



## The Invasion of Gaza and the Politics of Fear

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### Summary:

The politics of fear have been a poignant political tactic used by the US in its invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. Likewise, Israel has been employing the same tactics against the Palestinians. However, instead of Saddam Hussein or the Taliban, the Israeli pretext is Hamas. In this essay, I attempt to trace the roots and true intentions behind the use of the fear rhetoric by Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet and their Western allies in their war on Gaza.

**Key Words:** Politics of Fear, October 7th, Invasion of Gaza, Palestinian Resistance, Settler Colonialism, Neo-Orientalism.



The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti once wrote in his memoir *I Saw Ramallah* that “it is easy to blur the truth with a simple linguistic trick: start your story with “Secondly.” Start your story with “Secondly” and the world will be turned upside-down” (Barghouti, 2000).

This is why whenever Israeli officials are criticized for their war crimes, they evade the question with the infamous statement “what about Hamas?” as if Hamas represents all the other Palestinian entities Israel controls. This is also the same statement used by US officials when their blind support for the apartheid state is questioned.

To provide some context, Gaza emerged as a refuge for displaced Palestinians under Egypt's sovereignty following the upheaval of the Nakba in 1948. Subsequently, it fell under Israeli occupation during the Six-Day War of 1967 alongside the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Sinai Peninsula. It was under the terms of the Oslo Accords of 1993-1995 that Israel began the process of transferring governmental authority of the strip to the Palestinian Authority (PA). However, it was only after the violent effects of the second intifada (2000-2005) that Israel relinquished control of the strip, withdrawing its soldiers and settlers. Nevertheless, it maintained patrols of its borders and airspace.

The fate of Gaza took a different turn after the 2006 PA parliamentary election. In a decisive defeat for Fatah, the Islamic Resistance Movement (known as Hamas) was democratically elected in Gaza. Shortly thereafter, the movement was designated as a “terrorist organization” by the US, the UK and Israel. Therefore, when Israel is condemned for killing defenseless civilians and children in its clashes with Hamas's military factions, it first maintains its firm right to defend itself while blaming the casualties on Hamas, which, according to the Israeli narrative, uses their children and women as “human shields.”

With the American propaganda machine beautifying such atrocities, Israel uses this narrative to both dehumanize and demonize Hamas resistance fighters and deny them any sympathy or popular support. Indeed, who would dare to sympathize with a group of “human animals,” as labeled by Yoav Gallant, who would rather see Israel vanish and “innocent” Jews dead than their kids alive? Although this Israeli talk point is entirely baseless, many genuinely believe it and support Israel for it.

The truth of the matter is that ever since 2007, Israel, with the blessings of the US, has imposed an air, land and sea blockade on the Gaza Strip collectively punishing its entire population of 2.2 million, not just members of the Islamic Resistance Movement. This only means that even if Hamas resistance groups attempted to evacuate Gaza of their women and children, they literally have nowhere to go. This is why human rights organizations like [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) call Gaza the largest “open-air prison” on earth.

Due to this blockade, whenever there is an Israeli offensive on Gaza, civilian casualties among children and women are always the highest.

This leaves the besieged Palestinians in Gaza with no other alternative to negate their way around this blockade except for fighting back, whether through rock throwing or armed resistance. This is what many Westerners seem to not quite understand about them. For the casual Gazan citizen, it is either to resist getting killed, or getting killed. It is very much this simple.

However, following Hamas's operation on October 7<sup>th</sup>, the Palestinians have been vilified more than ever by Israel and Western media. Israeli officials made sure to evoke all sorts of fear and horror in their media appearances, diverting attention from the dire state of the Palestinians living under occupation.



Top US and UK officials, along with Zionist media corporations, also propagated this rhetoric of fear to shield Israel from any sort of scrutiny or accountability. In his first speech about the incident, President Joe Biden expressed disbelief, stating that throughout his long political career, he had never imagined he would “see and have confirmed pictures of terrorists beheading children.”

