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# AI, Sacred Violence, and War—The Case of Gaza

Chris Hables Gray

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*To my brother Dana, who saved me again from drowning.*

## PREFACE

As I finish this book, the one-year anniversary of the October 7 Hamas attack is being remembered. But, of course, that was not the beginning of conflict over the land “between the river and the sea.” It is thousands of years old. Nor, is it even the start of Palestinians resisting invading Zionists. That war is over a century old, and is far from over.

Still, it might seem new, what with the whole world watching through the unprecedented media web that embraces us all, with AI targeting the destruction of Gaza and computer networks exploding thousands of phones and other devices across Lebanon, while at the same time sophisticated digitalized apartheid surveillance directs the oppression and dispossession of the inhabitants of the West Bank. But look a little deeper and it seems all too familiar—razing cities, assassinating enemies, storming fortifications, occupying territory, and terrorizing noncombatants. New military techs don’t change the brutal calculus of war, no matter how much military practitioners wish they did. It is civilian technologies that have made genocide and ethnic cleaning politically problematic, even as technoscience has made them physically easier. War is now won in the hearts and minds of the participants, and in the hearts and minds of the judging observers of the world.

Although the exact details of Israeli military AI are top-secret, it is not that hard to discern what is happening because we know the history, the companies involved, the military results of the programs, and how the technologies work. Plus, we have the accounts of whistleblowers

who have come forward to talk to investigative journalists. In particular, +972 *Magazine* reporting on Gospel, Lavender, and the Where's Daddy programs was extraordinarily helpful.

I need to add that in the current climate of hatred and fear, where criticism of Israel is routinely labeled anti-Semitism, I do not conflate Israel's policies with Judaism. I do not consider that the Jews of the world are responsible for what one particular nation-state led by a rightwing party founded by terrorists (Revisionist Zionist) allied with Jewish fundamentalists does. Indeed, I am a long-standing member of Jewish Voice for Peace, and I am Jewish by Nazi law, thanks to Les "don't call me grandpa" Hables.

While I am an academic, and this book draws on my training, expertise, and research, it is also a very personal project. I know about Israel's military doctrine because my work used to be a part of it. In 2000 I attended the Israel Defense Force (IDF) co-sponsored "Martial Ecologies" conference in Israel, and the next year I visited Israel again to lecture at the IDF's Staff and Command College. For years my book *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* was required reading for all Israeli officers who aspired to higher command. At the time, Israel had a vibrant Peace Movement and even in the military there were many outspoken supporters of a two-state solution. But my host, General Shimon Naveh, commander of the Staff and Command College, was not optimistic. He introduced me to the IDF's first Orthodox general and said soon the military would be dominated by people who did not believe in co-existence with Palestinians. The peace activists I met then—Jewish, Moslem, Christian, Secular—shared this pessimism. They saw the same changes happening in Israeli society at large. Twenty-five years later they have been proven right.

This book focuses on the dangers and immorality of Israeli military policy in their war with the Palestinians, but in no way is it an apologia for Hamas (or Hezbollah or Islamic Jihad or even the very corrupt and co-opted PLO). I denounce all terrorism (attacks on civilians), War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, including many of the actions by Hamas and other groups. I have a visceral distaste for bloody fanaticism. I believe people should be free to govern themselves in their own lands—not ruled by invaders or the rich. And free in control of their bodies, their thoughts, their expressions, and their loves. I have put my career, my own freedoms, and my life on the line for these principles and will continue to do so.

But this book is not about Hamas and how the Palestinian people are struggling to survive; it is about Israel and its mobilization of high-tech and sacred violence in their attempt to end Palestine.

A book inevitably has errors. I apologize for them and take full responsibility.

Santa Cruz, CA, USA  
November 2024

Chris Hables Gray



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my dear friend Cheyenne Laue. Illness prevented her from co-authoring this book as we planned, but her energy got it started. She is not responsible for its contents. I also want to thank *Teknokultura*, especially its editor, my compañero Ángel Górho, who made it possible to publish the article this book grew out of—“Military AI, sacred violence, and war in the Middle East,” *Teknokultura*, February 21, 2024.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# An Introduction to AI in a Biblical War

**Abstract** This chapter is an introduction to the themes and issues of the book. It begins with a description of Israel’s attack on Gaza 2023–2024 and how it is a form of torture, tactically and strategically. The relationship between military policies and operational practices is explained. A quick and dirty history of actual military AI systems from Aegis to Titan follows. Then there is a gloss on the content of the following four chapters. Why understanding the technologies, ideologies, and fantasies of this conflict is vitally important is the last section of this chapter. This is explored through various personal and ancient stories, such as the holiday of *Tu B’av*.

**Keywords** Gaza Casualties · Long Gaza · Nakba · Ethnic Cleansing · *Tu B’av*

## THE TORTURE OF GAZA 2023–2024

After the shock of the October 7 attack, Israel’s leaders became savage in their fury. Israel Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on October 9, “I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly.” Israel Member of the Knesset (MK) Yitzhak Kroizer was openly genocidal in his comments on November 5: “The Gaza Strip

should be flattened, and for all of them there is but one sentence, and that is death.” Gallant and Kroizer should have paused and remembered a question asked of Israeli warriors many times over thousands of years, “Shall the Sword Devour Forever? Knows thou not that it will be bitterness in the end?” (Samuel 2 2:26) But they were too proud for such reflection, and injured pride is particularly dangerous, combining as it does anger and fear.

In the Summer of 2023 the security services of Israel were particularly proud of how they had mobilized AI and other new techs to assure their people’s safety. The head of Shin Bet (internal security), Ronen Bar, announced that they had developed a generative AI system that had been successfully integrated into their decision-making. It was “like a partner at the table, a co-pilot,” he bragged to the news site *Tech12*. He also said,

The system knows everything about [the terrorist]: where he went, who his friends are, who his family is, what keeps him busy, what he said and what he published. Using artificial intelligence, the system analyzes behavior, predicts risks, raises alerts. (Cockburn 2024, p. 25)

At the same time, the military intelligence Unit 8200 that focuses on cyberwar, was improving its high-tech “signals” collection and AI analysis systems, especially along the border with Gaza. They were so confident they knew what Hamas was doing that they ignored numerous reports from the female-only army scouts called Field Observers and civilians along the border, and a captured planning document, that Hamas was preparing to attack. That’s an “imaginary scenario” Israel’s intelligence agencies agreed—Shin Bit with their new AI co-pilot, Mossad with AI of its own, and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Military Intelligence Directorate, most notably Unit 8200 (Cockburn 2024, p. 25).

This was not the first time the latest technology has been deployed to validate the wishful thinking of military and political leaders with disastrous results, nor will it be the last. It has even happened before with AI-type systems. This book is an analysis of this dynamic in terms of the beliefs (especially fundamentalist) and techs (in particular AI) that have generated the horrific Sacred Violence deployed in and around Gaza in the 13-months of fighting and killing that started October 7, 2023.

This violence is called by many different names. “Gaza War” is most common, but it actually is just part of *The Hundred Years War on Palestine* (Khalidi 2020). “Battle of Gaza” is too limited and few people

use “Gaza Campaign,” which in strictly military terms might be the most accurate. One could also say “Siege of Gaza” or “Occupation of Gaza” but they haven’t caught on. I am going to go with a reference to a ubiquitous and horrifying dynamic—torture. It is the Torture of Gaza, for reasons I hope this book makes clear. It fits both the context, the strategy, the tactics, and the morality of this conflict as it is being carried out by the government of Israel made up of Revisionist Zionists and Fundamentalist Jews, also labeled Jewish Supremacists or messianic radicals by many Jewish and other opponents. Their policy is deadly.

According to epidemiological analysis of previous conflicts, Palestinian deaths in Gaza will eventually total between 100,000 and 200,000 when one counts all those directly killed and add in Long Gaza, the “slow deaths” of stress, starvation, and disease (Khatib et al. 2024). In the full total, civilian deaths will be 70% to 80% and women and children will constitute over half of those lives ended (Khatib et al. 2024; Chalabi 2024). Indirect deaths are normally 3 to 15 times higher than reported deaths in such wars, as Mona Chalabi (2024) reported, based on extensive research. Using a conservative 4 indirect deaths to one direct death, “it is not implausible to estimate that up to 186,000 or even more deaths could be attributable to the current conflict in Gaza” (Khatib et al. 2024). Prof. Devi Sridhar, chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh, predicts in the end half a million Palestinians will have been killed (2024).

These estimates are matched by the calculations of 99 American health professionals. In a letter to President Biden, they estimated conservatively 118,908 Palestinians had already died from Israeli violence in the year following October 7, 2023. This is 5.4% of the population of Gaza, 1 in 20. The group includes 12 professors of medicine, a Rhodes Scholar, and two retired U.S. Army doctors (Lt. Colonels), along with many other inspiring professionals from groups like Doctors Without Borders. Collectively they have decades of experience doing medical aid in combat zones and 5 years’ worth of experience in Gaza alone (Zhang 2024).

Confirmed deaths at the end of October, 2024 in Gaza were over 43,000. At least another 10,000 are estimated to be buried under collapsed buildings. Over 2,000 have also been killed in the West Bank and over 3,000 more in Lebanon. Consider these casualties in terms of the attack on New York City on September 11, 2001. Lebanon’s 2,119 casualties from Israeli attacks from October 7, 2023 to 2024 is the same

as if 114,000 people died on 911—38 911s. For Gaza, taking the conservative estimate of the 99 American health professionals who have been working there, it is equivalent to 15,390,000 deaths in the U.S. from 911, 5,130,000 911s.

In August of 2024 the first baby with polio was diagnosed in Gaza, partially paralyzed. There will be more and more disease (Borger 2024; Sridhar 2024). By October 2024 starvation had become extreme and Israel would only let in less than 20% of the aid needed (Karanth 2024). In August, Finance Minister Bezael Smotrich complained that, “It is impossible in today’s global reality to wage war – no one in the world would let us starve and thirst two million citizens, even though it may be just and moral.” He promised that if Israel could “starve and thirst” millions of Palestinians, the war would be over by now (Karni 2024). Starving and “thirsting” millions of people is never moral, but Israel seems intent on seeing how much it can get away with. In late October 2024 the Knesset overwhelmingly passed legislation banning the UN’s Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the most important humanitarian aid group in Gaza by far. Throughout 2024 Israel blocked so much aid even the U.S. government was forced to complain numerous times, to no real effect (*Haaretz* Editorial 2024).

Even after the Israeli attacks stop, there will be Long Gaza, the ongoing impacts of starvation, wounds, psychological trauma, and Hamas or its extreme successors. All this in the context of the wider war Israel is pursuing—attacking the West Bank, invading Lebanon, and assassinating perceived enemies in foreign countries (Lebanon, Iran, Syria, Yemen).

In the summer of 2024 Israel assassinated the political leader of Hamas in Teheran, who they were negotiating with at the time for a ceasefire in Gaza. Israel also killed a key military leader of Hezbollah by blowing up part of Southern Beirut and at least two women and two children. The Torture of Gaza continued and settler/IDF terrorism increased in the West Bank. Led by two serving Israeli government MKs, Jewish fundamentalists rioted at a military base to protest the very idea of investigating Israeli soldiers for sexually assaulting Palestinian prisoners. And Benjamin Netanyahu spoke in the U.S. Congress to the Republicans and most Democrats and was given 52 standing ovations.

That is the Benjamin Netanyahu who in November of 2019 was officially indicted for breach of trust, accepting bribes, and fraud in three different cases. Case 1000 is accepting illegal gifts from a number of billionaires. Case 2000 charges him with pushing legislation that

would hurt the newspaper *Israel Hayom* to benefit its competitor *Yedioth Ahronoth* in exchange for positive media coverage. Case 4000, the Bezeq-Walla case, alleges he intervened in regulatory decisions to benefit the giant Bezeq telecommunications company and the majority stock owner, Shaul Elovitch, to get favorable coverage from his new news site. On August 8, 2024 the prosecution rested their cases. The defense might stretch into 2025 (*Times of Israel* Staff 2024).

Even if convicted he can't go to jail as long as he is Prime Minister. Many (as in a million Israelis in the streets) argue his major reason for blocking a ceasefire, the return of the hostages, and any end to escalating conflict is for his own political survival. In leadership studies this is called "gambling for resurrection" and the classic example is Napoleon's Waterloo campaign. Napoleon had little to lose by losing and very much to gain if he won. Not so the thousands killed or maimed in his little gamble. Their Waterloo was permanent (Mukunda 2024). Netanyahu's gamble has already cost many more lives than Napoleon's. More deaths are inevitable until Netanyahu and his allies meet their Waterloo.

Since before the establishment of the State of Israel, the Fundamental Jewish/Rightwing Zionist goal has been to dispossess all the Palestinians from Palestine. For the last few decades they have longed to eradicate Gaza, neutralize the Northern border by occupying Southern Lebanon and drive Palestinians out of the West Bank. Pressure on Palestinians (and Israeli Arabs) was ongoing, killing their olive trees, stealing their water and land, destroying houses in illegal collective punishment raids, turning a blind eye to Settler attacks including murders, interfering with travel, sexual and other harassment, and so on. But the destruction of Gaza, the full dispossession of the West Bank, the occupation of Southern Lebanon were not options that their allies/suppliers and world opinion would accept in the past.

Netanyahu thought that changed October 7, 2024. But way before that Israeli military doctrine (technological and ethical) had been adapting to allow for the complete absorption of Palestine.

## POLICIES DETERMINE PRACTICES

For the last 500 years war has been changing with every new conflict but it is a mutual process. "Recall that it is not only that men make wars, but that wars make men," Barbara Ehrenreich (1987) reminds us. The Torture of Gaza (2023–2024) is the latest example. It is the result of



100 years of wars shaping Israeli technology, psychology, and politics. Israel has deployed the most sophisticated AI decision-making systems (DDS) and other advanced computing systems ever used in combat. But it isn't just new technology that drives the relentless development of new forms of war. The ideologies that drives wars, and the official policies that shape them, are equally potent forces.

By AI I mean expert systems and other systems labeled AI or performing complex logical operations. At the heart of the current generative AI explosion is what has been termed, for clarity's sake, algorithmic intelligence (Górdo and Gray 2023). Israel is an international leader in making bleeding edge digital techno-scientific innovations, especially in military applications, which it can test in actual combat since it is always at war with its Palestinian subjects. This is the Palestinian Laboratory (Loewenstein 2023), described in Chapter 4.

Israel does not just have new technologies; it has new policies which put great faith in these technologies, powered by a new spiritual faith as well—or in their view a very old faith. The current elected government of Israel is waging war on Palestinians in Gaza, the Western Bank, and in the North, because it believes that land is theirs by holy right, and any resistance to this is defying God.

Israel's growing commitment to computerized targeting, collective punishment, disproportionate response, outright assassination, and ethnic cleansing are the culmination of a long process linked to the alliance of Revisionist Zionism and Jewish Fundamentalism coming into full power. While the origins of the current battle, as with the long Israel-Palestine war, lie in the expropriations organized by colonial powers and the United States as it displaced them, the proximate causes include the recent political dominance of the Right in Israel and a growing enthusiasm for AI-driven military technologies. These factors have led to important changes in official Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) policies, along with a fundamental degradation of their ethical code.

I examine Israel's military uses of AI and recent significant shifts in IDF policy, strategy, and technology within the context of postmodern war and the ongoing disaster that is Israel's three-front war. Specifically, I focus on the Power Target Policy and the ways in which victory-through-technology illusions are exemplified in AI targeting systems such as Gospel, Lavender, and Where's Daddy. These new technologies are deployed in the context of policies such as Israel's unusual Principle of

Distinction, the Dahiya Doctrine, and the Hannibal Directive, to produce immoral and ineffectual military operations.

