



Israel under pressure

Six weeks into the war, Israel is facing intense international pressure to justify its bloody toll. Israeli officials have warned a “window of legitimacy” for the war to rout Hamas may be closing. Israel on Sunday presented what it said was evidence Hamas gunmen used Shifa Hospital to hide foreign hostages and to mask underground tunnels. Israel has repeatedly claimed that Shifa doubles as a base for Palestinian fighters, a charge Hamas and hospital administrators deny. Meanwhile, an Israeli police investigation into the October 7 attack indicates that Israel’s Defense Forces (IDF) mistakenly shot some festival attendees while firing at Hamas fighters, a report suggested. The alleged debacle was reported by the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, citing an unnamed police source. The source told Haaretz that their police investigation said an IDF combat helicopter fired at Hamas fighters after arriving on the scene. While targeting the perpetrators, the helicopter also hit some festival-goers, the source said. Frantic diplomatic efforts were meanwhile underway to seal a deal for the release of some of the 240 captives taken by the Hamas fighters during the movement’s Operation Al-Aqsa Storm on October 7.

Call for urgent action

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who hosted diplomats from Arab and Muslim-majority nations on Monday, called for urgent action to stop the “humanitarian disaster” unfolding in Gaza. “The situation in Gaza affects all countries around the world, questioning the human sense of right and wrong and humanity’s bottom line,” Wang told the visiting diplomats. A delegation of foreign ministers of the Palestinian Authority, Indonesia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan were in Beijing for talks on the ongoing crisis in Gaza.

“Let us work together to quickly cool down the situation in Gaza and restore peace in the Middle East as soon as possible,” Wang said. The Palestinian Authority’s Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki accused Israel of seeking to “bring to an end the Palestinian people’s presence on what remains of its historical land”. And Prince Faisal bin Farhan, Saudi Arabia’s top diplomat, said Riyadh was “seeking more cooperation with our friends in China,” with a view to “work towards ending this crisis and this grave situation as quickly as possible”.

Oslo, a peaceless agreement

From that date until 1993, when the Oslo Peace Agreement was signed between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, the land of Palestine, the Arab world, and Israel witnessed various events, including the triple wars. However, the Oslo Peace Agreement has not brought peace so far as Israel’s excessive demands remain unabated. According to the Gaza-Jericho Autonomy Agreement (Oslo I Agreement), a form of self-governance with limited powers was granted to Palestinians in 60% of the Gaza Strip and the city of Jericho on the western bank of the Jordan River. Yasser Arafat, the leader of the PLO, entered Gaza for the first time in 27 years in early July 1994. Following the temporary peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon in 1949 after the first Arab-Israeli war, control of the Gaza Strip was handed over to Egypt. This situation continued until 1967 when Arabs suffered defeat by Israel for the second time, and Israel reoccupied the Gaza Strip. Israelis had established settlements in the Gaza Strip over the years, and nearly 8,000 Jews were living in this area. This situation, however, led to heightened tensions between Palestinians and Israelis. Despite the 1994 Oslo Agreement, which had relinquished the Gaza Strip to the PLO, Israelis remained present in the strip and in the constructed settlements until 2005. However, in that year, Israel withdrew its soldiers and non-military personnel from Gaza.

Hamas control of Gaza

A year after the Palestinian parliamentary elections, the Hamas movement secured the majority of seats, appointing Ismail Haniyeh, a prominent figure within Hamas, as the leader of its self-governing body. Tensions between Hamas and the Fatah movement led to clashes between the two Palestinian organizations, ultimately resulting in the expulsion of Fatah members and full control of Gaza by Hamas in 2007. Subsequently, Israel quickly imposed a blockade on Gaza, severely restricting the movement of goods and people in and out of the region. This blockade persists to this day, earning Gaza the reputation of being the world’s largest open-air prison. From 2008 to the present, the Israelis launched numerous harsh attacks against the people of Gaza, resulting in the deaths of over 17,000 Gazans. Notable among these attacks was the operation known as Cast Lead, which took place from December 27, 2008, to January 17, 2009, claiming the lives of 1,419 Gazans. Israel’s Operation Protective Edge began on July 8, 2014, and continued until August 26, 2014, resulting in the martyrdom of 2,100 Gazans. The most intense and destructive Israeli attack on Gaza is the ongoing operation known as Iron Swords, initiated on October 7, following Operation Protective Edge and a heavy Hamas attack on Israel. Over 13,000 innocent Gazans, mostly women and children, have been martyred in this operation. Between 98% to 99% of the population in Gaza are Sunni Muslims, and less than 1% are Christians. While Arabic is the spoken language in Gaza, Hebrew and English are also prevalent among Palestinians.

