

The War on Gaza: How the West Is Losing. Accelerating the Transition to a Multipolar Global Order?

Part II. Upholding the Human Right to Resist Occupation

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Read Part I:



[The War on Gaza: Might vs. Right, and the Insanity of Western Power](#)

By [Amir Nour](#), December 01, 2023

Contextualising a Protracted Conflict: Self-Determination or Self-Defense?

What is of a paramount importance to assert at the outset is that the ongoing assault on Gaza did not start when Hamas militants launched the "Al-Aqsa Flood" military operation on 7 October. In this respect, an epic parallel information warfare is raging, pitting Israel's backers in the West against the Palestinians and their supporters across the world. To see through this battle of narratives and help navigate through its treacherous waters, history is critically important and matters more than any other consideration.

That's why United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, was perfectly right when on 24 October 2023 he stated^[1] before a special session of the Security Council convened to examine the situation in the Middle East that:

“It is important to also recognize the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum. The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation. They have seen their land steadily devoured by settlements and plagued by violence; their economy stifled; their people displaced and their homes demolished. Their hopes for a political solution to their plight have been vanishing”.

He uttered these undeniable facts after warning that:

“the situation in the Middle East is growing more dire by the hour. The war in Gaza is raging and risks spiralling throughout the region. Divisions are splintering societies. Tensions threaten to boil over. At a crucial moment like this, it is vital to be clear on principles – starting with the fundamental principle of respecting and protecting civilians”. He also “condemned unequivocally the horrifying and unprecedented 7 October acts of terror by Hamas in Israel. Nothing can justify the deliberate killing, injuring and kidnapping of civilians – or the launching of rockets against civilian targets. All hostages must be treated humanely and released immediately and without conditions”.

Unsurprisingly though, the Israeli government was quick to condemn this statement in the strongest terms, with Foreign Minister Eli Cohen disrespectfully lashing out at him publicly, saying:

“Mr Secretary General, in what world do you live? Definitely, this is not our world”,

while his Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, Gilad Erdan, demanded the Secretary General’s resignation for “*ostensibly rationalizing terrorism and spreading pure blood libel*”, hence losing “*all morality and impartiality*”, and the Israeli media, jumping on the bandwagon, affirming that Mr. Guterres “*has demonstrated a stunning degree of moral bankruptcy*”.

Such an unprecedented public fury directed towards a serving U.N. Chief suggests that he, perhaps unwillingly, hit a sensitive nerve within Israel’s establishment and most probably also among their staunch defenders in the West, when questioning their preferred narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which they all fear to be a mortal threat to the continued existence of Israel as a “Jewish state”.

Upholding the Human Right to Resist Occupation

In an eye-opening opinion[2], Professor Ilan Pappé, a renowned Jewish historian and political scientist, provided a deep explanation for what prompted this wave of scathing Israeli criticism. He says that Israel wants to erase context and history in the war on Gaza because the contextualisation and historicisation of the October 7 attack by Hamas combatants “*aid Israel and governments in the West in pursuing policies they shunned in the past due to either ethical, tactical, or strategic considerations*” and because this “*attack is used by Israel as a pretext to pursue genocidal policies in the Gaza Strip. It is also a pretext for the United States to try and reassert its presence in the Middle East. And it is a pretext for some European countries to violate and limit democratic freedoms in the name of a new ‘war on terror’*”. The wider historical context, he added, goes back to the mid-19th century, when evangelical Christianity in the West turned the idea of the “return of the Jews” into a religious millennial imperative and advocated the establishment of a Jewish state in

Palestine as part of the steps that would lead to the resurrection of the dead, the return of the Messiah, and the end of time.