Together they provide both the technological capacity and the ideological validation for Israel's many war crimes, including weaponizing consumer technologies to kill hundreds, widespread illegal detentions, harassment, and targeted assassinations (Horovitz 2018; Burke 2023; Chehayeb 2023; McGreal 2023), the systematic appropriation of water (Weizman 2006), total surveillance of millions of Palestinians, the destruction of domiciles, orchards, and crops, allowing Settler mob violence, and the shooting of unarmed protesters. These "necrotactics" represent a policy of "domicide" and "urbicide," that is an ongoing apartheid strategy. In the context of late Postmodern Conflict (aka TerrorWar, from Gray 2005), these practices are certainly doomed to fail.

However, on the deepest levels, Israel's government does not really care. It is not acting rationally; it is acting Biblically. In the last few decades, Israel has shifted toward theocracy. This is apparent in laws proposed by the government in 2023, including legislation to end the independence of the Supreme Court. Prof. Izhak Oplaka of Tel Aviv University notes that, "This is transforming Israel from a Zionist state into a Jewish religious state. A state-changing decision, pushing Israel back into the Kingdom of Judah during the Second Temple period" (Schneider 2023).

This not only justifies Israel's sacred violence but the growing hierarchies in the country. Status and resources are first divided between Jewish people and then all others. Jews are divided by military and religious affiliation, as demonstrated by yeshiva students who until the Spring of 2024 never had to serve in the IDF, and veterans who are prioritized for access to both Israeli services and to stolen Palestinian land. There are a growing number of policies targeting Christians, as well as increasing harassment against Christian clergy and the vandalization of non-Jewish religious sites. As one Jewish orthodox militant proclaimed after an attack, "No Idols in the Holy City of Jerusalem!" Secular Jews are similarly harassed for not keeping the Sabbath or for offending other fundamentalist sensibilities, such as working on the Sabbath or not being kosher (AP 2023).

This strategy of religiously defined social, economic, and political division is apparent in Israel's long-term fostering of Hamas in Gaza, neutering of the PLO in the West Bank, and direct suppression of uncorrupt or moderate Palestinian activists everywhere—all to prevent

Palestinian unity and the potential formation of a Palestinian state. The IDF's targeted assassination and repression program, known as "mowing the grass," is aimed at preventing effective leadership of any type in the occupied territories, "a strategy for protracted intractable conflict" (Inbar and Shamir 2014). According to Prof. Shamir (2023), however, "mowing the grass" is no longer an option because Israel now faces a "survival imperative" to "uproot" Hamas from Gaza entirely. Notably, Inbar and Shamir begin their 2013 paper by quoting Antoine de Saint-Exupéry,

A baobab is something you will never, never be able to get rid of if you attend to it too late. It spreads over the entire planet...It is a question of discipline...You must see to it that you pull up regularly all the baobabs, at the very first moment when they can be distinguished from the rosebushes which they resemble so closely in their earliest youth. It is very tedious work.

The Old Testament connotations are quite clear. According to Jeremiah (1:10) Israel is appointed "over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to tear down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant." Many, on both sides of the conflict, see this as a second *Nakba*, "catastrophe" in Arabic, the term for the violent ethnic cleansing of half the Palestine population in 1948 from large parts of Palestine by Jewish militia. Land, now integrated into Israel.

Only completing the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, a form of genocide, can prevent Israeli defeat. New policies and technologies of warfare applied in Gaza have dramatically increased the number of targets and casualties and show a new commitment to complete uprooting, rather than mowing. These tactics also contribute to the growing list of Israeli war crimes and ultimately guarantee that Israel will lose the war after winning all the battles. Even if most of the Jewish public come to accept the ancient religious justifications proposed by the current techno-theocracy, the rest of the world will not.

While some of the actions of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad are no less evil than what the IDF does victim by victim, technology allows Israel to kill 50 or 100 times more innocents. This will not always be true. Technologically, mass killings of many different types become easier every day, and need not even involve biological or nuclear material, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Postmodern asymmetric war predicts mass casualty events in Israel are now unavoidable. Israel's Torture of Gaza is

not only an immoral policy, but it is a losing strategy. Technologies cannot guarantee victory, Gods cannot either.

## FROM AEGIS TO TITAN

At the risk of exaggeration, the preoccupation with computerization dominates military technology, which in turn dominates military thinking, which itself dominates foreign policy, i.e., international politics. This is because our political leaders, our government bureaucracies, and much of the general public take for granted that superior computer technology guarantees superior military technology. In turn it is assumed that superior military technology guarantees superior military power, and that superior military power guarantees political effectiveness on the international scene in the pursuit and protection of our national interests. (Ladd 1987, pp. 298–9)

Our product is used on occasion to kill people.

—Alex Karp, CEO and cofounder of Palantir (Bamford 2024)

The current doctrines and technologies used by Israel in Gaza have their own specific genealogy. Since World War II, when modern war morphed into postmodern war, there has been an increasing commitment by the dominant militaries of the world to control information while automating combat as much as possible. As digital technologies improve, the temptation grows to succumb to the fantasy that Total Battlefield Awareness is possible, and if possible, useful. That this dream has been losing imperial wars since the 1950s has kept it in check, but again and again it returns as nightmare in new weapons in new battles.

This macabre dance has been led by the United States but Israel is a leading partner. Israel's military-technology complex is part of the U.S. military-industrial complex President Eisenhower warned about in his Farewell Address. Despite the reality that doctrines emphasizing the control of information technologically and the production of more and more sophisticated digital weapons have failed to produce victories for either the Soviet/Russian empire or the United States, they have continued to proliferate nonetheless because war is not a rational human enterprise. After all, the defeat in Vietnam of the Electronic Battlefield did not stop the development of potentially fully autonomous artificial intelligence weapon systems by the U.S. military in the 1980s.

The first of these, the Aegis (the shield Athena gifted Perseus), is for defending ships, especially carrier flotillas, against aerial attacks. The Aegis system takes in various kinds of electronic data (satellite, radio and radar data from other sources, radar reflections from the ship's own radars, target and other information from humans) and distills it into options for the humans in the ship's Command and Control system. It runs on an array of large and small computers, and is coordinated through dozens of different computer programs. It controls ship-to-ship Harpoon missiles, ship-to-air Standard missiles (up to 122), and two six-ton, six-barreled Phalanx automatic machine guns that can spit out 50 20-mm uranium-core bullets a second. The humans can either choose the targets and tell the computer system to engage them or put Aegis on automatic and it will do it itself. But actually captains never let it go autonomous because they would be responsible for what it does (Gray 1990).

Its first use in combat led directly to the downing of an Iranian civilian airliner in 1987 during the war between Iran and Iraq. The *USS Vincennes* was sent into Iran's territorial waters to provoke an Iranian attack on U.S. military assets, allowing an intervention on behalf of Saddam Hussain, a key U.S. ally at the time and losing his war with Iran. The Aegis is now deployed on over 120 ships in the U.S. Navy (and a few favored allies). But in 1987 it was only on two ships, one of them the cruiser *USS Vincennes*. Through a series of human-machine communication errors in the context of scenario fulfillment (they were hoping to be attacked, after all), the ship shot down a commercial airliner and killed all 290 passengers and crew. While the U.S. never apologized, it did pay compensation to the families of the victims and Iran (Gray 1990).

Since that inauspicious beginning, the U.S. military has accelerated its commitment to automated weapons and logical systems—Fire-and-forget, shoot-and-scoot, self-contained launch-and-leave first-pass single-shot kills—from automatic machine guns on guard robots, smart mines, drones of all sorts, to a wide range of intelligence and logistical AI-infused applications and aids. But a deep understanding of target populations eluded simple databases, so in Afghanistan the U.S. created a hybrid system where anthropologists were to feed information to the system, and called it Human Terrain. It failed miserably (Gusterson 2008).

Current Israeli systems such as Gospel and Lavender are directly descended from these programs and a long line of imperial databases with decision-making capabilities going back to the Electronic Battlefield of the Vietnam War. Under President Obama one key secret kill list was

called “the disposition matrix, a complex grid of suspected terrorists to be traced and then targeted in drone strikes or captured and interrogated.” It included biographies, locations, and ranges of operations for “individuals believed to pose a threat to U.S. interests.” But it was quite flawed. In the 10 years between 2001 and 2011 it targeted 400 people killed in Pakistan alone, for example, making many mistakes (Cobain 2013).

There are much closer links, technologically and chronologically, between the U.S. and Israeli military AI deployed in the Torture of Gaza. As Edward Snowden revealed, the U.S. has given Israel SIGINT (electronically captured signal intelligence) data for over a decade. According to a Top Secret Special Intelligence agreement between the two countries revealed in 2013, the U.S. provides Israel with unprocessed (“raw”) SIGINT that “includes, but is not limited to, unevaluated and unminimized transcripts, gists, facsimiles, telex, voice and Digital Network Intelligence metadata and content.” As Snowden pointed out, this includes phone and email communication between U.S. citizens and their relatives in Gaza and the West Bank (Bamford 2024).

It is fed into the Artificial Intelligence Platform and related targeting systems such as Gospel, Lavender, and Where’s Daddy that Palantir helped Israel build, based it seems on the U.S.’s Maven system. Meanwhile, Palantir has been given funding to build TITAN, the Tactical Intelligence Targeting Access Node, which the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) describes as the “next-generation Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance ground station enabled by artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to process data received from Space, High Altitude, Aerial and Terrestrial layers” (Bamford 2024).

How Israel has used their AI systems to target over 37,000 low-level Hamas functionaries and their families (often only their families) will be discussed throughout the book. But to be clear, these assaults, and what are obviously direct attacks on journalists and aid workers, are not “mistakes” in the heat of war. These are cold and calculated killings. When Israel dropped three missiles directly on the rooftop logos of three Word Central Kitchen cars and killed all seven people in them, it was not an accident. It is no mistake that over 200 aid workers have been killed in Gaza, “more than in all the rest of the world over the last 30 years combined, according to the Aid Worker Security Database.” The same goes for the record breaking number of journalists assassinated by distance munitions in Gaza (Bamford 2024). This is murder and high-tech genocide. Considering the starvation, the denying of medical aid, and the

“deals” Netanyahu offers to Hamas members to escape with their lives, it is clear that the goal is to cleanse Gaza of Palestinians by any means they can get away with.

## WHAT IS AT STAKE?

On the morning of October 7 a Palestinian family gathered for breakfast. There were about a dozen of them—grandparents, young adults, children. One young man doted on his new baby son as he ate his breakfast. Then he kissed them all goodbye, last of all his wife and baby, holding his little hands and smiling. Then he went out. They did not know he had decided to join the attack on Israel and certainly die. (Personal Communication)

Why did this young man go off to almost certain death? Casting the blame on Hamas pretends the conflict started that grim morning, but we know that is far from the truth. This is but the latest battle in the long war on the Eastern edge of the Mediterranean. Even though cycles of violence seem never-ending, specific conflicts have clear genealogies. They do not appear out of nowhere. The year was 2023 in the Western reckoning that dominates the world, thanks to the legacy of colonialism. It was also 1445 in the world of Islam. For Jews it was 5784. There are also Chinese, Mayan, Incan, and many other calculations. But we all live at the same time on the same planet. If acted upon, ancient stories of grievance and entitlement will destroy every one of us.

That this is not a unique conflict, despite its many particular characteristics. The War in Ukraine reprises ancient animosities in its own way, and is also about nation building and destroying, along with the very latest postmodern technology. Russians hunt Ukrainian civilians with drones, glide bombs, and missiles as Israelis target Palestinian civilians with drones, bombs, and missiles. Captured Ukrainian soldiers are tortured and murdered, as are Hamas fighters. But that is the subject for another book. Here I show by a detailed analysis of Israeli military technologies and doctrines how the interplay of the most ancient beliefs and the very newest techs threaten human civilization itself.

Chapter 2, “Relentless History,” contextualizes what is happening now in the Middle East, starting with the myths that justify the “Sacred

Violence” of Israel, its allies, and its enemies. This includes the imaginings of technologists, and how their “Fantasies” are “Driving Digital Technologies.”

No nation, no race, no ideology is immune. This is why a book focused on the very latest military technology, AI, starts with exploring the magical beliefs of the main combatants and creators. Technologies come out of beliefs, not the other way around. For the tech entrepreneurs it is the Sacred Hunger of Capitalism that they sacrifice us all for. That, and their lust for immortality, their Singularity fantasy, and for some, *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR). So, in the end, more Sacred Violence.

Old as its roots are, this conflict is clearly part of the Late Postmodern War system, which explains why technology does not produce victory. Despite this, the increasing integration of warriors and machines and the quest for perfect weapons continues. To wage Postmodern War with the fantasy of winning, old codes of conduct have to be changed. In the case of the Israel Defense Force (IDF) this required fundamentally degrading the “IDF’s Spirit Code.” The greater framing is the role of “Fundamentalisms and Global Narratives” in determining war and peace in the early twenty-first century.

Chapter 3 looks in detail at “Israeli Military Policies,” starting with “Growing Hamas while ‘Mowing the Grass,’” which explains how Israel uses Hamas as a counter balance to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) while deploying systematic assassinations and other violence to keep down any unified resistance. It also explains what human shields are and how the IDF violates international law by using them. This reliance on illegal violence also explains Israel’s other major policy “reforms,” such as revising “The Principle of Distinction,” the “Disproportionate Force Doctrines (Dahiya and Hannibal)” and using “Necrotactics, Domicide, Urbicide, and Apartheid” to ensure continued dominance. Finally, the IDF has reversed its long-standing suspicion that technology cannot achieve a meaningful victory with “The Momentum Policy,” which claims that technologies such as AI can indeed win wars. But this illusion disguises their deeper fundamental strategy—terror.

In “Chapter 4: AI at War” the various IDF AI and high-tech military applications are explained. But it starts with a discussion of “The Limits of Correctness,” which explains why these weapon systems will never do what they are built for. In the following sections there is a detailed discussion of key AI systems, such as the new Gospel, Lavender, Where’s Daddy, and Depth of Wisdom and older systems, including Pegasus, Iron



Dome, and the Alchemist. Israel’s commitment to these systems is based on its arms industry, which leverages its role in the subjugation of Gaza and the West Bank through “The Palestine Laboratory.” This allows it to market its weapons as tested in combat. All of this is in the context of Israel’s important role in “The U.S. Military-Industrial Empire.”

The book ends with “Chapter 5: End Times.” First, it revisits the question of “Is Victory Possible?” Then it looks at the deeper issues raised by “The Trap of Terrorism” and the danger of “General War,” followed by the question “Can AI Be Controlled?” The book ends with an explanation of how this conflict, and the driving dynamics of high-tech and ancient myths produced the Torture of Gaza with nothing but “The Paradox of Hope” to sustain us.

The discerning reader will notice that the way the military decision systems described in this book target specific people or types of people in what are termed “signature strikes,” is very similar to how social media companies target potential customers. Meredith Whittaker, the CEO of Signal and a former Google manager is clear about why this is: “A signature strike is effectively ad targeting but for death.” She is equally blunt about the origins of current AI technology. “AI is a product of the mass surveillance business model in its current form. It is not a separate technological phenomena” (Greenberg and Whittaker 2024). That business model has reshaped the world’s political economy into what Shoshana Zuboff calls Surveillance Capitalism (2019).

Military AI is just one of its dangerous products. The goal of the social media leviathans is to capture these technologies for their own profit, even if it means militarizing them and preventing open governance. Signal, a true nonprofit for the good of society, is for Whittaker an example of alternative that can lead to technology that might help curtail “the authority these companies have claimed for themselves to define our world based on the data they collect” (Greenberg and Whittaker 2024).