Although there is no evidence supporting the factual occurrence of Hamas members actually beheading 40 Jewish babies, this story was reported repeatedly by most prominent media outlets and journals around the Western sphere, leading many to believe it to be actually true. Recent investigations show that this story has no truth to it at all. Up to now, two babies have been confirmed killed on October 7<sup>th</sup>. They were not beheaded. Their deaths could also be the direct consequence of friendly fire.

In addition to the 40 beheaded babies, there is another news story about a mass number of women being raped and having their breasts removed by armed Palestinian fighters on the same day. As brutal as it may seem, nonetheless, the recent New York Times reporter scandal has revealed that the mass rape accusations against Hamas members were also baseless.

Furthermore, it is unimaginable that such horrific claims, in such a delicate period, were made by an uninformed person with no prior experience in actual reporting or journalism pre-October 7<sup>th</sup>. And yet, Ana Schwartz, a film director who served in the IDF, was commissioned to report on the most sensitive topic imaginable currently simply because of her ties to Israel. The timing of these stories could not be more adequate as they effectively managed to achieve their goals of frightening and mobilizing fear in whoever hears them.

Western media corporations are not only supportive of this rhetoric because its owners have ties to Israel, but also because of viewership numbers. It is not unusual to hear about 40 babies being beheaded, or a mass rape of Jewish women that it is concluded by cutting their breasts off.

So, fear for them is a perpetually fresh product, as most corporations will be waiting for such horrible things to occur to benefit their plummeting viewership numbers. However, reporting such horrible news without fact-checking them is the lowest standards of professional conduct that can ever be ascribed to journalism and reporting.

It is clear that ever since Hamas’s Al-Aqsa Flood Operation, Western media focused on depicting Hamas as anti-gay, anti-women, anti-semitic, and anti-liberal fanatics. This way, no one will sympathize with the Palestinians in Gaza without being fed this narrative of Hamas medieval-like savagery that goes against modern Western ideals.

Fear, on the other hand, has always been a sufficient political instrument of herding public opinion. Not only does it blind people’s reason, it also mitigates conformity in them. Thus in the midst of utmost chaos and fright, people cannot go through the struggle of looking through what is factually true and what is fake-news propaganda. Instead, they accept any given truth the proclaimed “saviors” like Netanyahu or Biden would provide them.

According to Al Gore, a former American Vice President, the politics of fear indicate “the ultimate misuse of fear for political ends,” particularly through the depiction of the other as a “terrorist” (Al Gore, 2004).

The danger of these politics, Al Gore contends, is that “fear suppresses the politics of discourse and opens the door to the politics of destruction” (Al Gore, 2004).

This is why the use of fear has become a very lazy tactic employed by Western politicians to maintain power over public opinion, thereby gaining their consent to pass and enact whatever policies such as invading countries and displacing their whole populations for resources.



As prophesied by the romantic Spanish painter Fransico Goya in his aquatint, “the sleep of reason produces monsters.” That is why politicians of fear rise up in times of disasters to become self-proclaimed heroes who are exempt from any sort of accountability to the people who voted them into power.

And historically, these Orwellian politics of fear were used by most despotic regimes to appease their frustrated subjects. To deflect internal criticism, these hegemonic states construct an enemy for their citizens, depicting it as the ultimate threat to their safety and to the nation’s national security. As a direct consequence, people become preoccupied with fear of this unknown entity instead of addressing the despotism of their regimes abroad, which may justify the existence of this enemy in the first place.

This practice has specifically surfaced during the golden age of colonialism, where conquest was justified by the civilizing of the “savage other.” Controlling the image of this other is a colonial disposition aimed at denying its resistance to occupation any legitimacy or public sympathy. In the case of Israel, “terrorism” is the “bread Palestinians get buttered on” to serve this purpose, as American Journalist Joe Sacco once expressed (Sacco, 2003).

Moreover, the encapsulation of Palestinians in acts of terrorism is rooted in a long tradition of Western Islamophobia. According to Edward Said, ever since the fall of the Soviet Union, Islam replaced communism as the number one threat to the Western civilization, particularly the US (Said, 1981). Palestinian Arabs are central to this fear since they have been involved in major confrontations against its Western extension in the Middle East, Israel.