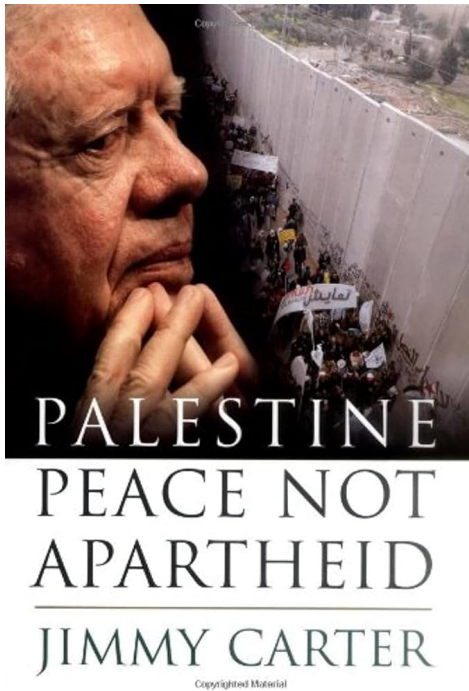
Hence, that theology became policy toward the end of the 19th century and in the years leading up to World War I, for two main reasons:

“First, it worked in the interest of those in Britain wishing to dismantle the Ottoman Empire and incorporate parts of it into the British Empire. Second, it resonated with those within the British aristocracy, both Jews and Christians, who became enchanted with the idea of Zionism as a panacea for the problem of anti-Semitism in Central and Eastern Europe, which had produced an unwelcome wave of Jewish immigration to Britain”; and when these two interests fused, “they propelled the British government to issue the famous – or infamous – Balfour Declaration in 1917”.

From that time on, Jewish thinkers and activists who redefined Judaism as nationalism hoped this definition would protect Jewish communities from existential danger in Europe by homing in on Palestine as the desired space for “rebirth of the Jewish nation”. In the process, *“the cultural and intellectual Zionist project transformed into a settler colonial one – which aimed at Judaizing historical Palestine, disregarding the fact that it was inhabited by an indigenous population”*.

Prof. Pappé then went on to lay out additional key historical context relevant to the present situation, consisting: the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine that included the forceful expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians into the Gaza Strip from villages on whose ruins some of the Israeli settlements attacked on October 7 were built; the expulsion of 300,000 Palestinians during and in the aftermath of the 1967 war and more than 600,000 from the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip ever since; the Israeli persistent collective punishment inflicted by the occupational forces on the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, exposing them to constant harassment by Israeli settlers and security forces and imprisoning hundreds of thousands of them, over the past 50 years; the increasingly aggressive Israeli policies towards Muslim and Christian holy places in Jerusalem; the 16-year old siege on Gaza where almost half the population are children; and the encirclement of the Gaza Strip by barbed wire and its disconnection from the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords. Pr Pappé draws the logical conclusion that

“ Hamas, in many ways, was the only Palestinian group that promised to avenge or respond to these policies”.



Also, as early as 2006 – just a few days before the first legislative elections were held in the Palestinian territories to elect the second Palestinian Legislative Council – following the publication of his book *“Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid”*[3], former President Jimmy Carter (in office from 1977 to 1981) declared that:

“What is being done to the Palestinians now is horrendous in their own territory by the occupying power which is Israel. They have taken away all the basic human rights of the Palestinians, as was done in South Africa against the blacks and I make it very plain in this book that the Apartheid is not based on racism as it was in South Africa but it is based on the desire of a minority of Israelis to acquire land that belongs to the Palestinians and to retain that land, they need to exclude the Palestinians from their own property and subjugate them so they can’t arise and demonstrate their disapproval of being robbed of their own property. That is what is happening in the West Bank and the people in this country, in America, never know about this, they never discuss this, there is no debate about it, there is no criticism of Israel in this country. The basic cause of the conflict is a sustained occupation of other people’s land by the Israelis and this is a direct violation of the United Nations resolutions, it’s a direct violation of the International Quartet’s Road Map. It is a direct violation of the commitments that leaders of Israel have made in the past at Camp David when I was President and in Oslo, promising that Israel will withdraw from occupied territories. They have failed to do so”.

President Carter said that since the book was published, he had been branded an anti-Semite and a bigot.

