prison, when you kill them as if they were beasts, they become very angry. They do to others what was done to them. I told it over and over. I told it for seven years. Few listened. And now this.

There are very brave Palestinian journalists. Thirty-nine of them have been killed since this bombing began. They are heroes. So are the doctors and nurses in your hospitals. So are the UN workers. Eighty-nine of whom have died. So are the ambulance drivers and the medics. So are the rescue parties that lift up the slabs of concrete with their hands. So are the mothers and fathers who shield you from the bombs.

But we are not there. Not this time. We cannot get in. We are locked out.

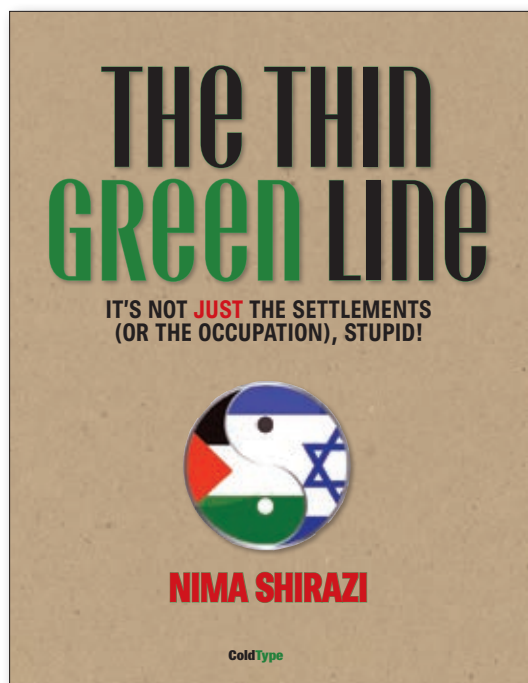
Reporters from all over the world are going to the border crossing at Rafah. We are going because we cannot watch this slaughter and do nothing. We are going because hundreds of people are dying a day, including 160 children. We are going because this genocide must stop. We are going because we have children. Like you. Precious. Innocent. Loved. We are going because we want you to live.

I hope one day we will meet. You will be an adult. I will be an old man, although to you I am already very old. In my dream for you I will find you free and safe and happy. No one will be trying to kill you. You will fly in airplanes filled with people, not bombs. You will not be trapped in a concentration camp. You will see the world. You will grow up and have children. You will become old. You will remember this suffering, but you will know it means you must help others who suffer. This is my hope. My prayer.

We have failed you. This is the awful guilt we carry. We tried. But we did not try hard enough. We will go to Rafah. Many of us. Reporters. We will stand outside the border with Gaza in protest. We will write and film. This is what we do. It is not much. But it is something. We will tell your story again.

Maybe it will be enough to earn the right to ask for your forgiveness. **CT**

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