Undoubtedly, the success of this rhetoric relies heavily on a chorus of propaganda and media coverage that is willing to align with the corporal interests of their true owners. With the power of fear, these corporations are capable of herding public opinion in whatever direction they desire.

Hence, the depiction of Palestinians as fanatic terrorists who pose a threat to Israel’s national security has been at the core of Zionist propaganda. By instilling fear of the Palestinians, Western media provides the pretext for subjecting them to blockade and intense surveillance in order to protect the Jewish nation against any perceived threats from them.

Following the recent Hamas and Israel clash after the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant ordered a complete siege on Gaza following a dehumanizing statement where he said that “we are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly.”

Subsequently to his orders, Israel has cut water, electricity, food supplies, fuel and humanitarian aid from reaching the civilian facilities in Gaza. Not only this, but the Israeli military used internationally prohibited weapons against Gazans, such as white phosphorus, with the intention of ethnically cleansing the strip.

As a direct consequence of this fear policy, this brutal siege was not as criticized, nor even as questioned in Western media to the same extent as Hamas’s operation.

Al Gore wrote his essay on the politics of fear in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq under the presidency of George Bush. In order to legitimize its invasion of Iraq, Al Gore suggested that Western media vilified and demonized Saddam Hussien and his regime, similar to what they did with Osama Bin Laden and Afghanistan.

These fear campaigns against Hussein had falsely linked him to Al-Qaeda and, hence, to the 9/11 attacks, which marked the beginning of the American-led War on Terror. Therefore, the fear generated by the September attacks blinded any sort of criticism to the US’s subsequent invasion of Iraq until the true intentions behind this conquest were revealed.



Similarly with the demonization of Saddam Hussien and the Taliban, the West is leading frantic media campaigns against Hamas. After Hamas's operation, the sentence "Do you condemn Hamas?" became the most used by media show hosts and reporters, which misled the public from talking about the other part of the issue.

In the same vein as Iraq in the Bush era, the public is being fed an exaggerated fear of Hamas that disproportionately outweighs the actual threat posed by this entity. Currently, many would believe that Hamas is more dangerous than a country that possesses between 80 and 400 nuclear weapons.

Therefore, it can be said that a similar fate to that of Iraq is being orchestrated and awaits Gaza, as the Israeli government is carrying out a military annexation of the strip under the pretext of eradicating "Hamas terrorist groups." Since oil reserves were a major reason for the West-led invasion of Iraq, many now suggest that the multi-dollar Gaza Marine gas field is a key reason for Israel to occupy the strip and hold geo-strategic power over it.

Ignoring all norms of international law, Israeli officials are adamant on not stopping their hostile aggression on Gaza until their goal is achieved. As the days passed, however, Israeli leaders' focus in this aggression has shifted from releasing Israeli hostages held by Hamas to leaving no "seed" of Hamas in Gaza. It is clear in their discourse that there should be no ceasefire until Israel has full control over the strip.

After the plummeting decline of the general ratings of Biden's administration due its unwavering support of the Israeli Genocide, US Vice President Kamala Harris called for a temporary ceasefire in Gaza on March 3<sup>rd</sup> in Selma, Alabama. The far-right Israeli minister of National security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, followed up with a tweet on X stating, "it's time to destroy Hamas, Kamala" (not referring to her as Vice President).

It is increasingly evident that the purported goal of eradicating Hamas and demilitarizing the Gaza Strip serves merely as a guise for the annexation of the entire area and it under Israeli control in one way or another. The northern portion of the strip already lies under Israeli control, and prominent far-right Israeli ministers such as Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich have been adamantly calling for Israel to reclaim control over the land since the beginning. Most recently, on February 29<sup>th</sup>, a group of extremist far-right settlers brazenly stormed northern Gaza, advocating for its resettlement.

Meanwhile, to succeed in this endeavor, Israel did the best to divert people's attention from this reality by painting the most barbaric image of Hamas to the public, shifting people's attention from what is really happening.

That being so, Israeli spokespersons went even further in demonizing Hamas by continuously and repeatedly comparing them to Nazis, Al-Qaeda, and especially ISIS, all of which are perceived as existential threats to Western values and ideals. Although Hamas bears no similarities to any of them, Israeli propaganda is adamant about continuing these comparisons.

