

Israel Is Not Committing ‘Genocide’ in Gaza



Israeli soldiers mount an Israeli flag on a military vehicle near the Israel-Gaza border amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in Israel, April 15, 2024. (*Amir Cohen/Reuters*)

By DANIELLE PLETKA & SAHAR SOLEIMANY

April 20, 2024 6:30 AM

The accusation has a malicious ulterior motive: advancing antisemitism.

IN the months since Hamas’s October 7 attacks, there has been a full-force campaign to frame Israel’s counteroffensive in Gaza as a genocide. And it’s not just an accusation pushed by the extreme Left. This is a campaign endorsed by foreign governments, international organizations, the media, and even elected U.S. officials. But why? It’s not simply that Israel’s actions in Gaza fail to meet the legal standard of genocide, but that other wars on a single population — Bashar al-Assad’s on Syrian Sunnis, the Chinese Communist Party’s on Muslim Uyghurs — stir no similar outrage. There’s a name for that double standard: antisemitism.

“Genocide” has a definition in law. For Israel’s actions to meet the legal criteria of genocide, there must be evidence of more than just a high casualty count or the leveling of property. Per the [United Nations](#), genocide requires an “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.” As [statements](#) by Israeli officials have made clear, their intentions in Gaza are limited to eliminating

Hamas's operational capacity and bringing home hostages. (Hamas, however, has openly declared its intent to wipe out Israel and the Jewish people. Just read their [charter](#).)

Any proper debate about genocide first requires understanding the casualties in Gaza, because whom Israel targets — and how — determines the legitimacy of the war effort. The only source of data on casualty figures has been the Hamas-controlled Gaza Ministry of Health, which claims that 70 percent of the more than 30,000 people who have died are women and children. Despite [mounting evidence](#) that the health ministry's numbers are statistically impossible, they continue to be legitimized by the [U.S. government](#) and widely distributed by mainstream media, and have even been [used](#) to discredit the Israel Defense Forces' own statistics on eliminated Hamas combatants. West Point's John Spencer, the premier expert on urban warfare, has repeatedly [stated](#) that the precautions Israel has taken to prevent civilian harm throughout this war — including during last month's raid of al-Shifa Hospital, in which the IDF killed or captured hundreds of Hamas fighters — not only surpasses that of any military in history, including our own, but goes above and beyond what is required by international law.

Has Israel erred in service of its aims? Absolutely. The recent accidental killing of seven World Central Kitchen aid workers is a tragedy, and those who played a role have rightly been [held](#) accountable. But such is the [reality](#) of all war; miscalculations are made, the wrong people get killed. And that is especially true in a war against an enemy that strategically embeds itself within civilian sites for the express purpose of [maximizing](#) death tolls among its own people. Yet that hasn't stopped widespread [accusations](#) against Israel of systematically targeting civilians. And while some may be ignorant of the relevant statutes, the Geneva Conventions and other elements of international humanitarian [law](#) are clear: The standard for the death of civilians is the word "willful." No credible source has presented evidence of Israel's *willful* targeting of Palestinian civilians.

These distinctions matter for putting genocide charges into the context of antisemitism. The term "genocide" was coined for the specific purpose of naming the systematic, state-sponsored persecution of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Recognition of the special nature of Jewish suffering has given way to frequent accusations that Jews seek to benefit from an exclusive claim on victimhood, that they have [weaponized](#) the Holocaust as a way to insulate Israel from all criticism and moral obligation, and have turned the Nazi genocide into a get-out-of-jail free [card](#). This manipulation of the Holocaust and the concept of genocide is textbook antisemitism, according to the widely adopted International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition. That it is being used by, among others, [deniers](#) of the Holocaust only deepens the irony.

The world must not ignore the sadistic pleasure taken by those charging Israel with genocide. It is an attempt to neuter Jewish trauma in order to wage political war against Israel. By positing a moral equivalency between what was done to Jews then and what the Jewish state is now doing in its defensive war against Hamas, the atrocities of the Holocaust are delegitimized, and Jews can no longer reap the supposed illicit advantages granted by their history. Indeed, the false charge of "genocide" is what has allowed critics to continue excusing Hamas's terrorism as a justifiable act of resistance, desecrating Jewish [storefronts](#) with swastikas and slurs, or holding signs [saying](#) "Hitler would be proud" with total impunity.

During the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s, at least 60 percent of Rwandan Tutsis were murdered. In the 1970s, some 99 percent of Cambodian Viets were murdered by the Khmer Rouge. More than two-thirds of Jews in Europe were murdered by the Nazis. Although the number of Arabs resident in British Mandatory Palestine in 1948, the year the State of Israel was created, is the subject of heated debate, even Palestinian [sources](#) admit that the Palestinian global population has increased nine-fold since then.

Hamas began this war with the brutal and deliberate targeting of innocent Israeli civilians. What has resulted in Gaza today is a terrible toll on both the Jewish people and Palestinians alike. This tragedy is, however, demonstrably, legally, and morally *not* genocide. To suggest that it is constitutes another crime of antisemitism against the Jewish people.

Danielle Pletka is a distinguished senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and the host, with Marc Thiessen, of the podcast What the Hell Is Going On? Sahar Soleimany is a senior research associate at the American Enterprise Institute.