Having worked at Google, Whittaker knows these companies have dangerously impoverished perspectives on crucial issues such as what AI is for and how we should create it. As she explains acidly,

What was new to ignite this AI boom right then? It was the presence of massive amounts of data—training data and input data—and powerful computational chips, the more of them strung together, the better. Now, what are those? Those are exactly the affordances that have accrued to the early platform companies that have built out their social media networks,

built out their data centers. With artificial intelligence, we're basically relaundersing a lot of this shit through broken models that are giving Google more and more authority to claim intelligence when what they're actually doing is issuing derivatives of the shitty data they have. And what was AI used for? Why were they into it? Because it's really good at tuning ad algorithms, at targeting ads. (Greenberg and Whittaker 2024)

Going from targeting ads at consumer to targeting weapons on Palestinians has turned out to be horribly easy.

It has been more than a year since Hamas and its allies launched their terror attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 and Israel responded with their own greater terror attacks, killing at least 50,000 people, the vast majority civilians, in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iran. There are many forces that have made this horror possible, especially the ongoing industrial and military support of the U.S., but two other critical drivers are the Sacred Beliefs of the government of Israel (and many of its citizens) and the high technology Israel effectively deploys to kill people and destroy cities. They both foster unrealistic beliefs about the possibilities of military victory over another culture when genocide is precluded. But it isn't just the impossibility of victory that is a problem with tactics seemingly designed to engender future hatred and opposition; it is the cost to the idea of Israel itself, and by sad extension Judaism. For it isn't just anti-Semites who try and tie Judaism to the crimes of the State of Israel, it is the leaders of that state today and their allies in the West, some Jewish, some not. They sow a whirlwind.

*Tu B'av* is sometimes called "Jewish Valentine's Day," but it is way more than that. First, it was a festival of fertility at the full moon of *Av*, the Summer Month, that included dancing in the fields and women importuning men. It is older than monotheism. The Talmud puts forward five other origin stories as well, such as the ending of marriage restrictions among the tribes. One story (see *Ta'anit* 9:11, 69c) stands out as particularly revelatory. It claims that *Tu B'av* marks the beginning and celebrates the end of the generation of Jews sentenced to death by their God for the sin of worshipping the Golden Calf, which was pretty much every Jew wandering in the wilderness but Moses.

During the Exodus, every *Tisha B'Av*, the 9th day of the month of *Av*, 15,000 of the Jews who crossed the Red Sea into the Sinai, out of 600,000, died. The first night this happened it created a sanitation and spiritual nightmare. How to dispose of 15,000 bodies in one day under

the strict Jewish timeline? So from then on, Moses decreed that every year on that date everyone would dig their own grave and sleep in it. Each year 15,000 would not awake, killed in their sleep by their God. This continued for forty years, until the last of the original generation had died. Only then did they move on to the Promised Land (Gilad 2024; Vizotsky 2014).

This is an angry divinity. With one hand he gives and the other takes away. What he gives is other people's land, and his blessing to exterminate all who offend him, like the Amelkites who attacked the Exodus Jews who came into their lands. But he can punish. Not just foreigners but Jews as well, as the story shows. This story and the holiday of *Tu B'av* are particularly popular among rightwing Zionists (Gilad 2024).

It is no accident that what started as a pagan celebration of harvest and love turned into forty years of punishment, and a ritual day of submission to the one God. The Zionists who celebrate this day as a justification for the liquidation of Palestine and Palestinians need to remember the cost. They are digging their own graves and unless their God is real and they are indeed chosen among all people, they will not be rewarded in the end. Rather, they will have dug the grave for Israel as well.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# Relentless History

**Abstract** Contextualizes what is happening in the Middle East, starting with the myths that justify the “Sacred Violence” of Israel, its allies, and its enemies. This includes the imaginings of technologists, and how their “Fantasies” are “Driving Digital Technologies.” It explains why a book about the latest amazing military technology, AI, starts with exploring the magical beliefs of the main combatants and creators. Technologies come out of beliefs, not the other way around. For the tech entrepreneurs, it is the Sacred Hunger of Capitalism, lust for immortality, the Singularity fantasy, and even *The Lord of the Rings*. This conflict is clearly part of the “Late Postmodern War” system which explains why technology does not magically produce victory. Despite this, the increasing integration of warriors and machines and the quest for perfect weapons continues. To wage Postmodern War with the fantasy of winning, old codes of conduct have to be changed. In the case of the Israel Defense Force (IDF), this required fundamentally degrading the “IDF’s Spirit Code.” The greater framing is the role of “Fundamentalisms and Global Narratives” in determining war and peace in the early twenty-first century.

**Keywords** Amalek · Fundamentalisms and War · Revisionist Zionism · Islamists · Tech Bro Fantasies

## SACRED VIOLENCE

To understand Amalek is to understand the Torture of Gaza.

You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible.  
And we do remember.

—Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, October 23, 2023

It is forbidden to take mercy on the cruel, there's no place for any  
humanitarian gestures...The memory of Amalek must be erased.

—Likud MP Boaz Bismuth, November 15, 2023

For the crime of attacking the people of Israel, their God commanded the Israelites commit genocide. Out of tens of thousands of lessons in the Jewish holy tradition, this is what the Prime Minister of Israel referenced when he sent his soldiers into Gaza.

It isn't just Jewish stories that are weaponized. Christian fundamentalists are a major source of support for rightwing Zionists and Jewish fundamentalists (also called Jewish supremacists, Jewish ultranationalists, and messianic radicals in Israel) and both are opposed by Islamist fundamentalists. Even many of the "secular" technologists who create the new decision systems, weaponry, and logistics for Israel have their own irrational belief systems. War may be high-tech these days, but the inspirations for it are as ancient as human civilization, as is the story of Amalek.

The Amaleks were a semi-nomadic tribe in the Sinai and Negev. According to the Torah, when Moses led the Jewish tribes through their territory they attacked, but the Jews defeated the Amalikes in the battle where Moses had to keep his staff above his head to ensure victory (Exodus 17:8–6). This attack so irritated the Jewish God that he spoke to his people.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." —Saul (1 Samuel)



If the ancient holy texts are to be believed, the genocide didn't happen right away. Fighting and massacres were traded between the Hebrews and the Amaleks, but it remained official Jewish God policy until finally the tribe was wiped out (Chronicles 1 4:43).

In the 1980s, Rabbi Israel Hess used the Amalek story to call for killing all Palestinians. In 1994 Baruch Goldstein used it to justify murdering 29 Muslims praying during Ramadan in a mosque in Hebron (Lanard 2023). National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir called Goldstein, who died at the end of his murder spree, his hero at a memorial speech on May 2, 2023 (Andrews 2023).

Israelis have an extensive vocabulary of bloody grievance. One elected official, David Azoulay of Metula, called the Hamas attack a "second Holocaust," advocating the forcible deportation of the people of Gaza to Lebanon "where there are enough refugee camps." Gaza would be "left empty, just like Auschwitz, a museum, so the whole world will learn what the state of Israel can do." The Memorial-Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau called his proposal "shameful" and noted terrorism does not solve terrorism (Karanth 2023), but it breeds it. For many, Israeli atrocities are made sacred by the Holocaust.

But the Holocaust was not just about Jews; it started with disabled people and then moved on to anarchists, communist and socialist enemies of Nazism. Defenders of any kind of democracy were also imprisoned and killed. Only then did Hitler and his followers move on to exterminating those they hated most intimately, the Romany and Jewish people. Although a higher percentage of Romany were killed than Jews, six million Jewish people were indeed murdered. But the plan was to kill all the Jews of the world. And all Slavs (and millions did die). All Africans. All Asians. Arabs as well. The madness was to make a world of ONLY so-called pure Aryans. Israel does not own this horror, and certainly should not use it to justify their own Crimes Against Humanity.

Nazism came to power because of the nightmare of the trenches of the Western Front and the rest of the violence of the Great War, and the postwar suffering the Allies inflicted on Germany out of revenge. It is not an accident that some Zionists were transformed by Fascist violence into what they started out hating, and made Israel into an apartheid state seeking the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people. They felt justified by what was done to the Jewish people of Europe by the Nazis and other Fascists.

So it is not an accident that the armed resistance to Israeli terrorism and oppression has embraced terrorism as a policy, leading to the atrocities some Hamas fighters and supporters committed on captured soldiers, women, and children. That Israel kills more women and children, destroys homes and hospitals, openly murders journalists and aid workers, and imprisons millions (as in Gaza), and fosters groups such as Hamas, is something many people chose to ignore, but this is the direct cause of the horrors that are happening now.

In Israel it is a crime to advocate the ethnic cleansing or genocide of a people, but apparently it is only calling for Jewish genocide (or just expressing opinions the government doesn't approve of) that is prosecuted. Despite dozens of calls by elected officials for the destruction of Palestinian Gaza (even with nuclear bombs as Likud MK Tally Gotliv did), or for eradicating the very idea of Palestine, no-one is ever prosecuted for it. As of the end of November, 2023, 269 investigations and 86 indictments had been lodged against Israelis, mainly Jews, for speech the authorities considered "supporting Hamas." These thought crimes ranged from pointing out that Israel is a partner in a mutual terror-system with Hamas, to just supporting a ceasefire (Graham-Harrison and Kierszenbaum 2024).

Dozens of Israeli public figures wrote a public letter demanding that the law be applied fairly:

For the first time that we can remember, the explicit calls to commit atrocious crimes, as stated, against millions of civilians have turned into a legitimate and regular part of Israeli discourse... Normalized discourse which calls for annihilation, erasure, devastation and the like is liable to impact the manner by which soldiers conduct themselves...Israeli society is embroiled in trauma which will take years to heal. This is precisely the substrate on which immoral monsters are liable to grow, and are growing. (Graham-Harrison and Kierszenbaum 2024)

But the main parties to this conflict are driven by ideas of Sacred Violence, and so are consciously fostering the "substrate on which immoral monsters are liable to grow." This includes the U.S. Empire with its "sacred" mission to preserve democracy (or at least its simulation) and Western Civilization (their version of it), the Germans with their need to atone for the Holocaust, fundamentalist Christians wishing for the apocalypse, Islamists (the academic term for fundamentalist political Muslims,

see Bodansky 1999, p. ix, note), and even the technologists in Silicon Valley and elsewhere, with pseudo-scientific beliefs (immortality, singularity, free market capitalism) that valorize not just their actions, but their wealth and power.

Many leaders in Israel, as well as some of their key supporters in the United States, are enamored with using Sacred Violence to achieve ancient aspirations, such as restoring the Third Temple. This is not a trivial goal historically or politically. Since the Romans destroyed the Second Temple thousands of years ago, the site has gone through many different incarnations, only a fragment of retaining wall for the Mount of the Temple remains—the Wailing Wall. The mount is now occupied by the Al Aqsa Mosque and is called Haram al-Sharif. It is the third most holy site in Islam. Legally it isn't even in Israel, as is made clear by multiple UN resolutions and enough treaties to make the issue a speciality in International Law.

Fundamentalist Jews often protest at the Wailing Wall—against women or Christians or Moslems, or calling for the destruction of the Al Aqsa Mosque and building the Third Jewish Temple. Some Jews want the Third Temple because it is God's will, and he has given it to them if they can take it. Fundamentalist Christians are for it because it is a necessary step to the end of the world, which ironically requires killing all but 40,000 Jews to keep around for converting at the last minute. This is Armageddon, their rapture.

Many Jewish and Christian fanatics agree that a number of flawless female virgins are needed to raise the new Temple. After amazingly complicated rituals one is to be slaughtered and her blood spread by hand—Virgin red heifers that is. The full ritual is detailed in a number of sacred Jewish texts. In the *Old Testament*, it is described in Numbers 19 (King James translation).

And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying... Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came the yoke...

And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face.

And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times.

And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn...

Lawrence Wright (1998) tells how fundamentalist Christians in the U.S. have teamed up with the Jewish Temple movement to breed the perfect red cows necessary for this magic to happen. His conclusion is worth quoting at length:

Jerusalem makes a cult of holiness, one that fuels the passion and yearning of millions for a personal encounter with God...For centuries, believers have streamed into the city in order to bathe in this sense of divinity and to marvel at the site that all three religions believe will be the place of the Last Judgment. On that day, both Evangelical Christians and Orthodox Jews expect their Messiah to stride down from the Mount of Olives and burst through the Golden Gate. Many Muslims believe that the Ka'aba—the holiest place in Mecca—will be transported to Jerusalem, and that all the dead will meet again in the streets of the city. As long as such mythologies are taken literally, the struggle for Jerusalem and the Temple Mount will never end. The religious carnage that has marked every era of this maddened city will continue, because whoever controls Jerusalem controls access to the sacred places. It is a way of owning God.

Jerusalem syndrome is when people visiting the Holy City are driven mad by its long history and powerful energy. Jerusalem syndrome writ large is no basis for military and political policy, yet it has clearly infected the government of Israel today, is prevalent in powerful fundamentalist Christian circles in the United States, and is common among the leaders of Hamas. The October 7 attack was code-named Operation Al Aqsa Flood, after all.

It is a bleeding wound. Zionists are continually violating agreed-upon procedures for sharing the holy sites of Jerusalem. In 2024 the pretext was Jerusalem Day, and over 70,000 marched through Palestinian neighborhoods on their way to pray illegally on the Temple Mount chanting, “May your village burn,” “Death to Arabs,” and “Gaza is a cemetery.” There were clashes between the marchers and Palestinians allied with Jewish supporters despite the heavy police presence of 3,000 uniformed and plainclothes officers. Ori, 18, a Zionist attending the parade, said: “These guys are Christians and Muslims. They don’t like us and we don’t like them. Today is about celebrating the return of the Jews to Jerusalem after 2,000 years. We are showing them who owns this place” (McKernan 2024).

The Jerusalem Day parade was under the control of Israel’s far-right and racist national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, in his role as head

of police. He told Army Radio, “We will march ... and Jews will go up to the Temple Mount. All the generals in Gaza tell me that every house they enter they see [pictures of] the Temple Mount, so they should be hit in the place that is most important to them” (Horn et al. 2024).

The conflict between fanatics shapes the world because fundamentalism is never defensive, it is always expansionistic. “Grow or die” is not just the slogan of the insatiably greedy. Self-described Christians in the U.S. feel compelled to force the rest of the country to believe, or pretend to believe, as they do. Islamists are the same. Their first enemy is other Muslims who do not believe as they do. But they also feel called to spread their particular flavor of Islamist beliefs beyond their homelands (Gray 2005, pp. 4, 12–16, 51–2).

They believe that not only should all Muslim countries become Islamist, they must unite in one Caliphate. For some this is not enough. One leading Shite scholar, the Iraqi Ayatollah Muhammad Baqui al-Sadr, argued that, “The world as it is today is how others shaped it. We have two choices either to accept with submission, which means letting Islam die, or to destroy it so that we can construct the world as Islam required” (Bodansky 1999, p. xiv).

Sheikh Assam, one of Bin Laden’s mentors, is just as clear:

Jihad must not be abandoned until Allah alone is worshipped. Jihad continues until Allah’s word is raised high. Jihad until the oppressed peoples are freed. Jihad to protect our dignity and to restore our occupied lands, Jihad is the way of everlasting glory. (Bodansky 1999, p. 10)

Sadly, Sheikh Assam is not alone in believing all Others are the enemy. Any fundamentalist beliefs can justify Sacred Violence, not just those of the People of the Book (Jews, Moslems, Christians), not just Fascism but Marxist-Leninism, not just Protestantism but Catholicism, not just Shi’ism but Sunnism, not just Buddhism but Atheism.

Ancient as absolute belief systems are, today they are complicated by new and incredibly powerful communication systems that spread facts as easily as fake news, making fantasies a potent part of reality.

## THE FANTASIES DRIVING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Our leaders and scholars...have given up on peace on earth and now seek peace of mind through the worship of new techno-deities. They look up to the surveillance satellite, deep into the entrails of electronic micro-circuitry, and from behind Stealth protection to find the omniscient machines and incontrovertible signs that can help us see and, if state reason necessitates, evade or destroy the others.