Another Israeli writer and columnist who has for more than four decades recognised the dire plight of the Palestinian people and condemned Israeli occupation is Gideon Levy. In his book *“The Punishment of Gaza”*[4] published in the aftermath of the first war on Gaza (27 December 2008-18 January 2009) he asserted that Israel’s 2009 invasion of Gaza was an act of aggression that killed over a thousand Palestinians and devastated the infrastructure of an already impoverished enclave. Indeed, from 2005 – the year of the so-called Gaza’s “liberation” – through to 2009, Levy tracks the development of Israel policy, which has

abandoned the pretence of diplomacy in favour of raw military power, the ultimate aim of which being to deny Palestinians any chance of forming their own independent state. Punished by Israel and the Quartet of international powers for the democratic election of Hamas, Gaza has been transformed into the world's largest open-air prison. From Gazan families struggling to cope with the random violence of Israel's blockade and its targeted assassinations, to the machinations of legal experts and the continued connivance of the international community, every aspect of that tragedy is eloquently recorded and forensically analysed.

Speaking at the National Press Club in Washington D.C., in March 2018, Levy indicated that across the mainstream Israeli political spectrum, there is no challenge to the occupation of Palestinian land. Occupation is off the table in Israel, he said, and nobody talks about it. He sees three sets of deep-rooted values as the core of Israeli society, which explain everything. The first is: *"We are the chosen people"*. The second is: *"We are the victims – not only the biggest victims, but the only victims around (...) it enabled us to do whatever we want and nobody is going to tell us what to do because we are the only victims"*. And the third is: *"The Palestinians are not equal human beings like us"*. As a result of these entrenched attitudes, *"the military occupation in the occupied territories is today one of the most brutal, cruel tyrannies on earth"* and *"there was never an Israeli statesman who really meant to put an end to the occupation – none of them"*. He concluded by saying: *"the basis of Zionism is that there is one people which is privileged over the other. That's the core. This cannot go on. If it goes on, it has only one name. Here [The United States] we call it apartheid"*[5].

With respect to apartheid precisely, it is worth citing what Benjamin Pogrund had to say in an opinion published just a month before the war on Gaza[6]. In Israel, he said,

"I am now witnessing the apartheid with which I grew up in South Africa. The Israeli government's fascist, racist power-grab is the gift Israel's enemies have long awaited. We deny Palestinians any hope of freedom and normal lives. We believe our own propaganda that a few million people will meekly accept perpetual inferiority and oppression. The government is driving Israel deeper and deeper into inhuman, cruel behaviour beyond any defence. I've lived through it before: grabbing power, fascism and racism, destroying democracy. Israel is going where South Africa was 75 years ago. He confessed that he did not want to write that article, "It was torn out of me, addressed to Israelis because the right-wing government is taking the country into institutionalised discrimination and racism. This is apartheid".

Fulfilling the Divine Duty to Wipe Out the Amalekites

In his revelatory book[7], David Livingstone Smith looked at why we dehumanize each other, with stunning examples from world history as well as today's headlines. "Brute", "Cockroach", "Lice", "Vermin", "Dog", "Beast", he writes, are among other monikers constantly in use to refer to other humans – for political, religious, ethnic, or sexist reasons. He pointed out that human beings have a tendency to regard members of their own kind as less than human. This tendency has made atrocities like the Holocaust, the genocide in Rwanda, and the slave trade possible, and yet we still find it in phenomena such as xenophobia, military propaganda, and racism. The author draws on a rich mix of history, psychology, biology, anthropology and philosophy to document the pervasiveness of dehumanization, describes its forms, and explains why we so often resort to it.

