

“Gazacaust”: Placing the Blame Where It Belongs. Mike Whitney Interview with Ron Unz

“Israel has absolutely no legitimate case whatsoever for its attacks on Gaza”

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Global Research, February 06, 2024

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [United Nations](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

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[Question 1: The ICJ Genocide Ruling](#)

Mike Whitney (MW): In your opinion, is the ICJ’s ‘genocide’ ruling convincing or overstated?

Ron Unz (RU): From the beginning **I’ve been extremely reluctant to characterize the Israeli attack on Gaza as being a “genocide”** because use of that term has become so wildly inflated and distorted in recent years, converted by dishonest Western governments and their mainstream media lackeys into a propaganda-weapon used to vilify countries whose governments they seek to undermine.

Most people understand “genocide” to mean killing a large fraction of a given population group as part of an effort aimed at total extermination. But in early 2021, the outgoing Trump Administration and incoming Biden officials [both publicly declared](#) that the Chinese government was committing a “genocide” against the Uighur people of Xinjiang Province despite failing to provide any evidence that any significant number of Uighurs had actually been killed, and the media heavily promoted those accusations. If the bipartisan political leaders of America and our complicit mainstream media can declare a “genocide” without any apparent killings, **the word has become so totally corrupted that I’m loath to consider using it.**

However, in a strictly technical sense this ridiculous situation is actually possible. The term “genocide” was originally invented around 1944 by a Jewish propagandist named [Raphael Lemkin](#), who used it as a means of stigmatizing and vilifying Nazi Germany. The beginning

of [the lengthy Wikipedia article on Genocide](#) explains how the definition soon officially adopted by the UN included situations involving few if any actual killings:

In 1948, the [United Nations Genocide Convention](#) defined genocide as any of five “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”. These five acts were: killing members of the group, causing them serious bodily or mental harm, imposing living conditions intended to destroy the group, preventing births, and forcibly transferring children out of the group. Victims are targeted because of their real or perceived membership of a group, not randomly.

Given the nebulous definition of causing “serious bodily or mental harm,” leftist academics over the decades have often denounced “cultural genocide,” in which a government uses its power to assimilate a minority group into the language and cultural practices of the majority. For example, a century ago Canada established a system of residential public schools to teach English and modern lifestyles to Amerindian children from deprived tribal backgrounds. At the time, the policy was considered a benign, enlightened effort to help integrate them into mainstream Canadian society, but in recent years, that educational project [has been denounced as “cultural genocide.”](#)

One obvious problem with this very expansive definition of “genocide” is that it includes far too many historical cases. Used in such a broad fashion, there may have been many dozens or even hundreds of different “genocides” around the world over the last decade or two, and **if everything is a “genocide” then nothing is a “genocide,”** with the powerful political term drained of any impact.

However, **despite all those serious concerns, I do think that the Israeli military actions in Gaza have been so extreme, so indiscriminate, and so massive that they fall into an entirely different category.** Nearly [70% of the Gazans killed have been women or children](#), a demographic profile very close to that of the general Gaza population. Since Hamas consists entirely of adult males, this indicates that nearly all the deaths have been those of unarmed civilians, which is almost unprecedented in military conflicts over the last few decades.

However, such carnage is hardly surprising given Israel’s enormously heavy bombardment of that very densely populated urban center with the largest unguided bombs in its arsenal. After less than one month, **the Israelis had already dropped more explosives than the tonnage corresponding to [the nuclear weapons used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#),** and they have accelerated their attacks since then, destroying 100,000 local buildings and rendering nearly two million Gazans homeless.

By early December, the *Financial Times* reported that [the destruction inflicted upon defenseless northern Gaza](#) after just seven weeks of Israeli attacks was **similar to that suffered by the worst-hit German cities after years of Allied carpet-bombing during World War II**, an astonishing comparison.

