

Opinion

We're anti-Zionist Jews and we see genocide unfolding in Gaza

Friday 20 October 2023, by [BROTSKY Ellen](#), [KOREN Ariel](#) (Date first published: 18 October 2023).

As Jews, we condemn what Israel is doing in Gaza. Any mass slaughter will not just be on Israel's hands, but on the hands of America

It is now impossible for US politicians to ignore the slaughter in Gaza: more than [3,500 Palestinians](#) have been killed in the 12-day barrage, including the 500 reportedly killed Tuesday at Al-Ahli Arabi Baptist hospital. Some 50 entire families have been [wiped out](#) — every living relative, including children and babies, gone. And Israel has [issued](#) a directive to those remaining that amounts to an ultimatum: leave northern Gaza, all 1.1 million of you, “for your own safety” — in other words, evacuate or risk death in the impending blitz and ground invasion.

The United Nations [says](#) such a mass evacuation is “impossible” and has potentially “devastating humanitarian consequences,” [pleading](#) with Israel to rescind the order. A UN special rapporteur was clear, calling the order “a crime against humanity and a blatant violation of international humanitarian law.”

We call it something else: unfolding genocide.

There is no other word to describe the pageantry of death embraced by Israel's politicians. Under [international law](#), genocide requires two things: an “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group,” and then the attempted destruction of that group. Without intent, these actions amount to ethnic cleansing. If deliberate, they are considered genocide.

Israel seems to be laying the groundwork for destroying Gaza and its residents: President Isaac Herzog on Friday [said](#) Gazans are not innocent civilians: “It is an entire nation out there that is responsible. It's not true this rhetoric about civilians not aware, not involved. It's absolutely not true.” This contradicts international law that [prohibits collective punishment](#) and the [targeting of civilians](#), both of which amount to war crimes. It also suggests that Israel will show no restraint in its attacks on Gaza.

Forced displacement, which Israel has begun, is an established precursor to extermination — the last step, in fact, in the [10 stages of genocide](#) cited internationally by genocide scholars and institutions, including by Holocaust museums [across the world](#). These steps, which can occur simultaneously, include “dehumanization,” acts that deprive groups of water and food, and the false labeling of military operations as “counter-terrorism.”

We are there. Israeli officials are invoking terrorism to justify their indiscriminate bombing campaign, while the Israeli defense minister said that they are fighting “[human animals](#)” — dehumanising language that is always used in the lead-up to genocide. And an unnamed Israeli

defense official was [quoted](#) as saying: “Gaza will eventually turn into a city of tents. There will be no buildings.”

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has [repeated his promise](#) that the mass death inflicted thus far is “only the beginning.” The Gaza strip is under “complete siege,” the defense minister [said](#), and cut off from electricity, fuel, food and water. A Knesset member openly called for a second Nakba, referring to the mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948. Again, to deliberately create another Nakba would amount to genocide in Gaza.

The rhetoric has made it down to the rank-and-file, too: an Israeli soldier [said](#) on national television that this war is not just with Hamas, but “with all the civilians.” This indiscriminate erasure of Palestinians in Gaza would, without doubt, be genocide — as an Israeli genocide scholar has himself [stated](#). The precursors to genocide are actively unfolding before our eyes.

As Jews, we wholly condemn this. We condemn our representatives’ unconditional support for Israeli policy, which has facilitated a decades-long occupation recognized by the majority of the world as a violation of international law. We condemn any action that will involve our people in another genocide — whether as perpetrators or oppressed.

We call on our lawmakers to do the same. Funding a potential genocide in our name is not an antidote to antisemitism: they are betraying the Jews they claim to support.

More than 1,400 Israelis have been killed last week in brutal surprise attacks by Hamas — in addition to 150 held hostage. This is a terrible, devastating toll, and we mourn the taking of civilian life without reservation. Preventing further loss of life — including of the hostages — is an urgent priority.