Likewise, citing as an epigraph the well-known quote by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche “*Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster*”, the Chicago-based Family Institute at Northeastern University rightfully observed that the atrocities throughout history – genocides, mass murders, incarcerations of large groups of people – have only been possible through the dehumanization of its victims, the gradual and widespread adoption of the view that those people are less than human. Words (like images) are an essential tool in the dehumanization process of those who are ethnically or racially different. When people are labelled monsters, it becomes easy over time to think of them as inhuman, as not like us. In the same vein, once we perceive others as inhuman, we create an opening that allows us to circumvent our hard-wired social feeling (the foundation of morality) that impedes us from causing them harm. It’s this loophole that enabled the Nazis to perpetrate the Holocaust, that made the horrors of slavery possible for hundreds of years; it’s the same loophole underlying today’s persecution of the Muslim Rohingya by the Buddhist majority in Myanmar.

For her part, as a historian who studies colonial pasts, University of Victoria historian Elizabeth Vibert argues[8] that the dismissal of Palestinians as “barbaric” or somehow “less human” is rooted in a long history of colonising narratives. Referring to renowned Palestinian-American literary scholar Edward Said’s 1978 classic book “*Orientalism*” – in which he explained how British colonisers wielded the “power to narrate” – she recalled that already by the 18th century, the binary of East versus West or “us” versus “them” had grown into a vast archive of western-produced “knowledge”, the relationship being cemented in the West as “superior” versus “inferior”, “civilized” versus “uncivilized”, “rational” versus “depraved” in all arenas of life: politics, culture, religion.

Israelis have long adopted such a discourse. It only got worse in the aftermath of Al-Aqsa Operation, revolving around the same recurring themes, namely: the 7 October attack is a terrorist attack against innocent civilians; was unprovoked; is likened to 9/11 attacks; is compared to the Russian aggression against Ukraine and portraying both as part of the conflict between the “forces of good” represented by the US and other democratic Western countries and the “forces of evil” represented by the likes of Russia, China, Iran and Hezbollah; is depicted as a war between the Democratic state of Israel and Hamas (not all Palestinians), which is an extremist Islamic group resembling or even worse than ISIS or Al-Qaeda; the Gaza Strip is no longer occupied since 2005. All of the above means that justice and legality are on the side of Israel, which therefore deserves empathy and solidarity and has the full right to retaliate, in the name of self-defence[9].

From that point onwards – shocked by the enormity of its most disastrous military and intelligence failure in decades if not in its entire history since 1948 and its ensuing lasting effect on the army’s morale and the population’s psyche – a process of extreme demonisation of Hamas and dehumanisation of the Palestinians in general, with explicit statements of intent by leaders in the Israeli government and military, started to build up. The obvious objective of this being to obtain an internally and internationally accepted justification for what was soon to become a spiral of unspeakable acts of barbaric vengeance and large-scale war crimes and crimes against humanity in the besieged enclave of Gaza, coupled with increased repression and purging rooted in ethnonationalist settler colonial ideology in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Image: US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin (L) and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant meet in Brussels on June 15, 2023. (Photo Credit Elad Malcha/Defense Ministry)



When Israel's defence minister Yoav Gallant ordered a complete siege of the Gaza Strip with "no electricity, no food, no fuel", he said:

"We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly".

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told German Chancellor Olaf Scholz that

" Hamas are the new Nazis...and just as the world united to defeat the Nazis...the world has to stand united behind Israel to defeat Hamas".

Commenting these statements, Natasha Roth-Rowland said that the rhetorical value of

"casting your enemies as Nazis – which the Israeli right and its supporters frequently do when discussing Palestinians writ large – is the way it suggests, implicitly or explicitly, that there is only one logical, even moral, course of action: the complete elimination of the Nazi-designates and anyone deemed to be affiliated with them. In addition, Nazi-like imagery has also been making the rounds among hasbarists on social media; in one drawing that could have come straight out of *Der Stürmer*, an IDF boot is pictured about to step on a cockroach with the head of a Hamas fighter". If the legacy of the Holocaust is interpreted to present Israel with carte blanche to cage, bomb, starve, dehydrate, and otherwise exert necropolitical power over the 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza – almost half of them children – then "never again" does not merely ring hollow. It becomes a call for unchecked violence, a war cry in an eliminationist campaign of retaliation"[10].

