

ONE YEAR OF ISRAEL'S GENOCIDE IN GAZA

Where do we go from here?



Yousef SY Ramadan
is Palestinian Ambassador to Bangladesh.

YOUSEF SY RAMADAN

A year since Israel first struck Gaza—in Khan Younis, killing 18 members of one family, including five children—the bombs have not ceased, and neither has the dehumanising death toll. For a year, 365 days, Palestinians in Gaza have suffered war crimes, with thousands dead, families shattered, children orphaned and hearts broken forever. Never in the history of wars between the Arab world and Israel has there been such an unspeakable level of crimes against humanity that have been committed, while people around the world watched on screens. The same extent that the "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood" caused military, moral, and economic damage to the occupation state, it provided Benjamin Netanyahu with the right climate to prolong the war to escape accountability for his own charges of financial crimes and corruption. There is no doubt that he capitalised on the attacks by Hamas on October 7, and spun it quickly to turn the Israeli society towards revenge, entrenched dehumanisation, the abhorrent normalisation of killing and destroying everything in Gaza, then the West Bank, and now, Lebanon.

We are here today because of decades of impunity for Israel by the world and allowing it to become the apartheid state that it is today, and the formation of a fascist government under Netanyahu. Israel's success since the massacre in Gaza in 2009 to the present day, in consolidating the construction of an extreme right-wing Israeli society in which any force that classifies

By expanding the war goals to Lebanon, launching airstrikes and now aiming to annihilate Hezbollah, after the goal to eliminate Hamas—all of which are impossible as these are ideologies of resistance—Netanyahu succeeded in reaching his strategic goal of making Iran the biggest security threat the world faces, under multiple pretexts.



For a year, 365 days, Palestinians in Gaza have suffered war crimes, with thousands dead, families shattered, children orphaned and hearts broken forever.

PHOTO: AFP

itself as "democratic" while weakening real secular or leftist groups, has become an asset to the likes of Netanyahu, Likud Party, and to the right-wing spectrum within the state of occupation from a national right or religious vantage point. Netanyahu's journey in becoming a leader whose name will go down in history for sheer selfishness—in ignoring the hostages of his own country and killing thousands and thousands, is one to reconcile with as we look back on this horrid year.

of President Obama and the Democratic Party, which he has utilised, and is still utilising with President Joe Biden to this day, and will continue to do so if Kamala Harris enters the White House. The result of years of Netanyahu's politics with the US has led to a problematic relationship at this point, where it's confusing who the superpower is within the two.

Netanyahu is invested in the US elections—less than a month away now—with clear preference for the Republican

Party and Donald Trump, and is exerting great pressure against the Democratic Party, especially President Biden and his successor Vice President Harris. Another Trump presidency will help Netanyahu obtain his main personal goal, which is to continue as president of the Israeli government until 2026. That will enable him to achieve what he called "absolute victory," sadistically

forces of resistance—in Gaza and the West Bank, passing through Lebanon, Syria and Iraq to Yemen and Iran. This move does not necessarily achieve victories on the ground, but it is important for him to plant this idea in the minds of the public of the occupying state—that he faces and fights on several fronts. This will undoubtedly result in unlimited support from a bloodthirsty right-wing audience, and it is simply a successful manipulation tactic by a "dictator" for a country that believes it is a "free and democratic state."

And with the blessings of the US, Netanyahu has managed to achieve certain objectives that, in a world where international law functioned objectively, would result in accountability. Netanyahu's goals are summed up, as he calls it, in a "new map of the Middle East." The roadmap to this goal includes: first ending any form of resistance in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen; secondly imposing open and economically viable normalisation, especially in the entire East Mediterranean region, and consolidating Israeli economic hegemony in the region. The third is to allow the besieging of any state in the region that does not "imprint" with the occupation, which will be classified as a hostile state unless it recognises Israel as a state so as not to become a country classified as "an anti-Semitic state" in the West—the green light which allows Israel this card to kill Palestinians mercilessly.

By expanding the war goals to Lebanon, launching airstrikes and now aiming to annihilate Hezbollah, after the goal to eliminate Hamas—all of which are impossible as these are ideologies of resistance—Netanyahu succeeded in reaching his strategic goal of making Iran the biggest security threat the world faces, under multiple pretexts. And it can be argued too, that he succeeded in dragging Washington in one way or another into a confrontation with Tehran and trapping it to respond to Tehran. This means that Netanyahu introduced the territory within the book of Isaiah, which talks about the destruction of all those who do not believe in "Israel or God's chosen people." Abusing religion, and abusing his own people, the tyrant Netanyahu and his occupying state have been allowed for over a year now to do away with international law and humanity in general. People in Palestine mourn today, as they mourn every day. But a day must come when the world realises the inhumanity that is becoming sealed in civilisation every day as this barbaric genocide goes on—every day that people are killed as though their lives, as though Palestinian lives don't matter.

Nothing new on the Middle Eastern front



Slavoj Žižek, professor of philosophy at the European Graduate School, is international director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities at the University of London and the author, most recently, of *Christian Atheism: How to Be a Real Materialist*.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

A twist on the title of Erich Maria Remarque's famous 1929 novel about everyday life in the trenches of World War I seems fitting for the first anniversary of Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel. While the media covers each new and surprising development—the killing of Hamas's leader, Ismail Haniyeh, and Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah; Israel's invasion of southern Lebanon; Iran's ballistic-missile attack on Israel—the fact is that things are becoming what they always were. Potentialities that were present from the beginning are being realised.

From a broader historical and philosophical perspective, Israel's critics miss the point when they claim that it is failing in its mission to destroy Hamas, and is merely killing Palestinians and razing Gaza. Recall Israel's strategy before October 7. For years, it ensured that foreign financing reached Hamas in order to keep the Palestinians divided, thus preventing any progress toward a two-state solution.