The catastrophic destruction of northern Gaza in less than seven weeks has approached that caused by the years-long carpet-bombing of German cities during the second world war <https://t.co/Hm0YiTNOjr>
[pic.twitter.com/vC3Nx3BP5X](https://t.co/vC3Nx3BP5X)

— Financial Times (@FT) [December 7, 2023](#)

The obvious Israeli intent has been to render Gaza totally uninhabitable and kill enough Gazans to drive them out into the Sinai desert, thereby allowing the Israelis to annex the land as many of their political leaders have proposed. The South African legal case filed before the ICJ included 90-odd pages quoting numerous top Israeli political and military leaders who publicly declared their explicitly genocidal plans towards the Palestinians of Gaza, and **their attacks over the last four months have certainly amounted to the greatest televised slaughter of helpless civilians in the history of the world.**

Under such a combination of facts, **I think it was very reasonable for the near-unanimous ICJ ruling that there was strong evidence that the Gazans were at serious risk of suffering a potential genocide at the hands of the Israelis.** The Israeli government itself appointed one of the ICJ judges hearing the case, selecting a former chief justice of the Israeli Supreme Court, but [he voted along with the other justices](#) that the Israeli government must take all measures to prevent and punish incitement to genocide against the Palestinians of Gaza.

Question 2: Possible Israeli Justification

MW: In your opinion, is there any defense for Israel's behavior in Gaza? And, are you at all sympathetic to Israel's stated position (that they need to defeat Hamas to defend their own national security.)

RU: Israel has absolutely no legitimate case whatsoever for its attacks on Gaza over the last four months, and as more and more facts have come out, the attempts at justification have become weaker and weaker.

Hamas came to power in 2007 following free elections organized and judged fair by the Americans, but after that surprising victory at the polls, Israel and the West orchestrated an unsuccessful attempt to overturn the vote by military force. As I [explained in December](#), the failure of that coup led Israel to impose a very harsh blockade and siege on Gaza:

For over fifteen years, more than two million Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza have been rigidly confined to what Human Rights Watch and other leading international organizations have widely described as [the world's largest open air prison](#) or concentration camp, with all their food, fuel, medicine, and outward movement tightly controlled by their Israeli captors.

When the Gazans began staging months of large, unarmed peaceful marches in 2018 to protest their terrible situation, they were massacred by Israeli troops, with many thousands killed or wounded. In 1960 Apartheid South Africa, a single, somewhat violent protest march against aspects of white minority rule led to 69 deaths and horrified the entire world, which proclaimed it ["the Sharpsville Massacre."](#) But given the tight control over the global media by Jews and other pro-Israel forces, the vastly larger number of deaths inflicted upon the totally unarmed Gaza protesters was almost entirely ignored. This remarkable story was told in [a widely-praised 2019 documentary](#) on the subject by filmmaker Abby Martin, an American sympathetic to the Gazans, as well as in her more recent interview on the same subject.

The American government and American media endlessly glorify the 1950s Civil Rights

protest marches led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and others and have fiercely denounced the brutal beatings those illegal protesters sometimes received at the hands of Southern police. But imagine the reaction if thousands of those black marchers had been shot down by American military snipers.

The key difference is that **the uniformly pro-Israel Western global media has for decades concealed these facts, allowing the Israelis to literally get away with murder.** Meanwhile, the Israeli government had spent hundreds of millions of dollars constructing massive fortified defenses around Gaza, which they believed had completely eliminated the possibility of any incursion by Hamas.

Therefore, when the very successful Hamas attack breached those defenses, the complacent and over-confident Israelis completely panicked, and their Apache helicopters were ordered to blast anything that moved with Hellfire missiles, killing very large numbers of Israeli civilians. The exact totals are uncertain, but based upon the evidence I think that a majority, probably **a substantial majority of all the unarmed Israeli civilians killed on October 7th actually died at the hands of their own trigger-happy military forces,** with perhaps as few as 100 to 200 killed by the Hamas fighters, in many cases inadvertently.