We also reject the hyperfixation on Hamas that has swallowed American politics, and understand this recent attack as the result of decades-long Israeli crimes and besiegement. This fact has been affirmed by Israeli [opposition leaders](#), [veterans groups](#), and [newspapers](#).

We ask our Jewish community: where is the mourning and grief on the days when the civilian lives lost are Palestinian? When the children are seized by Israeli soldiers?

Between 2000 and the recent wave of violence, more than 10,600 Palestinians were killed by Israelis, [according to human rights group B’Tselem](#), compared to 1,329 Israelis by Palestinians — an eight-fold difference.

The decades between 1948 and 2000 are filled with [tens of thousands](#) more dead — largely Palestinians. The story of this conflict, the numbers clearly show, has been the story of overwhelming Palestinian death and displacement.

The vast majority of American politicians, now and then, have acquiesced.

Over the last week, President Joseph R Biden has said repeatedly that the US commitment to Israel is steadfast — [“resolute and unwavering”](#) — as 1,000 bombs are dropped each day. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken [deleted](#) statements, twice, calling for a ceasefire. As Biden visits Israel, it is critical that he immediately call for an end to hostilities. If he fails to use the enormous leverage he has to save lives in Gaza, those deaths will be partly his responsibility.

A US special envoy [said](#) that “no one has the right to tell Israel how to defend itself.” The State Department, in fact, has [warned](#) diplomats to stay away from the phrases “de-escalation/ceasefire,” “end to violence/bloodshed,” and “restoring calm.”

Most of our congressional representatives — of both parties — are no better: leading Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said this was a “religious war” and [called](#) on Israel to “level the place” when speaking of Gaza.

Representative Nancy Pelosi, our California congresswoman, has [affirmed](#) that the United States stands “unwaveringly” by Israel as it conducts its defense — which is why seven of us [chained ourselves to her San Francisco offices](#) on Friday as more than 200 anti-Zionist Jews rallied, calling for an end to US military aid to Israel.

The few who have dissented are sidelined: Representative Rashida Tlaib, for instance, lamented losses on both sides but called for an end to occupation and apartheid; House Republicans are [seeking to censure](#) her. Representative Ilhan Omar also mourned both Israeli and Palestinian losses but was [lambasted](#) for daring to question “unconditional weapons sales and military aid to Israel.”

The White House [labeled](#) any legislators who push for restraint “disgraceful” and “repugnant.”

The most basic humanitarian impulse — to lay down arms — is now unthinkable in American politics. Questioning Israel’s right to “self-defense” is, in fact, equated with antisemitism.

Yet we see plainly the reality of that so-called defense: a terror campaign and developing plans for genocide from above. With Western support, Israel is plunging headfirst into slaughter.

And while the initial incursion by Hamas brought immediate condemnation from politicians across the country, the recent bombing has brought no reckoning whatsoever. There has been almost no reflection on the history that birthed Hamas, barricaded Gaza and created the occupation.

Israel has essentially told Gazans to get out or die, a choice between expulsion and extermination, between ethnic cleansing and genocide — and while doing so has [obliterated exit routes](#) and [fired on escaping convoys](#), leaving Gazans trapped.

Instead of calling for an immediate halt to violence, American lawmakers have lit up our capitol buildings in blue and white and said they “stand with Israel.” They have the power to shift the calculus and compel Israel — the biggest beneficiary of US military aid — to follow international law, yet they choose not to.

Enough. We call on lawmakers to muster the courage to stop genocide from occurring in our name. They can support Israeli victims without enabling mass slaughter and forced displacement, actions that will claim thousands and thousands of lives.

Any subsequent deaths will be blood not only on Israel’s hands, but on Americans’ — particularly those who had the chance to urge international norms and rebuke occupation, but who chose to stand by instead.

Ellen Brotsky and Ariel Koren

P.S.

• The Guardian. Wed 18 Oct 2023 23.04 :

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/18/israel-gaza-hamas-palestinians>

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