

How the unjustifiable war in Gaza is justified

Debunking propaganda in the Western media



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"Ramadan is the best time to kill them. They're weak and tired," said Almog Cohen, a member of the Israeli Knesset, urging Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to attack Rafah and massacre the Palestinian people. This critical statement, which shows the extent of dehumanisation, has been conspicuously absent from Western media coverage. Due to the extensive control exerted by the Zionist lobbies within the Western media, they lean towards omitting information regarding the Israelis' inhumane school of thought, and engage in corroding the image of Palestinians. This critical statement is among the numerous

they live in an open air prison—and the decades-long misery that the Palestinians have been living through. Establishing pre-attack legitimacy, the second component of propaganda is essentially the process of justifying the overt and unjustifiable Israeli aggression, in a twisted way of making the attacks "acceptable" to the general public. Take for example, BBC which released information alleging that hospitals were being utilised as Hamas tunnels, the day before a hospital in Gaza was bombed.

The third phase of propaganda served to dehumanise the victims. The Western media has, for the most part,

historic pace with which Palestinians have been murdered, the conflict of Israel-Palestine is somehow still up for debate, due to the normalisation of genocide itself.

Protecting the perpetrators, the fourth stage of the propaganda can be witnessed in the Western media's coverage of Israeli and Palestinian lives lost in the conflict. Israelis are described as "killed," while Palestinians are said to have "died." Take for example, a headline in *The New York Times*: "How Gaza Civilians Have Fared After Israel Has Asked Them to Flee." The article itself, published on March 19, 2024, delved into how nearly 2 million Palestinians are facing "forced starvation" as a direct consequence of the Israeli government's actions. It is, therefore, diluted at best and dishonest at worst, to suggest that people in Gaza are "faring." The phrase, Israel "asked" them to "flee," almost criminally underplays the ground reality. It seems as though the Israeli Army are nicely asking Palestinians to evacuate, when the reality is that they are killing them



Displaced Palestinian children gather to receive food at a government school in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on February 19, 2024.

PHOTO: AFP

The war tactic of starvation in Gaza



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The term "Holodomor" refers to the famine-induced mass killings of millions of Ukrainians under the Soviet regime, from 1932-1933. Only in 2006, the Holodomor was recognised by the European Parliament as the man-made process of "starvation as a manifestation of genocidal action."

As Muslims around the world prepare for Eid, the world is currently witnessing another episode of Holodomor unfolding in the Occupied Gaza Strip. The Palestinians, one of the most vulnerable populations in the history of modern warfare, are on the brink of a man-made famine. Starvation, commonly interpreted as a method of warfare, can cripple a population from its core, sometimes arguably more efficiently than any other modern weaponry with prolonged sufferings associated as a result of armed conflict. By now, the world is acquainted with Israel's devastating military operation and the resulting extensive civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructures, and starvation of an overwhelming population of over 2.2 million Gazans. Truth be told, starvation has been the fate of every two out of three Gazans for the past 17 years of partial blockade on humanitarian aid by Israel and Egypt.

On January 26, 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), through a provisional order, also acknowledged "the extent of the human tragedy that is unfolding in the region." The court observed that the military operation conducted by Israel has created an acute food and water crisis for the remaining few Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Other than Article II (c) of the 1948 Genocide Convention argued in the ICJ case, there are a plethora of international laws underlining starvation as one of the deadliest forms of destruction in modern warfare. These laws prohibit employing starvation as a means of warfare and subsequently draw examples from the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, to denote—if words are capable of doing so—the inhumane sufferings of the Palestinian population.

What the international humanitarian law says Rule 53 and Rule 54 of the customary international humanitarian law (IHL) explicitly prohibit the use of starvation as a method of warfare in both international and non-international armed conflict. These provisions have become a customary norm through state practice, and the inclusion of this prohibition on military manuals of different states also renders the same message. Interestingly, Israel's Manual on the Laws of War itself embodies that the prohibition of starvation "clearly implies that the city's inhabitants must be allowed to leave the city during a siege." In line with this view, the UN and other international organisations have also viewed blockades and embargoes on accessing humanitarian aid as a clear indication of deliberately causing starvation upon an entire population. Ironically, since the Hamas attack, the scale, rigour, and speed of destruction of civilian infrastructure and enforcement of the siege in Gaza have surpassed any other man-made famine in the last 75 years. The World Food Programme reported approximately 500 aid trucks a day containing food were supplied to Gaza before the war, which, after the recent Israeli invasion, came down to 127 trucks of limited aid, which are incapable of supporting over two million people.