These likely facts are hardly surprising since the primary goal of the Hamas attack was to seize Israeli hostages who could then be exchanged for the thousands of Palestinian captives held without trial in Israeli prisons, sometimes for years and under brutal conditions. Meanwhile, [it has been confirmed](#) that the Israeli government implemented its notorious **“Hannibal Directive,” ordering Israeli military forces to deliberately target and the kill Israelis** who had been captured by Hamas in order to forestall any such later prisoner exchanges.

I discussed these issues in several articles (see [this](#), [this](#), and [this](#)), beginning in late October, also explaining that since the Hamas fighters had apparently killed so few civilians, Israel and its media allies had desperately resorted to promoting the most outrageous atrocity-hoaxes to buttress their moral case for the massive retaliatory bombardment of Gaza they were unleashing.

In early January, I [summarized](#) some of these conclusions:

The surprisingly successful Hamas attack on October 7th was deeply embarrassing to the Israelis, and pro-Israel propagandists soon began heavily emphasizing ridiculous hoaxes such as the claims of forty beheaded babies or a baby roasted in an oven. All of these frauds were provided by [extremely disreputable characters](#), but eagerly accepted and promoted by leading Western political elites and media outlets.

The latest wave of very doubtful claims has focused upon second-hand stories of Hamas gang-rapes and sexual mutilations. These accounts only came to light two months after the events in question and lacked any supportive forensic evidence, with many of the claims coming from the same individuals behind the beheaded babies hoax, suggesting that they are equally desperate propaganda ploys. Journalists Max Blumenthal, Aaron Mate, and others [have discussed](#) the extreme credulity of the *Times* and other media outlets in [promoting](#) these blatantly fraudulent stories. Many of these points are summarized in a brief video discussion:

Inspired by my reporting at [@TheGrayzoneNews](#), this brilliant takedown by [@propandco](#) provides the strongest and most accessible refutation of the bogus atrocity propaganda Israel concocted to justify its genocidal rampage in Gaza

Watch and share it widely pic.twitter.com/Q8XawKN07Y

— Max Blumenthal (@MaxBlumenthal) [December 27, 2023](#)

Meanwhile, consider the very strong evidence from silence. According to news reports, small GoPro cameras were worn by the attacking Hamas militants, which recorded all their activities, and the Israelis recovered many of these from their bodies and began [carefully examining hundreds of hours of this extensive video footage](#). They surely would have soon released a video compilation providing any incriminating evidence that they found, yet I'm not aware of a single public clip that shows any such brutal atrocities or mass killings, strongly suggesting that very little of that occurred. Indeed, **the *Gray Zone* discovered that the main photograph provided of an allegedly raped and murdered Israeli woman actually turned out to be that of a female Kurdish fighter from years earlier that had been plucked off the Internet, demonstrating the apparent desperation and dishonesty of the pro-Israel propagandists promoting these stories.**

But given that total national humiliation, the Israeli military reaction aimed at punishing the helpless civilians of Gaza has been enormously brutal, probably already killing well over 30,000 victims, overwhelmingly women and children. Nearly all of Gaza's hospitals have been destroyed, along with the local universities, schools, mosques and churches, and administrative buildings. A few days ago, the *New York Times* published [an article](#) highlighting **the widespread Israeli use of controlled demolitions to deliberately destroy all of this civilian infrastructure. The obvious intent is to render the entire area uninhabitable and permanently drive out Gaza's Palestinians.**

It's useful to contrast this Israeli retaliatory campaign of massive destruction with how other countries reacted in the wake of comparable events. For example, in 1946 [Zionist militants dressed as Arabs bombed the King David Hotel in Jerusalem](#), killing 91 people in one of the worst terrorist attacks in history to that date, with an overwhelming majority of the victims being civilians. It would have been unthinkable for the British to have responded by launching a massive bombing campaign against the Jewish population centers of Palestine, killing thousands or tens of thousands of Jews, and they would have been universally condemned by the world as the worst sort of war-criminals if they had done so.