—James Der Derian (1990, p. 298)

Although many technology leaders are Christian or Jewish fundamentalists of one type or another and therefore solid supporters of Israel's Torture of Gaza, more of them are decidedly secular in their outlook, more committed to profit than prophets. They usually give their greed a decidedly fantastical twist, arguing that the invisible hand of the unregulated market—and other “zombie” economic theories that are demonstrably untrue but cannot die anyway—is all society needs to keep the rich and their companies from doing whatever they want.

This is their justification for their pursuit of profit. If it makes money, they have every right to do it. Slavery was one of the first businesses justified in this way.

Money is sacred as everyone knows... So then must be the hunger for it and the means we use to obtain it. Once a man is in debt he becomes a flesh and blood form of money, a walking investment. You can do what you like with him, you can work him to death or you can sell him. This cannot be called cruelty or greed because we are seeking only to recover our investment and that is a sacred duty. (Unsworth, 1993, p. 176)

It is the insanity of justifying slavery based on this sick logic that Barry Unsworth explores in his novel *Sacred Hunger*. But is not our world just as morally mad? Consider the Torture of Gaza happening in view of the whole planet, only part of which is horrified. Or what about claiming any innovation that is profitable, no matter how “disruptive,” is not just justified—it is better for everyone—it is morally good to desire this profit. This is the myth that makes capitalism so dangerous. This desire to do well for oneself (which means good for all, doesn't it?) is the “sacred hunger” that drives the world's neo-colonial empires and the corporate domination of our personal lives.

At the heights of the world economy today are kleptocratic gangs, rapacious power brokers, corrupt politicians, cults of personality, national militaries as organized crime, and other obvious authoritarians. At the beating heart and bleeding edge of the dominant economy, the U.S. Empire, are corporate titans who think the looting of living nature and human culture is not just necessary, but laudable. But it is clear now that what is called capitalism these days only makes most things worse. This is inevitable considering capitalism's origins in racist slavery (created by Europe), modern finance to facilitate colonialism (the Dutch), European global colonialism (the British especially), and the United States' invention of the currently dominant postmodern imperialistic system.

But blind faith in capitalism is thin gruel for even the most stunted souls. The tech world has also embraced the technological and moral imaginary they find in Science Fiction and Fantasy. From SF they get dreams of immortality, the hope for an AI singularity (the "rapture of the nerds"), and space colonization. From fantasy they have appropriated *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR) in its more conservative (hierarchical, white, masculinist, almost fascist), interpretations. Indeed, it isn't just tech moguls such as Thiel, Bezos, Musk, Luckey, and their minions who are inspired by Middle Earth, neo-fascists are as well.

Especially in Italy. When Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was a young activist in the Italian Social Movement, she became a Tolkien fan. She still describes the *Lord of the Rings* as "a sacred text" and she personally opened a 2023 exhibition about it at the National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art. As one observer explained, "In Middle-earth lore, some Italian neo-fascists see an existential struggle between the forces of tradition and modernity that resembles their own ideology" (Oltermann 2023).

Tech bro billionaires' love for LOTR seems a bit different. While Tolkien himself grew more and more sympathetic to anarchism as he aged, as in the lightly governed Shire of the Hobbits, his super-powerful fans getting rich off military contracts are drawn to the elitism inherent in a world where Wizards and Kings play such a big role. That the actual saviors of Middle Earth are lowly hobbits is an inconvenient detail they work hard to ignore. As they ignore that the ring (AI?) and even the Palantíri (total surveillance) are dangerous technologies that need to be destroyed (Lindenfeld 2023). Yet their commitment to them runs deep.

Peter Thiel named his military information company Palantir Technologies, after the seeing stones of LOTR, that by the Third Age almost

always corrupt their users, if not destroy them. Only Sauron, the prime evil, can use the Palantíri for his own ends. Although Thiel nicknamed his Palo Alto offices “the Shire,” it seems he envisions himself less the plucky hobbit and more the supreme all powerful manipulator. Thiel’s top company is the venture capital Founder’s Firm, called “the precious” as an in-joke by Thiel and his circle (Lindenfeld 2023).

Among his other companies are:

- Valar Ventures (Valar are the Gods of Middle Earth). Thiel used it to scam the New Zealand government for citizenship.
- Narya Capital, founded by Thiel with \$100 million in 2020. He made J.D. Vance co-founder for free. In 2022 he gave Vance’s campaign for Senate \$15 million. Narya is the Elvish Ring of Fire, carried by Gandalf the Wizard (Marx 2024).
- Mithril Capital, founded by Thiel and Ajay Royan is named for the magical metal of LOTR. Vance started working there in 2016. Mithril is also a “blockchain” protocol stylized as MITH.
- Rivendell One, a Thiel holding company, and Rivendell Trust where Thiel put his Roth IRA (a rich person’s way of avoiding taxes). Rivendell is an Elvish sanctuary.
- Athelas, the name of a healthcare management software platform, is also Elvish for kingsfoil, the common herb that Kings of Gondor can use to heal victims of dark magic (Marx 2024).

Thiel is not the only LOTR fan boy with military companies. A founder of the VR company Oculus, billionaire Palmer Luckey, named his latest company Anduril, Aragon’s sword, The Flame of the West. It makes AI for defense and is deeply committed to Israel’s savage ethnic cleansing of Gaza and other aggressions. It built surveillance towers on the Mexican border during Trump’s first administration. They are more like Sauron’s watchful unblinking eye than Aragon’s sword.

Luckey wants Hamas, and only Hamas, condemned for all the horror happening in Gaza. He told *The Wall Street Journal*,

What’s happening in Israel is just another instance of the same type of evil that’s been going on for a very long time. And I think it reflects very poorly on our billionaire class that you’re not seeing a whole country effort to become involved and to speak up about these issues, hedging on condemnation of Hamas for fear of saying the wrong thing, either in the court of public opinion or because it hurts their business interests. (Knight 2024)



But the reality is supporting Israel's wars is very good for Luckey's business indeed. Anduril has won major contracts for technology that will probably be sold to Israel, financed by U.S. military aid, which is almost always a direct profit (aid!) to the military-industrial titans that run so much of American foreign policy. One of Anduril's projects is Roadrunner, an autonomous (for both detection and destruction) jet-powered robot to target threats such as jet-powered drones. Supposedly, it will be made for only a few hundred thousand dollars. But then, supposedly, it works, although the announcement video was faked—unless the Roadrunner will really be able to operate in the desert without kicking up as much dust as the clever bird does in the cartoons. Anduril will get a billion dollars to birth Roadrunner. Its other lucrative contracts include an “AI-powered sensor fusion platform” to turn U.S. soldiers into “superheroes” by giving them “the power of perfect omniscience over their area of operations, where they know where every single enemy is, where every friend is, where every asset is” (Cockburn 2024). This is magical thinking.

But magic is seductive. Another powerful super fan of LOTR is Sean Parker, founder of Napster and Facebook's first President. He owns 25% of Peter Jackson's company. Jeff Bezos had his company Amazon pay \$250 million for the rights to *Rings of Power*. Meanwhile, Elon Musk, whose masculinity seems incredibly delicate, is furious with Bezos for making every male character in *Rings of Power* “a coward or Jerk” (Loewenstein 2023; Lindenfeld 2023).

The question is, “Don't they realize they are the bad guys?” Apparently, Mark Zuckerberg's employees call him “The Eye of Sauron.” He says the label is applied “lovingly” (Moore 2022). Such is his understanding of love. As Patrick James, a professor of International Relations pointed out, “What you see in *Lord of the Rings* says more about you than it does about the storyline” (Lindenfeld 2023). The super-rich are no more rational than the rest of us, despite what they tell themselves.

While practitioners of contemporary war also pride themselves on being rational, they are either lying or self-deluded. War, like business, cannot be rational; the stakes are too high and it is too complicated. Technologies, identities, hope and fears all interact in the context of the long story of war. As Morris Janowitz (1971, p. 417) realized, “New types of warfare do not eliminate old and even more primitive forms.”

Accepting this is necessary if we are to understand war today, as we stumble our way through postmodernity.

## LATE POSTMODERN WAR

Postmodern wars take place between two supposed impossibilities: apocalyptic total war and utopian peace.

—Chris Hables Gray (1997, p. 168)

The context for contemporary war is weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and of worldwide nets of unstoppable information flows, both public and clandestine. There are no true military triumphs, no really decisive battles, only cultural and political victories, the rise and fall of ideologies, economies, and regimes and the relentlessly increasing power of technoscience and its productions.

Only twice before has war changed so fundamentally. Thousands of years ago ancient war developed from ritual war about the time civilization arose. Five hundred years ago modern war was articulated in Machiavelli's call for complete mobilization and war without limits. Decisive battles became the goal and total war the ideal. By World War II, wars were global, battle continuous, and weapons absolute.

Then, Atomic bombs made it clear that modern war's main assumption—the political utility of total war—was insane. Yet most of the modern war system remains in place: the military-industrial complex, full mobilization of technoscience (a perpetual revolution in military affairs), and the assumption that war is still the most effective political tool available to policymakers. Hence, postmodern war.

The rise of modern war half a millennium ago coincided with the invention of nation-states, the spread of European colonialism, and the triumph of rationalism, especially as formalized in science and engineering. These developments were all related, so it is no surprise that the crisis of postmodern war parallels the decline of the nation-state, the collapse of European colonialism, and a growing critique of reductionistic rationality. TerrorWar, the rise of the corporations, and deepening globalization are the latest manifestations of collapsing modernity.

In the last 50 years there has been another fundamental shift in war—its very existence is seen by many people as not just unnecessary, but as a direct threat to human survival. For good reason, considering the growing power and continued proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

Even though it cannot last much longer, postmodern war has maintained the same basic properties for 75 years:

- The main justification for war is peace.
- The main justification for repression is freedom.
- Security comes from putting the very future of the planet in grave risk.
- People are too fragile for the new levels of lethality; machines are too stupid for the complexity of battle. War is cyborgian.
- The pace of battle is set by the machines, but experienced by humans.
- The battlefield is a battle space. It is four-dimensional and ranges into space. It is on thousands of electronic wavelengths. It is on the “home front” as much as the battlefield.
- The battle space is often constrained. Many targets may not be attacked. Even in war zones, the full fury of postmodern weapons is reserved for special killing boxes, free-fire zones, politically acceptable targets, and the actual battle line, if any.
- Battle now is beyond human scale. It is as fast as laser beams and goes 24 hours a day. It ranges through the frequency spectrum from ultra-low to ultra-high, and its meanings are contested around the globe.
- Every act of war needs political preparation and justification. There is only a very limited war space where all important decisions are made on military grounds. Wars can only be won politically. Through military means the best that can be accomplished is not to lose.
- Obvious genocide, now that it is technologically easy, is morally impossible for most people—but not all.
- The industrialized countries want colonialism without responsibility, Empire without casualties.
- Soldiers are no longer uniform(ed). They range from Department of Defense officials in expensive suits to women at the front lines, with spies, flacks, analysts, commando-warriors, techs, grunts, desk jockeys, and others.
- Civilians, and nature itself, are usually more threatened in battle than the soldiers are.
- New modes of war are invented but old types continue.
- War proliferates into the general culture.

The contradictions between modern war and the technologies that render postmodern war absurd also make it incredibly dangerous, and could well lead to conflict involving nuclear or biological weapons or other WMDs. Meanwhile, a new kind of war, or perhaps even peace, struggles to be born. What does this mean in terms of politics? If apocalypse is our fate, then all bets are off. If not, there are real possibilities. To sort them out, and increase our chances for their realization, we must understand postmodern war and the driving force at its heart: perpetual technological revolution.

Since the start of the twentieth century there have always been discussions about how some new Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) is fundamentally changing war. Since World War II it has usually been new electronics or information processing that is driving the newest RMA. AI is just the latest of these. However, a closer look suggests that there is no single RMA. Rather, since 1945 at least, we have been experiencing a Perpetual (or permanent) Revolution in Military Affairs.

Since the use of two atomic bombs by the U.S. on Japan rendered the basic idea of modern war (total mobilization for total war) absurd, war has been postmodern. The different RMAs that have been postulated are really part of a system of continual basic changes in military technology and doctrine in a futile attempt to overcome the basic contradiction of war today: modern principles in the context of postmodern technologies.

This means that Baron Von Clausewitz's modernist slogan "War is politics by other means" no longer applies. Instead, politics has become an extension of war, as Michel Foucault (1980) claimed. While the First Cold War with the Communists has been replaced by a more amorphous Second Cold War, ostensibly against Terrorism but actually of Terror (TerrorWar), the basic structure of the postmodern war system remains the same: no total war but all other types of war, continual technological innovation, increasing speed and lethality (including the proliferation of WMDs), the militarization of technology and science, more intimate human-machine systems (cyborgization), the fetishization of information and ever-increasing fear.

Although this system of Postmodern War is now fundamentally at conflict with itself, it is still dynamic. The dominate doctrines call for continual military innovation, bureaucracies are dedicated to it, and the key engine of technological advance, the computer chip, doubles in power every dozen months or so while AI computing power is increasing even faster. The "institutionalization of innovation" has met Moore's Law

(the geometric increase in computer chip power) with startling effect, producing major military innovations continually.

As for peace, or just real security, we know today there will be no such thing no matter what the RMA, for three fundamental reasons: the fog of war, the limits of information technology, and the Postmodern War system.

Late Postmodern War is organized around terror. Originally, terror was the appropriate emotional response to natural disasters or being condemned to damnation for eternity. Only with the French Revolution was it politicized, and then it meant terror by the state. States have worked hard to invert that, so now many people think only non-state actors can be terrorists, and that states are somehow exempt. But state violence is wholesale, non-state violence is retail. Shooting civilians to death is only different from bombing them to death in that the bombings kill many more innocents. When you add in the state terrorism that goes by the name of “counter-terrorism,” it is clear that states kill the most by far. They use extreme violence to defend their monopoly on violence (Gray 2005, pp. 3–7).

The “war” on terror has naturalized terror itself. All war is terrorism now—TerrorWar. Startling as this seems, in retrospect it was inevitable. War has always been about terror, often mainly about terror. Jose Zulaika and William Douglass explained in 1997:

The concept of ‘war’ itself is no longer the same when deprived of the goal of military victory: the traditional meaning of war is being replaced by *terrorism* (defined as ‘surrogate war’) and *deterrence* (defined as ‘mutual balance of terror’). (Gray 2005, p. 6)

That both sides of such a conflict end up embracing terrorism is no surprise. While “War is always a struggle for meaning” (Gray 2005, p. xii), TerrorWar can only produce certain meanings and victory or peace are not among them. Now power for Netanyahu and the Right in Israel is generated by war. So it will continue. It just so happens that the IDF has modified their ethics code to make this possible.

## THE IDF'S SPIRIT CODE

It should not be a surprise that the IDF, which once claimed to be among the most moral militaries in the world, now has a code of ethics that violates several key principles of International Law. Since 2005 the IDF's *Ruach Tzahal* "Spirit" Ethical Code has formalized their long-held belief that Israeli lives are worth more than the lives of Palestinians and other Arabs. Specifically, that the lives of Israeli soldiers are worth more than the lives of Palestinian civilians—it is better to kill them than to risk Israeli soldiers. This is a fundamental departure from International Law, which enshrines the duty to protect noncombatants. It also explains why IDF soldiers gunned down three unarmed, shirtless, men waving a white flag on October 7, 2023. They were Jewish hostages who had escaped. The mistake under IDF ethics wasn't killing unarmed surrendering young men, the mistake was they were Jews, not Palestinians. The same goes for Yuval Doran Kestelman, a Jewish civilian, who had just stopped a terrorist attack at a bus stop in Jerusalem and was unarmed with his hands in the air when he was gunned down by soldiers in November 2023.

The established Principle of Distinction (see also Chapter 3) states that military operations "at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives" (International Red Cross 2023). But the IDF's policy is to kill civilians if there is any risk to soldiers. Muhammad Ali Khalidi, of York University in Toronto, documents in horrifying detail IDF soldiers and officers admitting exactly that about earlier operations in Lebanon and Gaza. He also shows how an author of the code, Asa Kasher, and General Amos Yadlin, justify the prioritizing of combatants (if Israeli) over noncombatants (if not Israeli) using the "war on terror" and claims that Lebanon, the West Bank, and Gaza are not under "state control," although this is demonstrably untrue (Khalidi 2019).