Additional protocols to the Geneva conventions Complementary to the four Geneva conventions, the adoption of two additional protocols in 1977 strengthened the protection of victims of international (protocol-I) and non-international (protocol-II) armed conflicts from intentional starvation respectively. Specifically, Article 54 (2) of Additional Protocol-I expressly prohibits "any attack, destruction, and removal of any objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works" to starve out the civilian population. In no event can military actions be accepted to harm the sustenance of a population with inadequate food resources to cause deliberate starvation or forceful displacement of an adverse party to an international armed conflict. With Israel's full-scale military ground offensive operations, it is reported approximately 22 percent of agricultural lands in northern Gaza have been razed along with the destruction of 70 percent of Gaza's fishing fleet. This has created an alarming condition where accessing humanitarian relief is even more limited than the minimum reliefs available at southern governorates.

Rome Statute of International Criminal Court

The Rome Statute as the founding document of the International Criminal Court (ICC) categorises the prohibited conduct of armed conflicts as "war crimes." It operates as a deterrent to prevent the breaches of IHL by ensuring justice for the victims. Article 8 (2) (b) (xxv) of the Rome Statute entails criminal responsibility for committing war crimes in international armed conflicts by intentionally using starvation as a method of warfare. To prove the conduct of causing starvation as a war crime under this provision before the ICC, it has to be proven that the perpetrator possesses an acute knowledge of the conduct and consequences of any such acts. Since the Hamas-led attack on Israel, their high-ranking officials have made public statements expressing their aim to deprive the Gazan population of food, water, and aid as the military policy of their forces. This intent has been manifested by impeding humanitarian aid, razing agricultural lands, and destroying the sustenance of the entire Palestinian population. All of it amounts to war crimes.

International human rights law

The International Human Rights Law (IHRL) provides a fertile ground for reinforcing collective and individual fundamental human rights by complementing the commitments of IHL and ICL. The founding documents of IHRL including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political

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Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) respectively impose both immediate and progressive obligations on the states to safeguard the fundamental human rights of all people even during wartime. The right to food as a fundamental human right has been enshrined in all of these nearly universally accepted treaties as well as in several other multilateral and regional instruments. Moreover, the human rights lens in the context of armed conflict offers a substantial ground to establish the criminal intent of committing war crimes under the ICL where the perpetrators corroborate intentional starvation to dismantle a population's present and generations unborn. Other human rights commitments such as the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) enumerate the international community's obligation to prevent mass atrocities including starvation. Given the current range and extent of the atrocities committed and supported by powerful States, the RtoP commitments have significantly failed. The UN special rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri, quotes "famine was imminent and now inevitable" in Gaza as the United States and nine other countries have suspended additional funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA). UNRWA's funding crisis is threatening the basic human right to access food for the survival of the Palestinian population in an already meagre supply of minimum humanitarian aid able to cross through Egyptian and Israeli checkpoints.

On March 25, 2024, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted a draft resolution with 14 votes in favour and an abstention from the US, calling for a "lasting and immediate ceasefire," to facilitate unrestricted aid supplies amid the risk of an impending famine and release of all captives. The laws that are applicable to incriminate Israel, however, have not been applied to put an end to the ongoing genocide. At this point when the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza has wiped out an entire generation with the remaining half looking for a piece of bread to survive.



People outside *The New York Times* building, New York, protesting against the newspaper's coverage of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza, on December 11, 2023.

FILE PHOTO: AFP

pieces of information withheld by Western media outlets from their wider audience. Yet, it is essential to recognise that the concealment of such news contributes to the propagation of propaganda, influencing public opinion in a misleading manner.

Disinformation, dehumanisation of victims, and protecting the perpetrators are all important processes that are used in the construction of narratives in mainstream media publications. Especially during times of war, propaganda in the media is a prevalent practice. By using the Western media as their megaphone and pawn to repeat their words, carry out their directions, and most importantly, engage in defamation, intimidation, and the embellishment of falsehoods, Western politicians have legitimised bias, as the truth.