Similarly, beginning in the early 1970s, [the IRA launched a huge wave of terrorism](#) against British military and civilian targets, including bombing attacks in central London, and many hundreds died as a consequence. In 1984, [the IRA planted a massive bomb](#) in the Brighton hotel being used for a Conservative Party conference, killing or severely injuring many important British officials, with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and most of her government narrowly escaping death. The IRA had considerable popular support among the Catholics of both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, yet the British would have been considered totally insane if they had responded with a massive strategic bombing campaign against those Irish civilian population centers.

When countries behave like mad dogs before the eyes of the entire world they have only

themselves to blame for the ultimate consequences.

Question 3: Demographic Reasons

MW: Are there demographic reasons why Israel would want to expel the Palestinians in Gaza or is this really all about Hamas?

RU: The Zionist goal had always been to establish Israel as an ethnically-pure Jewish state, driving out all the native Palestinians. In 1948, the Zionist militias came close to achieving that objective, seizing nearly 80% of the territory and violently expelling almost a million Palestinians from their ancient homeland, killing many of them in that brutal process of ethnic cleansing. The main regret was that some Palestinians still remained when a truce ending the fighting, but the result was still the creation of an overwhelmingly Jewish state. Although the UN required Israel to allow the Palestinian refugees to return to the homes they had fled days or weeks earlier, the Israeli government always ignored that requirement, often shooting and killing any Palestinian civilians who attempted to do so. I discussed that history of Israel's origins in a long [December article](#).

However, in 1967 the Israelis suddenly launched a surprise attack against Egypt and its other Arab neighbors, seizing Gaza and the West Bank with their millions of Palestinians, many of whom were refugees who had previously been expelled from their homes in Israel two decades earlier. Annexing those new territories would have required Israel to grant citizenship to their non-Jewish residents, severely shifting the overall demographic balance, so despite endless peace negotiations, they have effectively remained under Israeli occupation for more than a half-century, even as their Palestinian populations have steadily increased.

A further political constraint upon Israeli governments has been the growing political power of the right-wing religious voting block, which regards those occupied territories as the sacred, divinely-ordained lands of their Greater Israel and is therefore absolutely opposed to relinquishing any part of it, especially in order to establish a Palestinian state. Moreover, during those long decades of occupation, Israeli governments have planted many Jewish settlements, with most of those settlers being religious zealots, determined to retain the land and drive out the existing Palestinians.

Over the last three generations, Palestinian numbers have grown more rapidly than Jewish ones, and they now constitute **almost exactly half of the population of the intended Greater Israel, now containing 7.2 million Jews and 7.2 million Palestinians. So if the Palestinians were granted civil rights, Israel would immediately cease to be a Jewish state.** Therefore, prior to October 7th, the Israeli strategy had been to maintain an Apartheid state on the West Bank, while confining the Palestinians of Gaza to what amounted to an open-air prison.

But the surprisingly successful Hamas raid destroyed those political illusions, inflicting very heavy casualties on Israel's military forces and also leading to many civilian deaths. With Apartheid no longer considered a viable, long-term option, **the Israeli government seems to have now decided to use the Hamas raid as an excuse for solving its demographic problems by killing or expelling all the Palestinians once and for all**, with surveys showing that the bulk of the Israeli public apparently supports that plan.

I had discussed some of these issues in an October podcast interview:



[Click here to watch the video](#)

Question 4: UNRWA and Palestinian Starvation

MW: Israeli leaders know that if they succeed in defunding UNRWA, tens of thousands of Palestinians will die from hunger. And, yet, among members of the Knesset, there is almost unanimous support for the policy. What are we to make of this? Does Israel really want to starve two million Palestinians or do they have some other goal in mind?

RU: For the last several months, the Israelis have been severely restricting the import of food, water, and medicine into Gaza so that there is already widespread hunger and thirst, with [a high-ranking UN official describing](#) the resulting famine as an “unprecedented” crisis. According to these reports, the **Palestinians of Gaza now constitute roughly 80% of all the people in the world facing catastrophic hunger.**

Moreover, numerous top Israeli leaders have been using explicitly genocidal language towards this Palestinian population. According to Max Blumenthal, Israeli public opinion surveys have shown that **98% of Israeli Jews support the massive destruction inflicted upon Gaza** and indeed over 40% think that the Israeli government’s military attacks have been too restrained and should be stronger.