Seventy IDF military veterans validate Khalidi's analysis in their critique of the 2015 Israeli Gaza operation Protective Edge, in the report "This is How We Fought in Gaza" from the Tel Aviv-based Breaking the Silence organization (Opall-Rome 2015). For example, when permission to fire heavy weapons was granted to junior commanders, they ordered soldiers to fire at everyone in the combat zone (a civilian city), replicating the "Free-Fire Zones" of the Vietnam War.

To quote from the report: “According to the 32-year-old veteran of the IDF’s Nahal infantry brigade, the IDF ‘appears to have made a deliberate shift in doctrine to what you might call zero risk to our troops at all costs.’” And, “The guiding military principle of minimum risk to our forces, even at the cost of harming innocent civilians, alongside efforts to deter and intimidate innocent civilians led to massive and unprecedented harm to the population and the civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip.”

The report adds,

Another infantryman, a first sergeant operating in the north part of the strip, testified: “They told us: ‘There aren’t supposed to be any civilians there. If you spot someone, shoot.’ Whether it posed a threat or not wasn’t a question, and that makes sense to me. If you shoot someone in Gaza it’s cool, no big deal. First of all, because it’s Gaza, and second, because that’s warfare. That, too, was made clear to us; they told us, ‘Don’t be afraid to shoot,’ and they made it clear that there were no uninvolved civilians.”

“I want aggression! If we suspect a building, we take down this building! If there’s a suspect in one of the floors of that building, we shell it. No second thoughts. If it’s either them or us, let it be them. No second thoughts. If someone approaches us, unarmed, and keeps coming despite our warning shot in the air, he’s dead. No one has second thoughts. Let errors take their lives, not ours.”

—An IDF military commander

Valuing the lives of Israeli soldiers above those of innocent Palestinians isn’t just a violation of ancient military traditions and existing International Law, it is profoundly undemocratic. Democracy depends on equal treatment under the law. To give the “benefit of the doubt” to the armed representative of the State, as rightists everywhere do for the police, strikes at the very heart of this principle. Codes of Conduct for the powerful are a technology that makes democracies possible, if they are limiting, just, and authentic. To have a military code that justifies War Crimes is the opposite.

The degradation of democracy in Israel is already evident because the law is a sham when it comes to crimes against Palestinians. The most telling recent example is the torture and sexual abuse of Palestinians at the military prison of Sde Teiman in the Negev desert, which not only held captured fighters from Gaza, but doctors and other community leaders. Whistleblowers, detained Palestinians and videos confirm that it was “a torture camp.” There was all the evil typical of such places: restraints,

sensory and sleep deprivation, sensory saturation (lights, sounds), sexual humiliation (photographed naked, diapered, beatings on genitals), gang and object (electrified probe) rape, beatings, not treating wounds and even handcuffing leading to amputations, surgery without anesthesia, and murder (at least 36 deaths in custody) (Valdez 2024a; Frankel and Meizer 2024).

This is certainly not the only Israeli prison where these things happen, indeed it is quite normal (Valdez 2024a). Investigations by the UN, CNN, AP, *Haaretz*, and the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem all prove that there is a network of these torture camps (Karanth 2024). But what made Sde Teiman different was military whistleblowers (Fogelman 2024) civilian medical reports about the gang rape victims, a leaked video of the assault by IDF prison guards and the shifting global moral calculus driven by the Torture of Gaza that has opened many eyes to Israeli crimes.

But when moves were made to punish ten guards, over 200 protesters, including armed and masked soldiers from Force 100, who served at Sde Teiman, broke into the site calling the soldiers and Border Police traitors, supported by Members of the Knesset (MK) and at least two Cabinet Ministers. One of these was National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. No arrests were made. Several dozen others protested at the home of Major General Yifat Tomer-Yershalmi, the Military Advocate General, calling her a traitor as well. A Major from Force 100 and two MKs were also present at these protests (Peleg and Solomon 2024).

Ben-Gvir denounced the prosecution of the torturers and rapists as “shameful” and called them “our best heroes.” He likened the conditions at Sde Teiman to a “summer camp” and called for “patience for the terrorists” to end (Frankel and Meizer 2024).

The barrage of publicity led the government to close the camp and move the prisoners out of the spotlight. During this time, five Israeli NGOs sued in the high court to have the camp closed. The court found closing the already closed camp a good idea but in a “timid” ruling did nothing about the of blocking Red Cross investigations, other torture sites, and other degradations of the rule of law (Shany and Cohen 2024). Is it any wonder the International Court of Justice has found that the legal system of Israel is apartheid (Valdez 2024b)?

Of the original ten Sde Teiman accused, five were quickly released and the others were not yet prosecuted as of October 2024. One of them, Meir Ben-Shitrit, revealed on national TV that he was the main suspect in the gang rape (Ofir 2024). It made him a media hero in Israel. The



first thing he did on television was read Deuteronomy 1, 16–18, quoting from his God.

And I charged your judges at that time, “Hear the disputes between your people and judge fairly, whether the case is between two Israelites or between an Israelite and a foreigner residing among you. Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of anyone, for judgment belongs to God. Bring me any case too hard for you, and I will hear it.” And at that time I told you everything you were to do.

Even though many of his accusers are Jewish, he frames his persecution as a plot by foreigners, justifying this with a quote from his sacred book. The book assures him he is innocent by definition. Any violence he committed was sacred. That is the new spirit of the IDF.

## FUNDAMENTALISMS AND GLOBAL NARRATIVES

Fundamentalisms (which always have their Sacred Violence) and democracy cannot coexist. It is epistemological. Democracies are about heteroglossia, many diverse voices coming to a working agreement. Fundamentalists tolerate only one truth and that truth is what makes their violence sacred. When the West, especially the United States, justify their Neo-colonialist and imperialist aggressions as defending democracy, they are telling a dangerous lie.

Democracy is not an idea invented or owned by the West, as shown in *The Life and Death of Democracy* by John Keane (2009) and *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* by David Graeber and David Wengrow (2021). These two wonderful books prove democracies of many different types have appeared throughout history all over the world. What both these crucial works also demonstrate is that democracies can die. This is what is happening in Israel.

When dozens of masked Settlers raided the West Bank village of Jit in the Summer of 2024, burning buildings and cars and beating residents, a “senior defense official” admitted IDF soldiers “didn’t do anything to stop the pogrom. They just stood next to them, saw everything and did nothing.” The Settlers murdered 23-year-old Rasheed Mahmoud Abed Al Khadier Sadah. Border Police witnessed the attack and made no arrests (Briener 2024; Khoury et al. 2024).

Gideon Levy argues that Settler immunity for such rioting and murder would not be possible “if the army had fulfilled its duty.” After all, the army “Knows how to suppress any peaceful protest or Palestinian riot, but stands aside or supports pogroms perpetuated by Jews. It’s a policy, not a mishap. It’s the intention, not a mistake” (Levy 2024).

Impunity for crimes by militants is a leitmotif of fascism. Again and again murders by the *squadre d’azione* of Mussolini (Foot 2022) or the Brownshirts and Blackshirts of Hitler went unpunished. In the rare cases where convictions were obtained, the perpetrators almost always escaped or were pardoned (Shirer 1960).

It is the same for Israel. According to B’Tselem, the Israeli human rights organization, on the West Bank in 2023 Palestinians have been forced out of at least 18 of their villages, there have been at least 1,270 attacks on civilians (a rise of over 50% from the year before) and at least 589 civilians were killed by the IDF and 11 by Settlers. Five Settlers and nine IDF soldiers were also killed. In the last 10 years “just 3% of official investigations into settler violence have ended in conviction” (Knell and Luckhurst 2024).

When Ronen Bar, Shin Beit’s head, denounced Settler terrorism as criminality, because it threatens Israel national security, there were calls for him to resign from far-right MKs and Ministers, including the Minister of Security Ben-Gvir, who Bar also denounced for leading a march and illegal prayers on Temple Mount (Borger 2024). But such critiques are rare, and usually repressed if not made by powerful people.

For years, all stories related to foreign affairs or security have had to be submitted to the IDF’s military censor. No other Western country has this kind of policy. The censor represents not the people of Israel, but the military and the industrial complex it feeds. In 2020, when Ariella Ben Ayraham left her post as head censor, she immediately joined one of the top military corporations, the NSO Group, which was sanctioned by the U.S. for selling its Pegasus spyware to authoritarian regimes and criminal gangs.

Another sign of fundamentalism is the demonization of one’s enemies. Israel’s sophisticated campaign to accuse Hamas of planned and multiple sexual attacks on October 7 is cover for their efforts to deny Israel’s own sex war crimes.

Based on video from the body cams of Hamas fighters and other sources, *Al Jazeera* produced a documentary about October 7, 2023 that exposes a massive misinformation campaign orchestrated by Israel.

It shows that while Hamas certainly committed crimes, such as killing unarmed civilians and taking them hostage, most of the worst actions were perpetuated by non-fighters who streamed over the border once Israel's defenses were overrun (Tkacik 2024; *Al Jazeera* Staff 2023).

While Secretary of State Antony Blinkin spread untruths, such as stories of beheaded babies, in the U.S. Congress and the *New York Times* published an exposé that eventually was totally debunked (see below), Israeli mistakes were not aired. For example, IDF helicopters killed some of the music festival attendees while following the Hannibal doctrine and destroying every vehicle heading for Gaza even if it held hostages. IDF tanks and helicopters reduced Kibbutz Be'eri to rubble (as they would soon do to Gaza as well), killing 12 residents. Israel announced Hamas had killed 1,400 (782 unarmed civilians) a few days after October 7, although it has never tallied how many of those were IDF friendly fire or the unfriendly Hannibal doctrine being applied. In any event, way more than 1,400 Palestinians had been killed by then, but somehow that wasn't as newsworthy (Tkacik 2024; *Al Jazeera* Staff 2023). How is such uneven coverage produced? A close look at one story of news management is instructive.

Right after October 7, 2023 the *New York Times* hired an outside consultant, Nat Schwartz, a former IDF air force intelligence official, to work with two regular reporters—her nephew Adam Sella and the Pulitzer prize-winning Jeffrey Gettleman. Schwartz had no pretense of objectivity. She liked a tweet calling for Gaza to be turned “into a slaughterhouse” and to “Violate any norm, on the way to victory. Those in front of us are human animals who do not hesitate to violate minimal rules.” A podcast interview Schwartz did in Hebrew revealed that the *New York Times* wasn't interested in finding the truth so much as spreading their predetermined position. But they did have to walk back their claim that Hamas “weaponized” sexual violence and that “there may have been systematic use of sexual assault” (Scahill et al. 2024).

In the interview, Schwartz reveals she could not get hospitals, rape crisis centers, trauma recovery facilities, or sex assault hotlines to confirm any sexual assaults in the October 7 attack. When she started interviewing people, she discovered that many of the widely spread stories were bogus, such as two teen girls raped at Kibbutz Nahal Oz (later changed to Kibbutz Be'eri, equally untrue), a dead baby in the garbage, and messages written in blood in Arabic. One of her main sources was Yossi Landau, a senior official for an ultra-Orthodox “rescue” organization. Although

Landau is documented to have made up atrocities before, in this case, the *New York Times* cites him often. Most other witnesses to systematic rape have been debunked. All that is left are reports of civilian Palestinian men raping at least one woman and maybe others (Scahill et al. 2024).

This is not the story Jake Trapper and others reported on CNN with the inflammatory headline, “Attackers laughed as they raped and murdered a woman in Israel on October 7.” Despite claims made in the *NYT* article about many cases “of rape and sexual violence committed as Hamas fighters burst into Israel” being documented by Israeli police, no such evidence has been produced. This doesn’t stop them from complaining that the “United National and human rights organizations were slow to denounce the reports of rape and mutilation against Israelis,” crimes we now know did not happen (Trapper et al. 2024).

Still, the evidence that some Hamas and other Palestinian fighters committed sexual assaults during the October 7 attack is strong, and that a few unaffiliated Gaza men did cross over into Israel to rape and murder is undeniable. Unsupported are claims of babies having their heads cutoff and pregnant women being mutilated and murdered (Shuham 2023). According to the very detailed and horrifying analysis in *Haaretz* by Liza Rozovsky six months after the attack, somewhere between 15 and 30 women were raped and murdered and around 15 raped and not killed. Most of the assaults took place at the music festival, almost always at the edges with few witnesses, and in several of the most reported cases by men who did not even have guns.

The witnesses and pattern of assaults indicate the claim this was Hamas policy (McKernan 2024) is not supported by the evidence. The only evidence this is what Hamas ordered is a “manual” that has never been produced, and three captured fighters from Gaza who said they were ordered to rape. But if this was a general order, why out of 1700 survivors asked only 21 reported witnessing or experiencing sexual assault? Besides, an order such as this would make no sense. The goal of Hamas was to capture hostages to pressure for the release of Palestinian political prisoners and to win the admiration of the world. Mass rape accomplishes neither of these goals, and also goes against the professed religion of Hamas’s leadership (Rovosky 2024). Rape happens everywhere, especially in war, even though all religions, Judaism among them, condemn it in most cases.

Rape and other sexual assaults by Jewish paramilitaries going back to 1948 and continuing with illegal Settlers today are well-documented

(Madar 2023). Considering the extent of this war, it is inevitable regular Israeli soldiers have raped Palestinians and it has been covered up. This happens in almost all militaries: U.S., Norwegian (on UN assignment), Indians and Pakistanis (on UN assignment), and so on. After all, Israeli soldiers have raped other Israeli soldiers. But as with the sexual assaults committed by Hamas and other Gaza militants, it does not seem to be a policy.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of cases of documented sexual assault by Israeli authorities on Palestinians are from Israeli jails and prisons. For example, one of the U.S. State Department officials who resigned to protest U.S. support for this Gaza invasion recounts how a few years ago, a documented case of rape of a Palestinian boy in prison led to the group reporting it being banned as terrorists! (Nassar 2023).

This is the psychology of true believers. Those who point out that the holy commit crimes are sinners against the sacred. But fortunately there are many global narratives besides fundamentalisms. There are other global narratives (journalistic, academic) that seek unity in hard fact finding, for example, around issues such as sexual war crimes. International Civil Society (peace movements, feminism) mobilize against violations of fundamental principles or for helping the victims of war. There are even some official international institutions, the International Court of Justice and branches of the UN, that consistently speak out against War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity. What stories will be told, and believed, in the end remains to be seen.

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## Israeli Military Policies

**Abstract** This chapter looks in detail at “Israeli Military Policies” starting with “Growing Hamas While ‘Mowing the Grass’” which refers to fostering Hamas to counter balance the Palestinian Authority while using systematic assassinations and other violence to keep down any unified resistance to the continued expansion of Israel. It also explains what human shields are and how the IDF violates international law by using them. This reliance on illegal violence also explains Israel’s other major policy “reforms” such as revising “The Principle of Distinction,” the “Disproportionate Force Doctrines (Dahiya and Hannibal),” and using “Necrotactics, Domicide, Urbicide, and Apartheid” to ensure continued dominance. Finally, the IDF has reversed its long-standing suspicion that technology cannot achieve a meaningful victory with “The Momentum Policy” which claims that technologies such as AI can indeed win wars. But this illusion disguises their deeper fundamental strategy—terror.

**Keywords** War crimes · Crimes against humanity · Terrorist strategy · Human shields · Assassination strategy

## GROWING HAMAS WHILE “MOWING THE GRASS”

Virtue without limits becomes terror.

—Jean Bethke Elshtain (Der Derian 1990, p. 2002)

Israel has developed the most robust, streamlined assassination machine in history.