To be sure, in this textbook of genocidal rhetoric and policies against the defenceless Palestinian population, two statements stand out as an unbelievable public call for an outright genocide – which have yet to be publicly condemned by Western centres of power, let alone be abhorred and indicted through the concerned international institutions, mainly the International Criminal Court. Firstly, when far-right Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage minister Amichai Eliyahu said in a radio interview that dropping a nuclear bomb on the Gaza Strip is "*an option*". And secondly, when in his press briefing on 27 October, Netanyahu cited a biblical reference to "*Amalek*" in the Old Testament to justify killing Palestinians. He said the troops that he has met in the field are determined to make Hamas pay for its actions on October 7; They are "*determined to eradicate this evil from the world, for our existence and, I add, for all of humanity*" before declaring: "*You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible. And we do remember*"[11]. The reference to "eternal enmity" between the Amalekites and the Jewish people is found in the Book of Exodus (17:8-16): "*Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation*"[12] and in 1 Samuel (15:1-35): "*Samuel said to Saul, I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the Lord. This is what the Lord Almighty*

says: *'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'*[13]

Jeffrey Goldberg reminds us that tradition holds that the Amalekites are the undying enemy of the Jews, and that the rabbis teach that successive generations of Jews have been forced to confront the Amalekites: Nebuchadnezzar, the Crusaders, Torquemada, Hitler and Stalin are all manifestations of Amalek's malevolent spirit.[14] For his part, rabbi Jill Jacobs – the head of *T'ruah*, a rabbinical human rights organization – said that it remains common for Israeli extremists to view Palestinians as modern-day Amalekites. In 1980, rabbi Israel Hess wrote an article that used the story of Amalek to justify wiping out Palestinians. Its title has been translated as *"Genocide: A Commandment of the Torah,"* as well as *"The Mitzvah of Genocide in the Torah"*. [15]

Lastly, Donald Wagner thinks that the "annihilate Amalek" theme, invokes support from the divine in this modern crusade to exterminate the Amalekites, interpreted today as every Palestinian. He explained that Netanyahu's base of political support among militant settlers finds inspiration from these violent biblical texts. Another base of Netanyahu's support is the international Christian Zionist movement. Wagner informs that shortly after the 7 October attacks, a letter of support for Israel's war on Gaza was issued by 60 conservative evangelical leaders in the United States, including two former presidents of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission – Russell Moore, now editor of Christianity Today, and Richard Land. The letter was delivered to the White House and every Congressional office on Capitol Hill, lending support for the Israeli aggression on Gaza.[16]

Israeli politicians have helped drive their "Holocaustisation" narrative, and the sentiment that the Palestinians are collectively responsible for the actions of Hamas has been echoed far beyond Israel's borders, more so in the U.S. In fact, Deborah Lipstadt, President Biden's antisemitism envoy, for example, tweeted the day after the attack that it was the most lethal assault against Jews since the Holocaust. Not long after, in a *60 Minutes* interview made less than a week after Hamas' attack on southern Israel, President Joe Biden himself said that the Palestinian movement had *"engaged in barbarism that is as consequential as the Holocaust"*. For his part, Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated[17] during a live-streamed press conference in Tel Aviv on 12 October:

"I come before you not only as the United States secretary of state but also as a Jew". My "grandfather, Maurice Blinken, fled pogroms in Russia. My stepfather, Samuel Pisas, survived concentration camps – Auschwitz, Dachau, Majdanek", he added as he referenced both eastern European persecution and the Holocaust.

He pointed out that he viewed the destruction of the southern Jewish communities from that lens. As for U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham, he went as far as calling for the wholesale destruction of Gaza, saying:

"We are in a religious war here. I'm with Israel. Do whatever the hell you have to do to defend yourself. Level the place"[18].

