

THE WORLD-HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WAR ON GAZA

ARTICLE

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Israel's ongoing genocidal war on Gaza is a much greater trauma than the 1948 Nakba. The extent of massacre is much larger. There were some 15,000 Palestinians killed in 1948, out of a total population of 1.4 million. They are today between 53,000 (including a common estimate of 10,000 unidentified persons buried under the rubbles) and over 200,000 (applying a ratio of 4 to 1 to get the total number of direct and indirect deaths as suggested in a contribution to the British medical journal *The Lancet* in June 2024) out of a total of 2.3 million Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza. The proportional number of uprooted persons might well end up being the same today as in 1948: some 80% of the Palestinians living on the territory seized by Israel in 1948 were made refugees. Some 90% of Gazans have been forcibly displaced until now, most of whom with no place to return to due to the destruction of close to two thirds of all built structures.

The 1948 Nakba provoked an acute nationalist resentment in the countries of the Arab East, triggering a chain reaction of Arab nationalist coups. The New Nakba unfolding in Gaza is likewise creating a huge resentment on a background of post-2011 regional destabilisation. No "peace process" or "two-state solution" will have any credibility after this ongoing genocide, which is creating a new time bomb of yet higher explosive strength than that of 1948. Resentment will breed violence, including forms of terrorism, as the 1991 and 2003 wars on Iraq provoked in recent history. This tragedy will certainly spill over into Europe in the form of violence and further waves of refugees.

How did we get here? The settler-colonial nature of the Israeli state led inevitably to a far-right drift of Israeli society and polity, boosted by the 1967 occupation of the rest of Palestine between the river and the sea. The Likud party, heir to a tradition labelled as fascist by the labourite wing of the Zionist movement, achieved its first electoral victory in 1977. Since then, Israel has been ruled by the Likud most of the time, with the present cabinet consisting of a coalition of Likud and groups characterised as neo-Nazis by Holocaust historian Daniel Blatman, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (*Haaretz*, 10 February 2023).

This far-right drift had a corollary in dealing with the Palestinians as well as with the Lebanese. Since 2006, Israel has devised a military doctrine, known as the "Dahiya Doctrine",

openly advocating a disproportionate strike at the enemy's civilian environment. This doctrine is in blatant violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). It was implemented a first time in Lebanon in 2006, and then twice against Gaza in 2008/9 and 2014. During his time as prime minister between 2009 and 2021, Benyamin Netanyahu played Hamas against the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority, avowedly to block any prospect of Palestinian state.

However, the present Israeli cabinet is composed of political forces that were all opposed, like Netanyahu himself, to the withdrawal from Gaza ordered in 2005 by then-prime minister Ariel Sharon. The Hamas-led 7 October attack was a fatal miscalculation in that it gave these forces a huge impetus for Gaza's reoccupation and destruction. The ongoing Israeli onslaught has quickly gone way beyond "disproportionate": it openly displayed from the start a genocidal intent under the pretext of "eradicating Hamas". Israel has been intentionally exposing the Gazans to death by either bombing or starvation or deprivation of medical facilities. It is currently completing the ethnic cleansing of North Gaza, while part of the Israeli cabinet (including Likud members) advocates the resumption of settlement building in the Strip.

This war has also been the occasion of a new stage in the US-Israel alliance. During his first term, Donald Trump had already jettisoned the long-standing US official bipartisan stance on Israel-Palestine in granting support to Israeli desiderata. Joe Biden continued Trump on the Middle East instead of reverting to Barack Obama's policy. He even outdid Trump in presiding over the first fully joint US-Israeli war. Since October 2023, Washington has been arming, funding, protecting, and politically endorsing the war on Gaza to the point of rejecting any call for a ceasefire during several months.

The Gaza War will go down in history as an episode of world-historical significance. The post-1945 Atlantic Alliance was founded on the pretence of a "liberal rules-based international order", including IHL and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). This pretence was sidelined during the Cold War. The pretence was renewed at the end of the Cold War, with George H.W. Bush proclaiming a New World Order based on the rule of law. This pledge was soon breached under the pretext of "humanitarian wars" leading to the 1999 Kosovo War, the first post-1990 US breach of international legality.

The subsequent years saw nevertheless the pursuit of a "new liberal cosmopolitanism" with the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the adoption of the "Responsibility to Protect" resolution by the UN General Assembly, approved by the UN Security Council. This renewed liberal pretence was discarded again by Washington after the 11 September 2001 attacks, this time in the name of the "war on terror".

The war on Gaza is the first televised genocidal war waged by an industrially advanced state since 1945, a state that is part of the Western geopolitical alliance at that. It has also been a major opportunity for further banalisation of the far right through the endorsement of the present Israeli government by Western liberal forces that allowed the European and US antisemitic far-right to join them in the claim of opposing "antisemitism" – a thin veil for Islamophobia.



This and the double standard blatantly applied by Western powers to the parallel invasions of Ukraine and Gaza have led to a total loss of credibility of their “liberal rules-based international order”. We are witnessing the final collapse of the attempt to revive this pretence: the law of the jungle reigns supreme.