—Ronen Bergman (2024)

Making military policy is not science; it is politics and philosophy in unholy alliance. The actual technology is often not as important an influence as perceptions of that technology, especially the hopes for it. Israeli military doctrines are no different. Recently, they have been changing radically. It started after the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Revisionist Zionist. Since his death, Israel has been governed by the extreme Right, which has rejected any pretense of allowing Palestinians to have the homeland the United Nations has promised them since the end of the British occupation.

It was the Rightwing in Israel that decided to foster Hamas as an opponent to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Zunes 2011). Hamas, a fundamentalist Muslim group has roots going back 100 years in Egypt to the Moslem Brotherhood. But in Palestine it grew specifically out of the two Intifadas in the late 1980s as opposition to the much more secular and interdenominational PLO. While Hamas boycotted Palestinian Presidential elections in 2005, in 2006 it decided to run “emphasizing reform and change, which was the name of its election list.” This meant downplaying “the socially conservative Islamist message that had been its trademark” (Khalidi 2020, p. 218).

Surprising everyone, including Hamas, it won 44% of the vote, compared to 41% for Fatah (the largest group in the PLO). Hamas even won in some Christian neighborhoods, marking it as more of an election of rejection of the co-opted and corrupt PLO, not an endorsement of Muslim fundamentalism. Hamas became the majority in the Palestinian Assembly but the PLO had the Presidency, the security forces (in Gaza trained by the U.S.), and local government. The victory of Hamas in a democratic election led the U.S. and Israel to reject the process, cut funds from Hamas, and persecute the group in other ways. But after a failed

coup by the PLO in Gaza to remove the elected Hamas officers, Hamas staged a counter-coup and took control (Khalidi 2020, pp. 219–221).

That Hamas won their first election does not make them in favor of democracy. In fact, they have never held an election anywhere they have been in power. But that doesn't mean they don't have significant support, even if it has declined somewhat in Gaza (although recruitment into their military brigades is quite strong), it is certainly higher in the West Bank and the Palestinian Diaspora. Democracy is not the measure of all things politically, and certainly not of agency and responsibility. Still, it is not a coincidence that Jewish fundamentalists are trying to end democracy in Israel just as Hamas has no interest in reviving it in Gaza. In their shared view, sacred truths should not be voted on.

Israel was fine with Hamas taking power in Gaza, as it fundamentally divided it from the West Bank governed by Fatah. Israeli support included standing aside during open fighting between Fatah and Hamas while granting Hamas freedom to organize the persecution of their competitors. Since then, the government of Israel has worked hard to keep Hamas in power in Gaza (Hasan and Sayedahmed 2018; Schneider 2023; Zunes 2011). This is typical in Postmodern War, where often both sides benefit from the very existence of conflict. The Netanyahu regime does not want peace; it wants an excuse to battle Palestinians and take more of their land until they can successfully expel them from Greater Israel, while Hamas openly calls for the reverse. They mirror each other. Hamas, clearly an extremist organization with a hard upper limit on its support among Palestinians, is preferred by Israel to a potentially more popular government (Tibon 2024).

Stephen Zunes goes into detail about Israel's role in the rise of Hamas.

While supporters of the secular PLO were denied their own media or right to hold political gatherings, the Israeli occupation authorities allowed radical Islamic groups to hold rallies, publish uncensored newspapers and even have their own radio station. For example, in the occupied Palestinian city of Gaza in 1981, Israeli soldiers — who had shown no hesitation in brutally suppressing peaceful pro-PLO demonstrations — stood by when a group of Islamic extremists attacked and burned a PLO-affiliated health clinic in Gaza for offering family-planning services for women.

At the same time Israel allowed Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the founder of Hamas, to openly preach anti-Jewish hate and the liquidation of Israel,

they forcibly exiled the Christian pacifist Palestinian activist Mubarak Awad for calling for peaceful protests against the occupation (Zunes 2011). Removing the Palestinians they find most threatening is a fundamental Israeli policy.

This is widely, but informally, referred to as “mowing the grass,” or as one Israeli defense analyst put it, “We want to break their bones without putting them in the hospital.” Israel fears “the possibility that a more radical organization” would replace Hamas (something they are now guaranteeing), and Israel did not “want to be responsible for governing Gaza.” This remains true, but now it does not want anyone else to govern it either (Cohen et al. 2017).

While helping Hamas supplant the PLO in Gaza, and fostering it through policies such as having them control work permits in Israel and allowing them to get funds from supporters like Qatar, Israel has also tried to sustain a strategy of violent coexistence, through targeted assassinations and overwhelming retaliation. This is “Mowing the Grass”—treating Hamas and others who resist Israeli domination (especially nonviolent activists) as weeds that occasionally need to be hacked back. But if Palestinian activists are the weeds that used to be cut back periodically through arrest and assassination, the people of Gaza are the grass, and now they are being eradicated at the roots (Armitage 2023).

Until October 7, 2023 most military and civilian leaders of Israel thought this policy was working well. The persecution of Palestinian society has been an Israeli practice since before statehood. In his definitive history, *Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations* (2018), Ronan Bergman documents how Israel has committed over 2,700 assassinations in its 70-year history. As he explained in an interview with David Horovitz, “from the very beginning of the state, Israeli leaders thought that secret operations and assassinations far beyond enemy lines were a useful tool to change history, or to do something to reality, without resorting to all-out war.” But in the long run this has not made Israel safe, as recent events have shown. Instead, the result of this policy is “a long string of impressive tactical successes, but also disastrous strategic failures” (Horovitz 2018).

This has continued. Despite the decapitation assassinations of many of the leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah over the first 13 months of the Three-Front War that started October 7, 2023, there is no sign of those groups collapsing. Peter Bergen asked himself, “Do ‘decapitation strikes’ killing the leaders of terrorist groups cripple them? The short answer is

not really.” In 2008 Israel killed Hezbollah’s military leader Imad Mughniyeh. Earlier it killed a founder of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. In July of 2023 it assassinated Mohammed Deif, the military chief of Hamas. None of these assassinations made these groups weaker. On the contrary, every assassination, as with every military victory or massacre of civilians, led to the strengthening of Hamas and Hezbollah. It legitimated them, especially in light of the cooptation and fecklessness of the PLO (Bergen 2024).

It is true that a sustained campaign of assassinations against the leadership and middle management of a nongovernmental organization can sometimes degrade it into ineffectuality, especially if a ground campaign against their centers of power is waged. But unless the underlying conditions fueling the group are changed, all that will happen is that a new, almost always more militant, group will emerge. The problem of occupying Palestine cannot be killed away.

During this policy of keeping things “under control” (and getting revenge) through assassination, a profound shift in the concept of “human shields” can be seen. Israel’s security forces have gone from trying to adhere to some semblance of International Law on the subject, to using the concept as an excuse to kill large numbers of noncombatants. In the past, Israel went to some lengths to minimize the number of civilian casualties; since October 7, 2023, thanks to the targeting permission of the Gospel and other software, it will destroy an apartment block killing dozens of civilians to kill one low-level fighter, who probably isn’t at home anyway, but his family is.

Ironically, the Geneva Conventions (I, III, and IV) and other treaties define misusing human shields so as to constitute a war crime in language that often frees Hamas from guilt. For example, Article 28 of the 1949 Geneva Convention IV states, “The presence of a protected person may not be used to render certain points or areas immune from military operations.” Since Israel does not consider any part of Gaza off limits for attack, including the very safe zones it has set up, Hamas is not using human shields. Even in the case of the Israeli hostages Hamas holds, there is no evidence they have deterred Israeli attacks at all. Indeed, Israel has killed a number of them, which does fit with the Hannibal doctrine, discussed below. Only in terms of medical facilities, which Hamas has set up at least some operations near or under, which is directly proscribed in Article 19, 1949 Geneva Convention I, can Hamas be creditably charged with a war crime in this context.

While Hamas has often been accused by Israel and its allies with using human shields, all investigations by international groups (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, UN Human Rights Council) have found this is not true. But Human Rights Watch did find in their 2014 invasion of Gaza the IDF used Palestinian civilians as shields in offensive operations, a clear war crime (Zunes 2024). The IDF has continued this policy in 2023–2024, clearly a violation of 1977’s addition to the Geneva Convention Protocol I Article 51(7). As a *Guardian* report puts it: “Israeli forces in Gaza ‘use civilians as human shields’ against possible booby traps” (Graham-Harrison and Kierszenbaum 2024). In June of 2024 IDF forces on an arrest raid in the West Bank even tied a wounded Palestinian named Mujahed Azmi of Jenin, to the hood of a military jeep and refused to turn him over to an ambulance. Israel made vague promises to investigate, and admitted it wasn’t proper “protocol,” but nobody expects any punishments, or charges, to be forthcoming. The real mistake was letting the crime be videoed. After all, a few months earlier five Palestinian children were used as human shields in another arrest wave, but as it wasn’t on camera it received much less publicity (*Al Jazeera* 2024; Wuhidi 2024).

Even worse is the case of Ramez al-Skafi from Shuja’iya in northern Gaza. He was held prisoner in chains for 11 days, only released to be used as a human shield by his IDF minders searching houses in his neighborhood. Often he was sent in alone, except for some quadcopter drones he could carry. The soldiers would watch the drones, and when they figured it was safe they would go in and destroy the houses. When the team that had enslaved him was attacked by a Hamas gunman, they not only used him directly as a shield but threatened to kill him if the Hamas fighter didn’t surrender. They didn’t carry out that threat, but after the sniper was killed they beat al-Skafi for four days for failing to warn them of a threat he did not see. He was cleared with other evidence. When the unit left Shuja’iya he was freed. *The Guardian* has documented a number of other cases of this kind of enslaved human shield (Tantesh et al. 2024). Yet, Israel and its allies have made accusing Hamas of using human shields, a centerpiece of their justifications for slaughter.

Stephen Zunes (2024) has gone into considerable detail showing how apologists for the killing of tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, including such Democratic leaders as President Biden, Senator Schumer, and Representative Pelosi, consistently misuse the concept of human shields, as do most Republicans. In 2009 the U.S. House of

Representatives, by an overwhelming bipartisan majority, even passed a resolution redefining human shields so as to shield Israel's use of indiscriminate force and horrific death tolls. It specifically denounced "embedding its fighters, leaders, and weapons in private homes, schools, mosques, [and] hospitals." But as Professor Zunes points out,

However, having a Hamas leader living in his own apartment with his family, attending a neighborhood mosque, and going to a local hospital does not constitute 'embedding' for the purpose of 'using Palestinians as human shields' as the resolution claimed. Indeed, the majority of leaders of most governments and political movements have their own private homes in residential areas, attend nearby houses of worship, and are treated in area hospitals when sick or injured, along with ordinary civilians.

According to the U.S. media, Mossad's HQ isn't surrounded by civilian "human shields" like so many Israeli targets in Gaza, Beirut and other Lebanese cities, Yemen's port, Palestinian urban centers in the West Bank, and even Damascus in Syria and Teheran, Iran. No, it is in a "densely populated area." The "Western media's double standards when it comes to Israel and Palestine are hardly new, the discourse around 'human shields'—or the failure to use the term—is an example of hypocrisy pushed to the extreme." But it is not a surprise for the journalist Ahmed Wuhidi, who lost his mother (a UN worker) and sister (a physiotherapist) killed in Gaza. "Neither was any more of a human shield than the residents of Tel Aviv. They were civilians killed by Israel" (Wuhidi 2024).

Nonetheless, Israel has shown real enthusiasm for targeting the homes of their enemies and liquidating their families with them. But imagine the public anguish if an Iranian drone or bomb planted by Hamas killed Netanyahu and his family, or any Israeli minister or general's family, as Israel has done to its enemies in Beirut and Teheran. And this still begs the bigger question: If one side in a conflict uses human shields, is it then justified for their opponent to kill civilians at will? Of course not. As Zunes (2024) notes,

...regardless of how 'human shields' is defined, it is still illegal to kill civilians. Protocol I of the Fourth Geneva Convention states that even if an armed group is shielding itself behind civilians, such a violation 'shall not release the Parties to the conflict from their legal obligations with respect to the civilian population and civilians.'



So even when Hamas uses unarmed noncombatants as human shields, it is a war crime to kill them.

There are also people choosing to be human shields to protect the innocent. The Fellowship of Reconciliation has a long-standing project in Columbia, for example, to try and protect peaceful communities from former guerrillas turned narco-terrorists and the rightwing death squads that compete with them. Around the world, many activists from the West join with indigenous and local environment defenders, sometimes helping to protect them and sometimes dying with them. They are among the over 2,000 environmental activists murdered worldwide between 2022 and 2024.

In the West Bank and Gaza, a number of non-Palestinians have risked their lives, and given their lives, to try and shield Palestinians from attacks by the IDF and Settlers. Most are Jewish Israelis (Mashiach 2024), but people have come from around the world to live in solidarity with Palestinians, often sponsored by the International Solidarity Movement.

Whatever the excuses, Israel's use of Palestinians as human shields, Israel's killing and maiming of volunteer human shields in Gaza and the West Bank, the illegal attacks on Palestinian civilians permitted or perpetrated by the IDF, and the mass killings of noncombatants in the Gaza area, all are clearly International War Crimes and/or Crimes Against Humanity.

How did Israel, which has always claimed to be particularly principled in their war-making, even bragging in the past that the IDF was the most moral of all the militaries in the world, get to this point? First, this has never been true. The Jewish drive for independence was full of war crimes, going back to the massacres of villages (for example, Deir Yassin, Ein al Zeitun, Abu Shlusha) and attacks on civilian targets (Haifa Arab market, Arab vegetable market in Jerusalem, Jaffa Gate, King David Hotel, Damascus Gate, and dozens more) perpetuated before Israel's founding by the Revisionist Zionist forefathers of the current ruling parties. This supposed morality was certainly not in evidence during the *Nakba* either. What is true is that it seems there has been a change, a growing disinterest on the part of Israel, in even appearing to be moral, since they are pursuing a sacred mission. This has been institutionalized in a set of intertwined policies, starting with their revised calculations on how to distinguish legitimate targets from illegitimate, and just how much "collateral damage" (dead babies, children, women, old men, other noncombatants) can be justified.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF DISTINCTION

Terror is a relationship.

—Diane Nelson (2002, p. 199)

If they would tell the whole world that the [Islamic Jihad] offices on the 10th floor are not important as a target, but that its existence is a justification to bring down the entire high-rise with the aim of pressuring civilian families who live in it in order to put pressure on terrorist organizations, this would itself be seen as terrorism. So they do not say it.

—Israeli government source on Power Targets (Abraham 2023)

The internationally established Principle of Distinction is that military operations “at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives” (International Red Cross, 2023, para. 1). Note how “objects” are included, as in houses, offices, cars. However, the IDF’s policy is to kill civilians if there is any risk to their soldiers, to kill civilians if there is some chance (perhaps determined by AI programs) of killing a targeted enemy fighter, to blow up buildings to terrorize the population, and destroy other objects of all sorts in Gaza. Look at the images of Gaza, before and after the Israeli attack, and it is clear that no distinction is made between military fortifications and the shops, homes, schools, and clinics in Gaza neighborhoods.

In Chapter 2, the work of Muhammad Ali Khalidi (2019) on the IDF’s Spirit Code and their prioritization, during the earlier attacks on Gaza and Lebanon, of soldiers’ lives over civilian lives is documented, based on statements from Israeli soldiers themselves. These policies have been expanded in Gaza and Lebanon since October 7, 2023. Tens of thousands of civilians dead and the wholesale destruction of Gaza is all the proof that is needed. But Israel has gone beyond even this in their use of domestic objects as booby traps in the infamous pager attacks in Lebanon.

Turning the pagers and walkie-talkies used by Hezbollah members and their families into booby traps is certainly a war crime (Valdez 2024). There are very specific international law prohibitions on booby traps that are portable and seem harmless, as an article on the West Point Lieber

Institute website by a serving Royal Navy officer, Commander William H. Boothby, carefully details (2024).