In many instances, the words "Hamas" and "ISIS" are deliberately uttered by Israeli spokespersons next to each other, invoking memories of ISIS and associating Palestinians with the same frame.

This mantra was initiated by the Israeli prime minister, who, following the operation, bluntly asserted that "Hamas equals ISIS." This statement subsequently gained traction as a rallying cry among supporters of Israel's incursion into Gaza.



American officials, such as the US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, echoed similar sentiments. During his visit to Israel shortly after the incident, Austin said that Hamas actions were deemed “worse than ISIS.”

In the meantime, these unparalleled comparisons of Hamas to ISIS were spread across major Western media outlets after October 7<sup>th</sup>. Consequently, the public discourse became that Hamas is deserving of the same fate as ISIS. This rhetoric overlooks the fact that Hamas is a nationalist movement that was democratically elected and is committed to an arm struggle on behalf of an occupied people who have been under extreme siege since 2006.

It is regrettable that US politics and media were also polluted by these Israeli tactics. Not only did American officials adopt the same unfounded Israeli talking points, but they also continued to compare October 7<sup>th</sup> to the events of 9/11. This particular event led to the two-decades long global war on Islamic terror and subsequently to a massive wave of Islamophobia in the West. It initiated the fear doctrine of Muslims that is still applied today on Islamic groups such as Hamas.

By exploiting this event, American politicians make sure the American public does not question their country’s blind support of a genocidal regime. Furthermore, these matchless comparisons aim to garner blind sympathy from the American public for Israelis, who are portrayed as their fraternal victims of terror.

Israeli and American leaders alike have further weaponized the memory of the Holocaust and Jewish persecution to justify their genocide in Gaza, as Hamas’s actions were continuously compared to the Nazi Holocaust, which triggers an existential trauma for the Jewish people.

During his visit to Tel Aviv following October 7<sup>th</sup>, President Joe Biden initiated his statements in Israel by saying, “Hamas committed atrocities that recall the worst ravages of ISIS, unleashing pure unadulterated evil upon the world.” He stressed, “there is no rationalizing it, no excusing it. Period.” Then he added, “the brutality we saw would have cut deep anywhere in the world, but it cuts deeper here in Israel. October 7, which was a ...sacred Jewish holiday, became the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust.”

Corrupted by his administration’s political interests in the region, President Biden went even further to declare that this incident “has brought to the surface painful memories and scars left by millennia of antisemitism and the genocide of the Jewish people.” Nevertheless, he failed to mention how this antisemitism is a Western product, nor did he dare to address the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands, which started 76 years ago before October 7<sup>th</sup>. How could he? There are so many American interests at risk.

By taking this stance, Biden continued the long tradition of comparing Hamas to Nazis. Just on October 12<sup>th</sup>, when former prime minister Neftali Bennett was asked on Sky News about cutting electricity and fuel on hospitals in Gaza which have baby incubators, he defended his country’s approach by shouting at his host, “Are you seriously asking me about Palestinian civilians?” And then he added, “We are fighting Nazis.”

Amidst these blatant comparisons, a whole context is buried, obscuring the truth of occupation, which is shoved entirely under the rug. It is crystal clear that cutting the power and fuel to hospitals and bombing them in a strip that contains 2.2 million residents is an act of genocide. Yet, the killing of these Palestinian babies has not provoked the same hysteria as the false story of 40 beheaded babies.

Furthermore, the politics of fear are deeply rooted in the Manichean paradigms of “us vs. them”, “good vs. evil”, and of “righteous vs. barbaric.” So when Israeli or American officials



employ this rhetoric about Palestinian resistance, they are utilizing binary oppositions that position them on the benevolent side of this Manichean principle.

For instance, it is no surprise that Netanyahu perceives his aggression on Gaza as a “struggle between the children of darkness and children of light, between humanity and the law of the Jungle,” as he expressed in a now-deleted tweet. Nevertheless, it is only through rhetoric of fear and binary oppositions like these that a populist leader like himself could divert Israelis from the failures of his cabinet.