It is a truism nowadays to say that for Western spheres of power and decision-makers, anti-Zionism is a dangerous and costly accusation at all levels. As a result, "Anti, anti-Zionism"

has become synonymous with antisemitism.”[19]

The support for the Israeli discourse is so strong and pervasive that in a 2002 interview, Shulamit Aloni, a former Israeli government minister was asked: *“Often when there is dissent expressed in the United States against policies of the Israeli government, people here are called antisemitic. What is your response to that as an Israeli Jew?”*

Aloni replied:

“Well, it’s a trick, we always use it. When from Europe somebody is criticising Israel, then we bring up the Holocaust. When in this country [the US] people are criticising Israel, then they are antisemitic”. She explained that there was an “Israel, my country right or wrong” attitude and “they’re not ready to hear criticism” and that antisemitism, the Holocaust and “the suffering of the Jewish people” were used to “justify everything we do to the Palestinians”. [20]

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Notes

[1] <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-10-24/secretary-generals-remarks-the-security-council-the-middle-east-delivered>, 24 October 2023. It is worth pointing out that this statement was delivered on the very same day the international community was celebrating the “United Nations Day”, marking 78 years since the UN Charter entered into force. The Charter reflects the UN member states’ shared commitment to advance peace, sustainable development and human rights.

[2] Ilan Pappé, “Why Israel wants to erase context and history in the war on Gaza”, Aljazeera, 5 November, 2023.

[3] Jimmy Carter, “Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid”, Simon & Schuster, November 2006.

[4] Gideon Levy, “The Punishment of Gaza”, Verso Books, Brooklyn, May 2010.

[5] Gideon Levy, “The Zionist Tango: Step Left, Step Right”. Read and watch: <https://www.wrmea.org/2018-may/the-zionist-tango-step-left-step-right.html>

[6] Benjamin Pogrund, “For Decades, I Defended Israel From Claims of Apartheid. I No Longer Can”, news24, 9 June 2023. Benjamin Pogrund, born in Cape Town, was deputy editor of the Rand Daily Mail when it was closed in 1985. He moved to Jerusalem in Israel to start a dialogue centre. South Africa awarded him the Order of Ikhamanga Silver for services to journalism and academia during apartheid.

[7] David Livingstone Smith, “Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others”, St. Martin’s Press, March 2011.

- [8] Elizabeth Vibert, “How colonialist depictions of Palestinians feed western ideas of eastern ‘barbarism’”, The Conversation, 16 November 2023.
- [9] Dina Shehata, “Western media and public opinion and Israel’s war on Gaza”, 25 October 2023.
- [10] Natasha Roth-Rowland, “When ‘Never Again’ Becomes a War Cry”, 28 October 2023.
- [11] Noah Lanard, “The Dangerous History Behind Netanyahu’s Amalek Rhetoric”, 3 November 2023.
- [12] Bible Gateway, “The Amalekites Defeated”.
- [13] Bible Gateway, “The Lord Rejects Saul as King”.
- [14] Jeffrey Goldberg, “Israel’s Fears, Amalek’s Arsenal”, The New York Times, 19 May 2009.
- [15] Noah Lanard, op cit.
- [16] Donald Wagner, “Netanyahu abuses Bible to impress US evangelicals”, The Electronic Intifada, 7 November 2023.
- [17] Tovah Lazaroff , “I come before you as a Jew,’ Blinken tells Israel after Hamas attack” Jerusalem Post, 12 October 2023.
- [18] Chris McGreal, “The language being used to describe Palestinians is genocidal”, 16 October 2023.
- [19] Stephen F. Eisenman, “When Anti, Anti-Zionism Becomes Anti-Semitism”, 17 November, 2023.
- [20] Steve Cooke, “Is antisemitism a trick? A closer look at that Shulamit Aloni meme”, 6 June 2019.

Featured image: Entire neighborhoods have been leveled in the Israeli bombing campaigns. (Photo: Mahmoud Ajjour, Palestine Chronicle)

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