In the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk:

Simultaneous targeting of thousands of individuals, whether civilians or members of armed groups, without knowledge as to who was in possession of the targeted devices, their location and their surroundings at the time of the attack, violates international human rights law and, to the extent applicable, international humanitarian law.

He added that those who ordered and carried out these attacks “Must be held to account” (Serhan 2024).

This kind of decentralized, networked information war is a clear aspect of postmodern war. But just because technology changes war, the hard won codes of combat should not fundamentally change. Such as the principle that war is for combatants while noncombatants should be spared if at all possible. This was at least the official the policy of Israel, despite many obvious failures to adhere to it, from its founding up until 2005 when Israel established its new Spirit Code, as is discussed in Chapter 2. The big change between earlier misuses of the Principle of Distinction and the Torture of Gaza is the use of missiles, drones, and bombs to kill tens of thousands.

The use of distance weapons makes the killing psychologically and politically easier and the deaths of innocents more likely. Before the invention of long-range artillery and, later, aerial bombing, killing large numbers of civilians at all was a war crime. While the terror of killing in war has often fallen on civilians, it was not inevitable. With the development of distance weapons, war expanded to direct shelling of civilians (pioneered in the American Civil War) and then later bombing, first used by Italian and British colonial armies. In World War II this morphed into the technological fanaticism of strategic bombing (Gray 1997, p. 7).

AI targeting, new extraordinarily powerful conventional munitions, and other technologies that perpetuate self-serving illusions about efficacy and morality make these policies much worse. Yet decision-makers insist on doubling down on the dream of a “silver bullet” that can win unwinnable wars,

This is the fantasy driving the Power Target (*matarot otzem*) policy. Power targets *are not* Hamas leaders or infrastructure. Those are different

categories. Power targets are not military priorities; they are chosen to break the will of the Palestinians. Destroying high rises is supposed to be particularly good for this. In early campaigns there was some effort to make sure civilians had left the buildings targeted, but not since October 7. This has led to such atrocities as the destruction of the Babel building in Gaza City (10 stories, Oct. 10, 10 dead); the Al-Taj residential building in Gaza City (12 stories, Oct. 25, 120 dead, including 37 members of the Sharaf family); the Al-Mohandssen apartments and offices at Nuseiradt Refugee Camp (8 stories Oct. 31, 150 dead), and many others (Abraham 2023). After one year of the Torture of Gaza, Israel had “wiped out” (killed everyone on the civil registry with that name) 902 families including the Al-Najjar family (393 killed), the Al-Masy family (226 killed), and the Al-Astal family (225 killed) (Haddad and Antonopoulos 2024).

Three high-level intelligence sources admit that the policy of directly attacking Palestinian society through the indiscriminate slaughter of noncombatants is “civil pressure” on Hamas (Abraham 2023). In other words, Israel is torturing the body politic.

Torture can be a war’s whole strategy. The Pentagon Papers show how the U.S. in Vietnam pursued this approach. Daniel Ellsberg, who released the documents in the face of possible prosecution and at least one assassination attempt, admits that it was his wife Patricia, who read the documents and pointed out “in horror” that the U.S. strategy in Vietnam was described by its architects in “the language of torturers.” He gives numerous examples from William P. Bundy, Robert S. McNamara, John T. McNaughton, and Richard Helms: “water-drip’ technique,” fast/full squeeze,” “the ‘hot–cold treatment,” “ratchet,” and “one more turn of the screw” (Ellsberg 1972, pp. 304–205).

What does this mean in real terms? High-rises with one suspect office are destroyed, homes of regular Hamas soldiers are obliterated, although they often are not where their families usually are. Even whole neighborhoods are targeted if they are “terror nests” according to the IDF. This is terrorism, even if called counter-terrorism. Historically, this tactic has never worked to break an enemy. Terror bombing only increases civilian commitment to armed resistance, as demonstrated by the Blitz on London and later V-1 and V-2 attacks, and as the terror bombing of Nazi Germany showed, as the failure of bombing to ever win a war shows. Even the Japanese surrender in World War II was based more on the victory at sea that cut Japan off from almost all raw materials and

any chance of winning, then on the burning of Tokyo and the nuclear obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Destroying whole cities is clearly the use of disproportionate force but so is killing dozens of civilians to assassinate one militant. Israel does both.

## DISPROPORTIONATE FORCE DOCTRINES—DAHIYA AND HANNIBAL

The “Dahiya Doctrine” advocates destroying enemy infrastructure no matter what the civilian toll because all civilians are the enemy. Named after the Beirut neighborhood of Dahiya, almost completely destroyed by the IDF in 2006 in an earlier attempt to eliminate Hezbollah, and attacked again in November of 2024. As the Israeli General commanding the North, Gadi Eisenkot, explained in 2008 to the Israeli magazine *Haaretz*, in the next war: “We will wield disproportionate power against every village from which shots are fired on Israel, and cause immense damage and destruction” (Institute for Middle East Understanding 2012).

This should not be surprising, since the Supreme Court of Israel has found assassination to be “proportionate” as long as one calculates correctly:

Israel’s Supreme Court assessed the legality of targeted killing operations in a 2006 decision...The court found targeted killing to be lawful under certain strict conditions, including considerations of proportionality. (Kasher 2023)

Such calculations turn out to be not so strict, and were used in the four major IDF attacks in Gaza from 2008 to 2014, resulting in 5,000 Palestinians killed (mainly civilians) compared to 30 Israeli civilians and 350 Israeli military and police dead (Rogers 2023).

The 2023–2024 death toll in Gaza proves the Dahiya Doctrine of Disproportionate Force is being applied with even more savagery than ever before. A study of Gaza deaths during this attack, by the sociologist Yagil Levy from the Open University of Israel and published in *Haaretz*, shows that at least 61% of casualties are civilians. This compares unfavorably to the earlier Israeli attacks on Gaza (with ratios between 40 and 33%) and the average rate of civilian vs. military casualties in twentieth-century conflicts (Borger 2023).

Strategic bombing, and policies such as the Dahiya Doctrine, are terrorism as Caleb Carr, military historian and novelist, points out, denouncing strategic bombing as terrorism and ineffective (2003, pp. 247–248). Sadly, it is a strategy the U.S. has continued to follow up the present day. Carr argues, in the case of the second invasion of Iraq, that it guaranteed the U.S. military’s defeat:

But of course, the single most tragic result of the air campaign, as well as the periodic air strikes and cruise missile raids that were undertaken in the years that followed, was the transformation of the Iraqi people from an ambivalent population trying to survive the rule of a ruthless dictator into a much more anti-Western—and specifically anti-American—nation. Rarely in recent history has the real effect of strategic bombing been so clearly revealed: it *galvanizes* rather than breaks a people... (2003, p. 250)

Israel’s use of Disproportionate Force is also Collective Punishment, yet another clear war crime. This isn’t just the killing with bombs, missiles, and artillery shells of civilians; it is also cutting off millions of civilians from health care, housing, communication, food, and water. By December 6, 2023 almost half of all the people in Gaza were experiencing severe levels of hunger. This is a conscious policy. On October 18, 2023 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that “food and medicines” for the population would not be allowed into Gaza “as long as our hostages are not returned” (*Al Jazeera* Staff 2023). But it gets worse. The Israeli Minister for Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage, Amichai Eliyahu has even called dropping a nuclear bomb on Gaza “an option” as “there are no non-combatants in Gaza” (Karanth 2023a).

Using a nuclear WMD on Gaza would be Genocide, and an unprecedented Crime Against Humanity, but in many ways it would just be an expansion of Israel’s Kill Zone practices. Designating huge swathes of territory as Kill Zones is hardly new. Bandit Country, Free-Fire Zones (U.S. Vietnam), Kill Boxes (U.S. Gulf War) are a common strategy. But they are almost always looked upon by most of the world as crimes. Now aggressive combatants often prefer to not bestow labels.

So it is with Israel. While not officially recognized, Kill Zones are clearly a de facto policy. Consider the IDF shooting of three escaping Israeli hostages who were in the wrong place at the wrong time. One source noted, “To a large extent, the tragedy in which three hostages were killed by the IDF is such a story, since in fleeing from their captors

the three entered a kill zone in the middle of the Shujaiyeh neighborhood of Gaza City” (Kubovich 2024).

Through the alchemy of circular reasoning, anyone killed in such a zone is, by definition, guilty. One IDF reserve officer who served in Gaza said, “In practice, a terrorist is anyone the IDF has killed in the areas in which its forces operate” (Kubovich 2024). Making everyone killed in a Kill Zone automatically a terrorist, casts serious doubt on Israeli claims of terrorist casualties, since hundreds (or even thousands) of people so labeled might just have had the bad luck to be in a Kill Zone.

Such zones in combat areas that mix Israeli soldiers and civilians with Palestinians could only be acceptable in Israel if there was a related doctrine that it is better Israelis die than become hostages. There is. It is named after the Carthaginian General Hannibal, who committed suicide rather than be captured by the Romans. The Directive is to use maximum force to respond to any potential capture of Israeli soldiers or civilians, including killing the captured soldiers and others through friendly fire. In large part this doctrine is aimed at preventing the need for exchanging prisoners and the political problem of hostages.

In 2014, when Hamas captured IDF Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, Israel responded by indiscriminately shelling and bombing four Rafah neighborhoods, killing at least 135 civilians and the Lieutenant, which Amnesty International and many others judged a war crime. Military commanders were distressed that Hadar Goldin’s fellow soldiers did not fire on him and his captors when he was first seized, so they established the Hannibal Doctrine or Protocol. Yehuda Shaul, a paratrooper and combat veteran who rose through the ranks to become a commander, explains it requires maximum force when an IDF soldier is captured, “You will open fire without constraints, in order to prevent the abduction” even at the risk of killing the captive. And all possible routes the enemy and their prisoner might take should be targeted (Jamal 2023).

Due to massive criticism, Hannibal was officially terminated in 2016. But it has been applied since the October 7th attack. The IDF immediately issued a policy directive that, “not a single vehicle can return to Gaza” even if they held hostages (McKernan 2024). Eyal Weizman, director of Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths University explains, “With the current indiscriminate bombing of Gaza, the government seems not only to be bringing unprecedented destruction on the people of Gaza but to be returning to the principle of preferring dead captives to a deal” (2023).

Many of the hostages are anti-Netanyahu coming from progressive border kibbutzes Nir Oz and Nirim and the music festival. In July, when the bodies of six hostages who died in captivity were returned, Osnat Peri, the wife of Chaim Peri, said he had been abandoned “for political reasons.” Chaim himself didn’t think the current Israel government had any interest in saving the likes of him. “We have Bibi, and we are left wing” (Daylan 2024).

Israel rejected an “everyone for everyone” deal—All Israeli hostages for all Palestinian prisoners, of which there are thousands, many women and even children, proposed by Hamas. While Israel often releases civilian prisoners or captured soldiers at a rate of hundreds to one, it calls this proposal “psychological terror.” Netanyahu’s government claims freeing the hostages is one of the primary goals of the “ground operation” called Swords of Iron, but most of the hostages’ families and many others doubt this. The Hannibal Directive appears to be in play. If it seems something from the ancient times of blood feuds and massacre, that is not an accident.

Netanyahu consistently sabotaged any chance of a hostage exchange and ceasefire deal. It is about extending his own political life (Harel 2024) through death and destruction.

## NECROTACTICS, DOMICIDE, URBICIDE, AND APARTHEID

If we act strategically they will emigrate and we will live there. We won’t let two million stay. With 100-200k in Gaza, the ‘day after’ debate will be different. They want to leave, they’ve been living in a ghetto for 75 years.

—Finance Minister Bezael Smotrich,  
December 30, 2023 (Karanth 2023b)

Eyal Weizman argues that the IDF uses “necrotactics” because it aims not at controlling territory, but rather for locating “members of the Palestinian resistance” and killing them, or even just killing Palestinians.

The military does not kill enemy soldiers as a means to obtain the strategic ground they occupy, but temporarily enters strategic ground in order to kill its enemies. Killing is not a by-product of military maneuver, but the very essence of the current Israeli campaign against Palestinian guerrillas and terror, and thus has become, in the absence of any legal process to support it, and since the definition of “immanent danger” is extended to



all members of the resistance and their supporters, a systematic campaign of murder. (Weizman 2006)

The proof is in the body count. On Christmas Day 2023 an Israeli airstrike killed General Seyed Razi Mousavii of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, a close friend of Iranian General Qassim Soleimani, head of the Quds Force, who had been killed by a U.S. drone in Iraq on January 3, 2020 (Chehayeb 2023). On January 2, 2024 Salleh Al-Arouri, deputy head of the political bureau of Hamas was assassinated in Beirut by Israel (Salam, Bashir, et al., 2024). These individual killings, although sometimes with dozens, and in one case of a Hamas commander in Gaza, hundreds of civilian casualties (Abraham 2023) are mirrored by the attacks on buildings and even neighborhoods. This is all part of the policy of assassination terror, but reversing normal military priorities, instead killing is the goal, the targeting of humans, their homes and their cities the means.

Consider how Isaac Ben Israel, the General in charge of IDF weapons development, argued a 25% kill rate would degrade (“paralyze”) a particular network of suicide bomb makers and logistical support by just killing 700 people (Bergman 2018). Bar-Israel, the genius who predicted COVID-19 would die out in 70 days (Jeffay 2020) claimed this justified destroying many houses, even neighborhoods.

The incredible levels of destruction in Gaza have also been called “domicide.” While this term is “increasingly accepted” (Wintour 2023), it isn’t a new idea. The indiscriminate night raids of the RAF against German population centers was described as “dehousing” officially. Ineffectual militarily, they did kill hundreds of thousands of civilians steeling German resolve to fight on.

The Turkish urban studies scholar Sibel Bekiroğlu has developed a sophisticated analysis of this stage of postmodern war in her 2023 doctoral dissertation, “Space, Memory, War, and Necropolitics: An Attempt to Conceptualize Urbicide.” She shows how the “destruction of the urban fabric” impacts society, directly damaging culture and memory especially, killing politics with necropolitics.

She starts her thesis (2023, p. v) with three quotes:

Being chiefly human, cities can be killed.

—Roger Spiller

The city [is] not just the site, but the very medium of warfare --a flexible, almost liquid medium that is forever contingent and flux.

—Eyal Weizman

Today, wars are fought not in trenches and fields, but in living rooms, schools and supermarkets.

—Sultan Barakat

Bekiroğlu draws on Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics, which he terms the most important form of power because of its “capacity to determine life and death...the subjection of life to death” (Bekiroğlu 2023, p. xiv). She also deploys the related concepts of urbicide, necroicide, collateral damage, place annihilation, spatial violence, warchitecture, ethnic cleansing, cultural cleansing, cultural genocide, identicide, and spaciocide. She notes, “As the derivatives of genocide, the terms used to describe the ruins and rubble in the settlements are predominantly related to the systematic and planned destruction of the cities. Like the formation of the cities, their destruction is also planned” (p. cxxi).

Spaciocide is a particularly good fit for IDF policies in Gaza. It is the concept of Prof. Sari Hanafi, who lives in Beirut-space, which was under vicious Israeli attack in the Fall of 2024. As Bekiroğlu explains:

Treating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a Colonial Project, Hanafi (2005) defines the destruction in Palestine as spaciocide. According to him, this destruction is neither a process of genocide nor is it directed against the urban fabric like urbicide. Hanafi proposes a more holistic approach to this colonial project...[and] analyzes spaciocide through six characteristics... 1) being a strategic colonial ideology; 2) the ignorance of demographic development; 3) being justified through humanity; 4) three-dimensional nature; 5) the continuous redrawing of borders; and lastly, the aim of transforming the territory into noncontinuous enclaves. (Hanafi 2005, pp. 161–163)

Urbicide, another new term, focuses on the aftermaths of “manufactured disasters” such as war zones. The violence of postmodern war creates a “new situation both historically and in terms of the spatial realms.” Urbicide includes the “direct targeting of urban centers and collective memory, the deliberate destruction of urban infrastructure and especially the disruption of the rhythm of urban life” (Bekiroğlu cxxiv).