Crimes amid international silence

Gaza, throughout its 5,000-year history, has experienced numerous ups and downs, witnessing many victories and defeats. Nonetheless, it is not unfounded to claim that the toughest and most devastating attack on this region is the recent Israeli assault, supported by the United States and other Western countries. Astonishingly, the most atrocious assault on Gaza, lasting over 40 days and resulting in the massacre of more than 13,000 people, occurred in an era marked by human rationality, development, and human rights led by the Western world, particularly the United States, amid an international silence and sometimes with the support of human rights advocates! The number of martyrs and the amount of incurred damages and losses are significant, but undoubtedly, this is not the end point of Gaza’s history. Gaza will rise again, and perhaps the words of the Palestinian ambassador to Rabat will prove true: “Gaza is the graveyard of all invaders.”

Follow the money in Israeli-led ‘war on terror’

ANALYSIS

Today, Israel is filled with anger and vengeance and does not care one iota about the death of Palestinian civilians. Many in the Netanyahu-led cabinet have expressed genocidal intent towards the entire Palestinian population. Most in the Israeli military and public are celebrating the physical abuse of Palestinians. Amid an atmosphere that is remarkably similar to the US after 9/11, the Israeli “war on terror” is taking shape. But Israel’s “war on terror” will not be only about revenge, just as the US’s was not.

The Israeli arms industry has been thriving in recent years, with a record \$12.5 billion in sales in 2022, double the figure from one decade ago. In the last year, 24 percent of its arms went to Arab states, including Bahrain, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates. According to the Israeli Defence Ministry’s own figures, the number of countries buying Israeli drones has jumped 40 percent in the last three years, munitions have grown by 45 percent, and spyware and related cyber-equipment soared from 67 to 83 countries in 2022.

As I wrote in my book, *The Palestine Laboratory*, Israel has used both the endless occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, along with the siege on Gaza, to “battle-test” ever-evolving new forms of repression and surveillance. These offensive tools are then marketed and sold to the majority of nations on the planet.

In this context, the current war on Gaza will certainly be good for business. The Israeli army’s social media team is already proudly promoting the first time the Elbit-made Iron Sling, a mortar designed to hit Hamas rocket launching sites, was used in battle. This is a war for a local and global public audience as well as potential foreign buyers looking to build up their arsenal.

Israel is also likely hoping to expand the sale of its high-tech military and intelligence tools. Even Israeli spyware company, NSO Group, mired in scandals for years, is looking to get in on the action, pitching themselves to Washington as an essential part of this new “war on terror”.

In its assault on Gaza, the Israeli army has boasted about using artificial intelligence (AI) in combat to “produce reliable targets quickly and accurately”. For years, Israel has claimed that it is a pioneer in AI-enabled warfare, but there is no evidence that it has reduced civilian casualties while using it. The current death toll of more than 12,000 people in Gaza — the vast majority of them civilians — certainly does not lend credence to this claim.

In the occupied West Bank, AI is used to deepen the complete monitoring and control of Palestinians. It is not a liberating technology in Palestine. It is the complete opposite.

Israel’s pursuit of an ethno-nationalist agenda endangers both Palestinians and critical Jews within Israel and across the world. Israel remains an inspiration for huge swaths of the global right and far right in building a loose global coalition of nations opposed to immigration, multiculturalism, and abiding by human rights norms.

With Israel claiming that it is fighting a war between so-called Western values and “barbarism”, the decimation of Palestinians’ lives and livelihoods in Gaza is a sign of an increasingly erratic and wild Israel. And yet, as it embarks on a dark and bloody “war on terror”, the Western world is supporting it every step of the way.

The full article penned by Antony Loewenstein first appeared on Aljazeera.