The first type of propaganda in the genocide in Palestine is disinformation. Images of affected newborns in Gaza were released by *The Times of London* with the title, "Israel releases pictures of mutilated babies," to allege proof of the October 7, Hamas attacks. The Western media, far from fact-checking, parroted the Israeli propaganda, claiming the possession and verification of harrowing images murdered by Hamas. *The Times* mentioned in their article, that they refuse to publish images of Israeli infants with mutilations because they were "too graphic." Later on, an investigation by Haaretz, found that no babies were beheaded during the October 7, Hamas attacks.

The media engaged in "pre-attack legitimacy," purposely broadcasting content with the intention of either convincing their audience that a certain act of assault ought to take place or assisting viewers in comprehending that an attack is on the horizon. Everything started as soon as the events of October 7th occurred, when an official US statement—which quickly described the Hamas attacks as an "unprovoked terrorist attack." The "unprovoked" component reverberated through the media, and was repeatedly used by politicians. Both of these combined serve to convince the audience that Hamas carried out a heinous terrorist attack, with no underlying reason other than sheer ruthlessness and inhumanity.

This "pre-attack" rhetoric prepares the audience to view the Israeli attacks in response as acts of "self-defense." In reality, the international community has been ignoring the citizens of Gaza for many years—the fact that

focused on the victimhood of Israelis, while entirely ignoring the Palestinian side. The bias was crystal clear, as commonly liberal magazines pursued large-scale reporting of the victims of the October 7 attacks, in abundance, while ignoring the Palestinians, who were also being killed in a genocidal campaign. Stories spotlighting the families of October 7 hostages by Hamas received unilateral attention compared to all the families whose lives were also shattered by Israel's grueling response.

In the first few months of war, it was evidently clear that this was going to be disastrous for the civilian population in Gaza; the Israeli government had cut off the Gaza Strip, which prevented the delivery of fuel, food, and water as well as the supply of electrical power. Israeli fighter jets began their bombardment of the besieged region; whole neighborhoods were soon

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reduced to rubble. For months, none of these received the attention of Western media outlets. On the other hand, false information—including accounts of Israeli civilians being burned and decapitated, women being raped—were spread by top politicians in the West, including the president of the US.

It would not be too far-fetched to question whether the objective of the Western media has been to liken Hamas to well-known terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The persistent association of Hamas with ISIS is a part of a deliberate attempt to depict all Palestinians as "terrorists." This narrative makes it easier for people to sympathise with Israel, and desensitises them towards Palestinians. As a result, the global society as a whole has been more bent to assume that Israel is the victim, which in return normalises the mass murder of Palestinians. Despite the

wherever they themselves are telling them to go. The language itself reeks of preconceived bias and reveals the hidden propaganda that is ensconced in the Western media's coverage of the genocide.

On the other hand, due to the proliferation of social media, many users in Gaza have become "self-proclaimed journalists." In an effort to counter the false narratives and demonstrate the real horrors, Gazans have made this effort by utilising their social media accounts to broadcast real-time images, videos, first-hand accounts of those who have been injured, and stories of families who are dealing with terrible losses. Motaz Azaiza, Plestia Alaqad, Bisan Owda, and Saleh Al Jafarawi are just a few of the names that will live on in this historic moment for public service journalism.

At the end of the day, the Western media will never properly refer to what's happening as a genocide; rather, they still believe it all started on October 7, 2023. But in fact, there have been massacres in Gaza in 2021, 2018-2019, 2014, 2012, 2008-2009, the battle of the Jenin refugee camp in 2002, the massacre at the Ibrahim mosque in 1994, the slaughter at the Al-Aqsa mosque in 1992, the massacre at Sabra and Shatila in 1982, and a lengthy list of previous assaults going back to 1948.

Despite the Western media's inclination towards aligning with Israel, countries such as Bangladesh who have shown their constant support for Palestine serve as a source of inspiration for Palestinians, bolstering their resilience and fostering optimism over the eventual liberation of Palestine. The Palestinians will forever be commemorated as the individuals who have consistently reminded the global community of their presence and unwavering determination to oppose oppression by colonialism. Palestinians will be remembered as individuals who were previously prohibited from flying their flags, which caused them to substitute watermelons instead, partly due to their remarkable resemblance to the flag. Palestinians will continue to be symbolised as the "Al-Badawi" olive tree—which is situated in Bethlehem, Palestine—which means "The Great One," and is believed to be 5,000 years old. No matter what happens, Palestinians will resist; they will remain in Gaza because Israelis are aiming to wipe out a people whose strength against oppression is as deeply ingrained as the roots of the Al-Badawi olive tree.