Combining these different pieces of evidence, I doubt that many members of the Knesset would be dismayed if large numbers of Gazans began to die of starvation, especially if such horrifying conditions finally succeeded in driving them into Egypt and forcing the Egyptian government to accept them, thereby emptying the enclave and allowing Israel to permanently occupy and annex it. At the very least, Israeli leaders may believe that such mass starvation of Gazan civilians would coerce Hamas into accepting defeat and agreeing to release their remaining prisoners.

So the plan behind the Western suspension of financial support for UNRWA may be based upon Israeli goals, which include some mixture of punishment and further pressure for

Palestinian expulsion or Hamas surrender. Meanwhile, the Western media has used the heavy coverage of those unsubstantiated accusations against UNRWA to avoid reporting the dramatic vote against Israel by the IJC that had immediately proceeded it.

The actual reasons given by the United States and many of its allies for cutting off funding to UNRWA and beginning to starve the Palestinians seemed utterly unreasonable. According to media reports, UNRWA employs some 30,000 Gazan residents and [the Israelis claimed that just 12 of these individuals had participated in the October 7th Hamas attack](#) on Israel—**12 out of 30,000 employees!** This demonstrates the absurd subservience of Western political leaders to the wishes of the Israeli government.

With so much of Gaza destroyed and with so many Gazans now on the verge of starvation, there are videos showing groups of [Israeli activists blocking the entry of trucks carrying food and water](#) to that desperate population, and surely almost everyone around the world condemns that monstrous behavior. Yet the political leaders of America, Britain, Germany, and many other Western nations who endlessly boast of their humanitarian principles are now doing much the same thing, seeking to cut off food supplies to millions of starving civilians, utterly outrageous actions ignored by most of the American public, who have been successfully brainwashed by our mainstream media.

Question 5: A War of Narratives

MW: Israel's operation in Gaza is, to large extent, a war of narratives. On the one hand, we have the highly-politicized term "genocide," and on the other we have the equally-politicized term "antisemitism." I cannot remember any conflict in which language played a more important role or summarized the views of the warring parties. Do you agree that—beyond the actual hostilities and violence—there is a battle of narratives taking place in which the two main enemies are brandishing their own particular terminology to overpower the other? Who do you think is winning that war?

RU: I do think that the political activists condemning the Israeli military attack on Gaza quickly began using the incendiary charge of "genocide" to dramatize their case and also to counter the weighty accusations of "antisemitism" they faced from their pro-Israel opponents. But that approach has resulted in some serious setbacks.

For example, when student protesters at Harvard and other elite colleges held up signs denouncing "genocide" or shouted it out at their public demonstrations, their opponents dishonestly claimed that they were publicly calling for the genocide of Jews. This allowed pro-Israel forces to deploy [their overwhelming political and media power to promote that ridiculous argument](#) and use it to force the resignation of the presidents of Harvard and UPenn, resulting in an unprecedented ideological purge of the top leadership of Ivy League schools.

I also think introduction of that term may have helped pressure Elon Musk into banning anyone on Twitter who used the popular progressive slogan "From the River to the Sea," claiming that it represented a call for "Jewish genocide" rather than merely the replacement of Israel with a secular democratic state with equal rights for both Jews and Palestinians.

On the other hand, now that a near-unanimous majority of **the International Court of Justice has ruled that the Palestinians of Gaza are indeed potentially at risk of suffering such a genocide at Israel's hands, those accusations have become much**

more substantial and legitimate, although the Western mainstream media has done its utmost to avoid reporting that important story, probably preventing most of the public from becoming aware of it.