The parallel between Ukraine and Palestine has grown stronger as some key distinctions have become blurred. The pro-Israel West (especially the United States) now frames its support for Ukraine and its support for Israel as two initiatives in the same global war, as if Israel is no different from Ukraine.

Of course, Israel is acting in self-defence in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon. But much depends on how one defines "self." If Russia occupies part of Ukraine and proclaims it part of Russia, can it then claim self-defence when it crushes those who resist? When Germany invaded Belgium at the start of World War I, a Belgian minister supposedly observed that, "Whatever historians will say later about this war, nobody will be able to say

that Belgium attacked Germany." Yet since Russia's invasion, respect for settled facts no longer holds. The Kremlin and its allies have become increasingly effective at claiming that Ukraine started the conflict.

Israel's rhetoric is not dissimilar. When the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) launched its "limited ground operation" in Lebanon on October 1, one was reminded of Russia's euphemistic description of its invasion as a "special military operation." In both cases, we can paraphrase Groucho Marx: it may look like war, and it may hurt like war; but don't let that fool you. This really is war.

Again, things are becoming what they always were. In late July, a coterie of Israeli ministers, MPs, journalists, and TV commentators decried an IDF military police raid on the Sde Teiman base in southern Israel, following reports of Israeli reservists abusing Palestinian detainees. The raid and arrests triggered large public protests, even though it was other Israeli reservists who had

blown the whistle. Horrified by what they had witnessed, they heroically came forward with allegations that security personnel on the base were torturing Palestinian prisoners by sodomising them with metal rods. Some of the prisoners then bled to death.

Yet rather than being outraged by such atrocities, some Israeli officials were outraged at those prosecuting the case. Consider the following transcript from a debate in the

Knesset (parliament), aired by the British journalist Peter Osborne:

Unidentified Israeli MP: "This is insanity, someone in the prosecutor's office thinks it's possible to arrest soldiers for things they do to Nukhba (Hamas Elite Unit) terrorists. We can't continue as usual..."

[Interjection]: "To insert a stick in a person's rectum, is this legitimate?"

MP: "Shut up! Yes, if he is Nukhba,

predicament may be to entertain a conspiracy theory. Almost a year ago, I imagined a phone call between Israeli and Hamas hardliners:

Israeli hardliner: "Hi, do you remember how we discreetly supported you against the Palestine Liberation Organization? Now you owe us a favour: why don't you attack and slaughter some Jews close to Gaza? They're friends to Arabs, peaceniks, so we don't need them. What we need is something to end the



Israeli soldiers stand by a truck packed with shirtless Palestinian detainees in the Gaza Strip on December 8, 2023.

PHOTO: REUTERS

everything is legitimate to do. Everything."

Or consider this clip from a panel discussion on Israeli TV (also shared by Osborne):

First panellist: "Soldiers are suspected of raping a shackled prisoner—this doesn't concern you?"

Second panellist: "I don't give a rat's ass what they do to that Hamas man. The only problem I see is that it's not state policy to abuse detainees. First, they deserve it and it's a great form of revenge. Second, maybe it will act as a deterrent."

Imagine our reaction if all this had happened in Russia. Crazy as it may sound, the best way to account for our moral

civil protests against us, and to distract from the slow ethnic cleansing of the West Bank. The world will be shocked at your brutality, and we will be able to play the victim, achieve national unity, and accelerate ethnic cleansing in the West Bank!"

Hamas hardliner: "Okay, but we need a favour: to avenge our slaughter, you must bomb civilians in Gaza, killing thousands, especially children. That will foment anti-Semitism around the world, which is our true goal!"

Israeli hardliner: "No problem, we also need a resurgence of anti-Semitism, which allows us to keep playing the role of the victim and

do whatever we want in self-defence!"

This imaginary scenario is obscene, of course. But recall Robert Harris's novel *The Ghost* (later a film by Roman Polanski). A ghostwriter for Adam Lang, a former UK prime minister modelled on Tony Blair, discovers that his client has been planted in the Labour Party and manipulated by the CIA all along. Commenting on the book's "shock-horror revelation," a critic for *The Observer* wrote that it was "so shocking it simply can't be true, though if it were it would certainly explain pretty much everything about the recent history of Great Britain."

Like Harris's invention, my own abhorrent scenario teases out the logic of today's perverse tango: It isn't true, but if it was, it would explain everything. My imaginary phone call is not part of reality, but it is real. Since victims are in principle permitted to strike back, the war gives Israel a chance to pursue ethnic cleansing in Greater Israel. According to Israel's far-right finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, the "voluntary migration" of Palestinians in Gaza is the "right humanitarian solution" for the besieged enclave and for the region.

The parallel between Ukraine and Palestine has grown stronger as some key distinctions have become blurred. The pro-Israel West (especially the United States) now frames its support for Ukraine and its support for Israel as two initiatives in the same global war, as if Israel is no different from Ukraine. Meanwhile, on the pseudo-left, many claim that the initial attacks by Russia and Hamas were both justified defensive measures in response to historical provocations and oppression, as if Donetsk is the Russian West Bank.

In the new world order that is emerging, the Gaza war is a nodal point that condenses all the defining antagonisms of the modern era. It is where everything will be decided. "Palestine" today is a universal symbol—a stand-in for all European sins and a font of anti-Semitism.

The tragedy is that Israel, which resulted from Europe's guilt over the Holocaust, is becoming a symbol of European oppression and colonisation. Europeans gave the survivors of that genocide land that other people had inhabited for centuries. It is that original sin which, unexpiated, is once again preventing peace and quiet on the Middle Eastern front.