

# Violence Against “Human Animals”: Images from the Israel-Hamas War

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*With the body count rising in this latest, and particularly bloody Israel-Hamas War, the narrative of Israel the wounded, Israel the desperate, has now been annexed to Israel the just warrior State, fighting darkness and primaeval stone age barbarism.*

This has taken two forms. The first is the way the victims of the Hamas attacks inside Israeli territory have been elevated, ennobled, sanctified. The second is the manner with which the Hamas killings have been rendered exceptionally ghoulish, visceral, blood curdling.

Regarding the former, Israeli suffering has been personalised, individualised, and given the spit and polish of reverence. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, for instance, [stated](#) his shock at the “depravity of Hamas” while feeling a jolt of inspiration from the Israeli “grandfather, who drove over an hour to a kibbutz under siege, armed with only a pistol, and rescued his kids and grandkids; the mother who died shielding her teenage son with her body, giving her life to save his, giving him life for a second time; the volunteer security teams on the kibbutzes [sic], who swiftly rallied to defend their friends and neighbors, despite being heavily outnumbered.”

In contrast, the Palestinians die in sheer anonymity by the thousands, untroubling statistical notations. The names of whole families who perish in the aftermath of machine inflicted slaughter are not known, not published, and not sought. Reduced to mere numbers, the human element is leached out.

That absence of humanity brings us to the second point: reiterating, portraying, and marking the violence of the Hamas militants as singular and spectacular. While international debates rage on the issue of holding back media distribution of graphic content, notably showing massacres and atrocities, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has decided to throw all caution to the wind.

On October 12, his office released photos of slain infants, sharing them on the official Twitter ('X') account to roughly 1.2 million followers. A PMO spokesperson [explained](#) the rationale for doing so to *The Times of Israel*: "So that the world will see just a fraction of the horrors that Hamas carried out." The Israeli Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in [another post](#) accompanied by a "graphic content warning," featured a bloodied victim with a preamble on Hamas's achievements: "More than 1,300 Israeli civilians slaughtered. Women and girls raped. People burned alive. Young kids kidnapped. Babies tortured and murdered. Parents executed in front of their young children."

Such distributive efforts depicted Hamas, and it follows, Palestinians, as unalloyed in their savagery, untutored to the finer points of civilised life. Blinken [affirmed](#) the point by stating that such "difficult-to-see images of babies murdered and burned by the monsters of Hamas" served to show that these people were "not human. Hamas is ISIS." As for US President Joe Biden: "I never really thought that I would see, have confirmed pictures of terrorists beheading children."

In contrast, an Israeli fighter jet responsible for demolishing a building complex in Gaza resulting in the deaths of whole families is merely a hygienic, industrial consequence of war. In terms of an unstated moral calculus here, industrial-military murder proves less affronting. Throw in the justification of self-defence and such terms as "collateral damage" closes the matter. File it and forget it.

With humans reduced to paper jottings and innocuous markings, it becomes easy for a state, as Israel has done, to simply demand the removal of 1 million individuals from their already precarious dwellings in an imprisoned enclave should they wish to live. In his [address to the nation](#) on October 7, Netanyahu warned those living in Gaza to, "Leave now because we will operate forcefully everywhere."

Such individuals are moveable stock. It matters not that they may have no choice in moving, nor the means, nor the inclination. Arrogating a power to itself, Israel had annulled the autonomy of an entire population, declaring that those who remain are no better than terrorists who deserve speedy liquidation.

The order to evacuate dovetails with sentiments from politicians who see this as a prelude for a more conclusive expulsion, inspired by the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by the embryonic Israeli state in 1948 that came to be known as the Nakba. Forget the fact that the roots of the Hamas attacks, as with previous wars between Israelis and Palestinians, have been the bitter harvests of those forced, vicious expulsions.

Ariel Kallner, a Knesset member of Netanyahu's Likud Party, could [barely conceal](#) his ecstasy at the retributive violence to follow in a social media post: "Right now, one goal: Nakba! A Nakba that will overshadow the Nakba of 48. Nakba in Gaza and Nakba to anyone who dares to join!" It was "time," affirmed Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, "to be cruel" begging the question when Israel's policy towards Gaza and Palestinians more broadly had been anything other than cruel.

The corollary of such power and treatment is the imposition of a wholesale siege that is deemed that much easier because the targets are not seen as humans. In [the words of](#) the Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant,

"There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting

human animals, and we act accordingly.”

In the [mild, though rebuking language](#) of the International Committee of the Red Cross,

“The instructions issued by the Israeli authorities for the population of Gaza City to immediately leave their homes, coupled with the complete siege explicitly denying them food, water, and electricity, are not compatible with international humanitarian law.”

To execute what will be an operation of sheer pulverisation, euphemised as a mission to “degrade” and “dismantle” terrorist infrastructure, the Israeli Defence Force has now massed on the border with Gaza and is already making what are stated as “incursions”. Journalists from a whole stable of Western news outlets are reporting such this state of affairs as cathartic. There is even a charging frisson, a sense of masochistic delight at the handiwork that awaits the fourth most powerful military in the world.

To that end, the coverage is almost cartoonish: the savage Indians circling the caravans have struck the innocent settlers, and now must be punished with the full modern might of the “settling” power that really wants peace, but whose hand was forced. But the facts remain that the “people’s army,” as the IDF is often called, was hoodwinked, its intelligence community caught unawares. The murderous rage now following is only informed by vengeance born from impotence. The diplomatic corps has gone into hibernation, but in time, political realities will have to be acknowledged, though this is likely to be done over a mountain range of corpses.

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*Featured image: Some of the wounded at al-Shifa hospital (Gaza Health Ministry)*

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