There is also a very strong divide based upon age and sources of information. For generations, America's mainstream print publications and broadcast media have presented an extremely one-sided, pro-Israel account of the Middle East conflict, and individuals drenched for decades in such powerful propaganda are unlikely to suddenly change their opinions, so polling shows that they are still very supportive of Israel.

However, **younger Americans are less set in their beliefs and they also often get their knowledge of events from social media and video platforms, which are much less under the total control of pro-Israel propagandists.** Therefore, surveys reveal that they are far more evenly divided in their views, or even actually [lean more towards the Palestinian side](#).

Meanwhile, in the rest of the world outside the influence of the Western mainstream media, support for the Palestinian cause seems absolutely overwhelming, certainly among the two billion Arabs and Muslims, but elsewhere as well. For example, China and its media outlets have attempted to provide even-handed coverage of the current conflict, seeking to maintain good relations with both Israel and the Arab world. But when a leading influencer on Chinese social media polled his million Weibo followers soon after the October 7th Hamas attacks, [98% of them thought](#) that the Palestinians were the ones with justice on their side.

I discussed some of these matters in several recent podcast interviews:

[Question 6: Inciting a War with Iran](#)

MW: In your opinion, is Netanyahu trying to incite a war between the United States and Iran? How would Israel benefit from such a war?

RU: It's absolutely obvious that he is trying to do so. **Indeed, Netanyahu and his political allies, including the American Neocons, have been doing their utmost to incite an American attack on Iran for decades**, using military provocations, dishonest propaganda, and political pressure to achieve this objective. [For more than thirty years, the Israeli leader has declared that Iran is on the verge of producing a nuclear weapon](#) and must be stopped, famously holding up a colorful illustration of the dire Iranian threat [at the 2012 UN General Assembly](#).

The problem they face is that **all competent military experts agree that such a war would be utterly disastrous for the United States and our Western allies**, as well as the entire world. Iran is a large, populous nation and its reasonable concerns about a possible American attack have caused it to build up a very formidable military force, including an enormous arsenal of highly-accurate cruise missiles which could easily overwhelm our defenses in the region. If we attacked, Iran's retaliatory strikes could probably destroy all of our local bases in the region, killing enormous numbers of Americans, while sinking many of our ships at sea, perhaps even including the aircraft carriers that provide our global projection of power.

Over the last few weeks, the Houthi militias of Yemen, merely equipped with second- and

third-tier weapons, have demonstrated that they can successfully bar the Red Sea to any vessels they wish, and our vaunted naval and air power has proved powerless to stop them. So in a war, **the Iranians—who possess a vastly larger arsenal of first-class weapons, supposedly even including the hypersonic missiles that we ourselves have yet been unable to produce—could easily block the Straits of Hormuz to oil tankers, thereby collapsing much of the world economy at a stroke**, especially including our NATO allies and Japan.

Given the endless American threats of attack, the Iranians have worked very hard over the last couple of decades to greatly improve their military capabilities, while despite our enormous defense budget, our own conventional arsenal has largely remained stagnant due to our overwhelming focus upon counter-insurgency efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. More than two decades ago, the Pentagon's [2002 Millennium Challenge war games](#) found that the Iranians could defeat America in a war, and Iran is vastly stronger today. Meanwhile, the Iranians have recently finalized [a comprehensive 20-year deal](#) with Russia that includes defense cooperation, and given our huge support for the Ukrainian forces over the last couple of years, Moscow would certainly be very willing to return the favor by backing and supplying Iran.

So I actually think the greatest danger we face is that a sufficiently ignorant or arrogant **Biden Administration, under enormous internal and external pressure by pro-Israel political forces, might be drawn into a totally irrational war with Iran.** And if the results were sufficiently disastrous, with enormous American human losses from Iranian missiles fired at our military bases and ships sunk at sea, perhaps including aircraft carriers, **our government might find itself compelled to threaten or use nuclear weapons to salvage its position, thereby pushing the entire world to the brink of destruction.**

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This article was originally published on [The Unz Review](#).

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