It is not surprising either when the President of the US empire, which proclaims itself to be, in Manichean terms, the leader of the “free world,” states that Hamas is “pure unadulterated evil,” he is ultimately providing all the reasons for Israel to eradicate it and thus supports the Israeli narratives. This narrative is what ultimately shapes the people’s perception of the conflict: Hamas is pure evil and Israel is a righteous democracy. Therefore, the righteous must vanquish the evil.

As confirmed by the Israeli army spokesperson Daniel Hagari, who is considered the face of Israeli propaganda during this period of Israeli aggression on Gaza, when he unabashedly stated, in a message the IDF deemed as important, that “Hamas is dedicated to death and destruction while Israel is dedicated and determined to sanctify life.”

The demonization of the Palestinians reached levels where Israeli officials invoked biblical references to justify their genocide in Gaza. In his attempt to mobilize Jewish fear and hatred towards Palestinian resistance, the Prime minister invoked the Biblical story of Amalek, in which according to the Hebrew Bible is a nation that the Israelites were ordered to wipe out in an act of revenge. Calling for a holy war of annihilation against the population of Gaza, Netanyahu stated in Hebrew, “you must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible. And we do remember.”

As analysed by Norman Finkelstien, “when you say that your enemy is Amalek”, in the midst of a war, in a country that is schooled in the bible, “then you are calling for the destruction and the killing of every man and woman and child.”

Looking at this frightening depiction of the Palestinians by Israeli leaders and their Western supporters, there is no doubt that many would find the suggestion of Israel’s far-right Heritage minister Amichai Eliyahu of “dropping a nuclear bomb” on Gaza a plausible option too.

This desperate resort to fear is Netanyahu’s cabinet’s only chance at surviving politically. It is fear that is prolonging Netanyahu’s political career in the first place, and it was fear that protected him from what seemed like an inevitable demise were it not for October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Netanyahu understands that in times of fear, people will turn into any sort of savior. Thus, he needed this fear to save himself from the accumulated frustration of the Israeli population at his failed government. Thus it does not come as a surprise that his cabinet opposed all the ceasefire deals to prolong this fear and thus their seat in power. The same principle could also apply to Israel’s recent theatrical clashes with Iran as it serves as a another distraction from its aggressions on Gaza, which many view as genocidal.

The fruit of this discourse of fear is that it has encapsulated all Palestinians within these frames of terror, not just Hamas. Henceforth, all crimes against them were justified as punishment for allowing Hamas to exist and hold power in Gaza since 2006.

On the other side, when we consider the Palestinians themselves, they are a people who are not permitted to have a state of their own and thus have no army to defend themselves against the aggressions of the IOF. The emergence of any armed groups or individuals in Gaza



specifically is not a choice; it is the only option available for them to self-defend against continuous Israeli aggressions.

Moreover, International Law acknowledges the right of occupied groups to defend themselves against any form of illegal occupation, even through armed means, as long as they do not target innocent civilians. The Palestinians definitely have the right to defend themselves against any agent of the Israeli Occupation; whether they are armed settlers, extremist Jews or the IDF/IOF. It is unfortunate that their right to defend themselves is being altered and depicted instead as an act of terror.

The truth of the matter is that every liberation group has been labeled by its hegemonic oppressors as an evil entity. Moroccans and Algerians were labeled as barbarians for resisting the French, Mandela was labeled as a terrorist for denouncing apartheid, and the Palestinians as terrorists for resisting occupation. Although Israel claims itself to be the “only democracy of the Middle East,” the politics of fear play a pivotal role in the political conduct of its leading politicians since its inception.

The fact that Israel and Western media have managed to tell us that we should fear Palestinian resistance and support Israel’s right to defend against it, rather than the other way around, is a concrete example of a story told by starting with “secondly. ”

Ultimately, a political resolution in Palestine is only possible when the fear rhetoric is diminished, and the humanistic language of tolerance is embraced. At the moment, the current situation does not indicate that the Palestinians would gain their independent state anytime soon, at least not with Netanyahu in power, as an occupied Palestine serves the interests of the powerful best. Nevertheless, if they cannot have an independent state, the least the international community could do is grant them the dignity of dying as martyrs for freedom, and not as terrorists who are only visible as death tolls.





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