Urbicide is a way of “rebuilding the city through systematic and widespread violence, notably by destroying the urban fabric of buildings and symbolic structures.” Palestine is one of the “bloodiest instances.” While Israel’s claims this is part of the “war on terror” and portrays it as “a battle between good and evil,” it is just colonial conquest after all (Bekiroğlu 2023, p. cxxi; Abujidi 2014). The goal is the occupation of Gaza (Benn 2024). The strategy is genocide.

The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was inspired by the Holocaust, but genocides have been a feature of human culture for thousands of years. Genocide is defined as violent physical acts with the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, as such.” It was the Jewish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin who first coined the term in 1944. Along with the violent actions the UN focuses on, he included “soft” means of eradicating a people, like attacking its cultural heritage, museums, language, and so on. This is now called cultural genocide and *identicide*.

Jewish Voice for Peace has detailed how Israel has destroyed The Great Omari Mosque, the Church of Saint Porphyrius, the Pasha Palace/museum Qasr el-Basha, the Rashad al-Shawa Cultural center, and the Central Archives of Gaza. It isn’t just the buildings destroyed, the people killed, and the ancient documents burned; Israel is targeting the idea of Palestine (Jewish Voice for Peace 2024).

The term *identity* is used to describe the unique environments cultivated by individuals who share a common way of life. People operate upon spaces, shaping their behaviors and attitudes just as they create and build places with meaning. When these identity-based, symbolic entities are destroyed, it is seen as a direct attack upon such identities. This destruction is defined as *identicide* by Sarah Jane Meharg in the context of the Palestinian case. She points out that it is aimed at destroying “cultural elements” in various ways, including cultural cannibalism. In the end, it breaks the bond “which underpins individual, community, and national identity.” (Bekiroğlu 2023, pp. cxxiii)

It is Israel’s new Momentum military technology policy that makes this *identicide*, this cultural genocide, possible.

## THE MOMENTUM POLICY

There is no war, then, without representation, no sophisticated weaponry without psychological mystification. Weapons are tools not just of destruction but also of perception.

—Paul Virilio (1990, p. 6)

When technology replaces humans, it comes at the cost of dulling human intuition and research capabilities and a disconnection between human soldiers and the battlefield.

—Tehilla Shwartz Altshuler (2023)

Tying an unreasonable faith in new military technology to changes in war-fighting doctrine is not new. It is so tempting, considering how sometimes new technologies are the key to victory. Just not often. Technological superiority does not win many wars; it can never win a war when one doesn't even understand what victory is.

For many years, led by civilians turned soldiers during the 1967 war, the IDF resisted the allure of “silver bullet” high-tech weapons and their promise of military triumph, understanding that against the PLO, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other such groups it was impossible. “War is a continuation of politics” by other means, and those means are highly constrained in postmodern war. The only solutions to the problem of Palestine/Israel are not violent nor technological.

Still, over the years things have shifted in the IDF, including a growing faith in the ability of new weapons to solve age-old problems of battle. In 2020 Israel established a new military plan linked to its modernization named Momentum. It promised victory through “...rapid war of maneuver, blending quick strikes and the highest technological capabilities...” (Ahronheim 2021). Its core is a concept of operations called “Intelligence-as-a-Service” (Kalo 2021). Considering one of its primary goals was to prevent disasters such as the attack on October 7 by being “a new type of war machine” (Lappin 2020; Frantzman 2022), it cannot be considered a success. But Israel has embraced it with even more fervor since.

This kind of technophilia is one of the main fallacies warned against in *Postmodern War* (Gray 1997), once required reading for all higher-ranking IDF officers. Now the IDF is committed to a wide range of

cutting-edge technologies, including various AI programs for logistics and even to help individual tanks fight. In 2021, the IDF proudly proclaimed their attack on Gaza “the first AI War.” Of course, it wasn’t a war just a campaign, and it was not the first major military deployment of AI. The U.S. had been using much more sophisticated AI systems for decades, as is discussed above (Gray 1990).

One critic of the old doctrine, Hanan Shai (2021) explains it “replaced its traditional doctrine of victory, which was based on rapid physical defeat of enemy forces, with a doctrine of “psychological victory,” which does not entail enemies’ physical defeat. But this postmodern view has now been discarded, and modern illusions restored. The same illusions led to the imperial defeats in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Shai declared this restoration in the new Momentum policy,

A revolution in military doctrine, which is now focused once again on winning—not by immobilizing the enemy’s war-fighting capacity as in the past, but by systematic, precise, and complete (or almost complete) destruction of its resources and terrorists.

It also promised to do away with the IDF’s traditional “decentralized, goal-oriented command” to implement a “hybrid-centralized goal-oriented command that is merged with a very tight centralistic command, in certain domains even with robotic management” (Shai 2021).

Nothing screams technophilia as loudly as fantasies about “robotic management.” Inevitably, such passion leads to disasters. It seems likely that in the months before the October 7 attack, the IDF’s “tight centralistic command” allowed it to ignore the many reports from the women soldiers at the Gaza border about the coming attack.

Referring to the “Momentum Plan,” Tehilla Shwartz Altshuler, a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute and an expert in law and technology, criticized the over-reliance on tech by Israel, calling it a “disastrous” love affair. “Over the last 20 years, the IDF has undergone an extensive process of technologization as part of the global technological revolution,” she argued (2023), adding,

When technology replaces humans, it comes at the cost of dulling human intuition and research capabilities and a disconnection between human soldiers and the battlefield. All of these factors played some part in the

disaster of October 7, 2023, as did the government and military's addiction to the feeling of technological superiority.

Blind faith in technological superiority is a symptom of technological fanaticism. In his brilliant analysis of World War II strategic bombing, Michael Sherry argues that the political fanaticism of the Axis powers was mirrored by the technological fanaticism of the Allies. Fascist political ideas justified the extermination of inferior people (Romany, Jews, Slavs, Blacks, Chinese, Koreans) by Germany and Japan, while the technologies of strategic bombing justified the extermination of whole cities by the Allies. The allied policy was the product of...

...two distinct but related phenomena: one—the will to destroy—ancient and recurrent, the other—the technical means of destruction—modern. Their convergence resulted in the evil of American bombing. But it was a sin of a peculiarly modern kind because it seemed so inadvertent, seemed to involve so little choice. Illusions about modern technology had made aerial holocaust seem unthinkable before it occurred and simply imperative once it began. It was the product of a slow accretion of large fears, thoughtless assumptions, and at best discrete decisions. (Sherry 1987, p. 137)

The U.S. has never abandoned “aerial holocaust” as a policy, as the people of Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and many other places can attest. That Israel has taken up the same strategy is not surprising, especially as many people around the world will forgive killing thousands of civilians, babies even, as long as it is done at a distance with missiles, bombs, or artillery.

Part of this evil farce is pretending that such killing can be precise, surgical, and with little “collateral damage” to use that profoundly deceptive term. Israel claims the mass killings in Gaza are under control. But they are not, except in the sense that killing thousands of innocents is the goal. Even if that were not true, more than half the bombs are dumb and IDF fire control is profoundly flawed, or consciously a war crime, often striking sites where they have sent Palestinian civilians to be safe (Tacchi 2023; Al Sawalhi et al. 2024). This particularly vicious form of torture is clearly terroristic.

Sadly, torture and terror can have military utility. Some successful military systems depend on them, often linked intimately to shock and awe. But one of the implications of postmodernism is that while terror as an idea can be spread more easily than ever, the actual practice of it is more

difficult. There are several ironies in all this. Small acts of violence, retail terror as non-state actors and even individuals often perpetuate, achieves a much greater psychological impact while torture/terror as a military strategy has to be disguised, as massacre, ethnic cleansing, and genocide are now frowned upon by most governments and actively condemned by a majority of humanity.

Caleb Carr defined terrorism as “...the contemporary name given to...warfare deliberately waged against civilians with the purpose of destroying their will to support either leaders or policies that the agents of such violence find objectionable” (Carr 2003, p. 6). In Roman times it was called destructive war or punitive war but whenever it has been used, Carr was unimpressed with the results.

Whether inspired by hatred, revenge, greed, or political and psychological insecurity, terrorism has been one of the most ultimately self-defeating tactics in all of military history... [T]he nation or faction that resorts to warfare against civilians most quickly, most often, and most viciously is the nation or faction that stands the greatest chance of seeing its interests frustrated and, in many cases, its existence terminated (Carr 2003, pp. 16-17).

That it has never succeeded seems unlikely, but it certainly fails quite often and it is only assured success when genocide is possible. This is not possible in our postmodern world with global communication and ubiquitous surveillance technologies. For Carr, terrorism is a behavior and it doesn't matter who kills civilians on purpose, it is always wrong.

One man's terrorist...is most emphatically not another man's freedom fighter; but *every* man's murderer of civilians during hostilities is *every* man's terrorist. (p. 30)

It can be an individual, a group, or a State.

Modern armies equipped with high-tech weaponry can attack and kill civilians as premeditatedly as can small bands of fanatics brandishing the crudest of weapons; and until we finally recognize all such behavior as terrorism—as an unacceptable belligerent tactic whose insidiousness is never modified by the relative nobility or baseness of its practitioner's goals—it will go on claiming the lives of innocents. (p. 7)

How can we understand what this means on the deepest, personal level other than experiencing it? Perhaps the story of one innocent man's death, and the deaths in his family, can offer us a glimpse. It brings together many of the threads of this book: targeted killing, sacred violence, terror as a strategy, cultural genocide, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and the way the media in the West and Israel are covering the Torture of Gaza.

Refaat al-Areer was a Palestinian poet and a professor. He was killed around 6 pm on December 6, 2023 in northern Gaza. It was a targeted strike. He had been receiving death threats by phone where he stayed with his wife and young son, so he moved to his sister's apartment which he thought was safer. He was being understandably careful. In 2014 his house was destroyed by Israel and 30 members of his family were killed, including a brother (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor 2023).

Northern Gaza was a free-fire zone. Israel had ordered everyone out but his family had nowhere to go. CNN explained, "Civilians like Areer were confronted with an impossible predicament. Stay home and risk being killed, or try to flee without protection." Less than a month later a single Israeli missile destroyed his sister's apartment (and none others) in a three-story building in Gaza City, killing him, another brother, his sister, and her four children as well (Haq and Salam 2023). Five months after his murder, Refaat Alaceer's oldest daughter Shaima, her husband, and their 2-month-old son were killed in an Israeli airstrike on Gaza City (Goodman and Abusalaim 2024).

Why was the poet killed? Al-Areer was an important intellectual who had even been profiled in the *New York Times*, in part for his appreciation of the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai. He was considered by many one of the most important voices of Gaza. How could this assassination happen? Only with the latest targeting and missile technologies.

After his murder his poem "If I Must Die" went viral, including a project to translate and recite it online in over 70 languages, from Yiddish to Swahili, Baluchi to Hindi, Esperanto to Norwegian. It is so much easier to kill a poet than a poem.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# AI at War

**Abstract** The various IDF AI and high-tech military applications are detailed. But it starts with a discussion of “The Limits of Correctness” which explains why these weapon systems will never do what they are built for. In the following sections there is a detailed discussion of key AI systems such as the new Gospel, Lavender, Where’s Daddy, Depth of Wisdom, and older systems including Pegasus, Iron Dome, and the Alchemist. Israel’s commitment to these systems is based on its arms industry, which leverages its role in the subjugation of Gaza and the West Bank as “The Palestine Laboratory.” This allows it to market its weapons as tested in combat. All of this is in the context of Israel’s important role in “The US Military-Industrial Empire.”

**Keywords** Models · Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI or Star Wars) · Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR) · Limits of computing

## THE LIMITS OF CORRECTNESS

All models are wrong, but some models are useful.

—George E. P. Box

(Silver 2012, p. 230)

The best model of a cat is a cat.

—Norbert Wiener

(Silver 2012, p. 230)

When the Pentagon’s research agency, DARPA, was trying to develop SquadX, an AI-enabled robot to help U.S. Marines fighting at the squad level, they “trained” a visual generative AI system by having Marines hang out with it for six days so it could learn to recognize them. Then they put it in the middle of a street intersection and asked the Marines to touch it undetected. Two got in a big cardboard box and, giggling, did so easily. As did the guy who somersaulted his way up to the robot and the one who held fir branches and approached as walking like a tree. All eight beat the robot. In war your enemy is always adapting based on what they know about you. As the AI was “learning” about the Marines, they also learned about it, and better (Hauptman 2023).

Knowledge is imperfect because it is human. Reality is so vast in every way that humans can only know a small slice of it. Policymakers and scientists often claim they understand much more than they do about the real world. The temptation of such hubris needs to be resisted. Accepting our epistemological limits is crucial for controlling technologies politically and operationally. This became clear during the debates over the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—Star Wars—and its addendum, the Strategic Computing Program (SCP), during the 1980s.

The Reagan administration had decided it wanted to end the madness of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction)—the nuclear deterrence regime we live under that prevents nuclear war by promising massive nuclear retaliation for any nuclear attack. Their solution was to develop an effective first strike capability by inventing an AI system (hence the SCP) to control a space-based ICBM defense shield shooting lasers, missiles, and rocks at any incoming weapons. This was the SDI, labeled Star Wars. By also increasing ICBM accuracy to 1 meter, the U.S. calculated it could launch a successful “decapitation” first strike on the Soviet Union. The response would be absorbed by the SDI, with acceptable (low millions) in American casualties. Thus, U.S. nuclear hegemony would be restored.

When this was proposed, many scientists and engineers reacted with horror. Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR) mobilized a crucial intellectual response that fundamentally shaped how computing has been understood since. Every computer program is a model of a reality or a model of a fantasy. Both types of models have real



world consequences and what could be more consequential than nuclear weapons? Eventually, a strong majority of computerists (and experts from many other fields) agreed that SDI and SCP were dangerous mistakes.

This debate is more relevant than ever today. Among the key texts and arguments: \*Brian Cantwell Smith (1985) describing the fallacy of using models to describe “Full-blooded Action,” and mapping out the limits of correctness set by the proliferation of levels of failure. \*Christine Floyd (1985) stressing that “All models of reality anchored in a program are, by their very nature, reductionistic.” \*David Lorge Parnas, one of the most experienced military computing programmers of the day, arguing that “Practical software must deal with so many distinct situations (or states) that complete testing is impossible” (1987, p. 222) and that enemy actions and battlefield modifications mean there is a fundamental complexity and impossible-to-overcome uncertainty around all testing of computer weapon systems. \*Gary Chapman’s unpacking (1987) of the AirLand Battle manager (on practical and moral grounds) being developed by DARPA and the U.S. Army, and showing his critique also applied to SDI, as well as the Navy’s Aegis system, and to using expert systems for battle management in general. \*Susan Landau’s (1987) critique of the limits of expert systems.

Among all these authors, and thousands of other computer scientists and engineers, there was a strong agreement that human and computer languages are a profound limit on what we can expect a computer system to do. Floyd (1985) put it most strongly, “Here we must make it clear that between human beings and machines there can be no communication in the proper sense of the word.” Smith (1985) is a bit more restrained, “human–machine communication is difficult and not well understood.” In his critique of using natural language interfaces in military situations, the linguist Geoffrey Pullum (1987) argued that because of the inherent instability of the human–machine interface, any tasks that rely on good human–machine communication should not be vital.

The Star Wars dream died because of its failure to even model itself. The simulation that was supposed to pretend to be the SDI, and which at the time was the largest computer program ever, could never be made to work, even with humans pretending to be computers doing what the computers could not yet (and in some cases still cannot) do. But the hunger for such systems in the postmodern militaries of the world was not sated (Gray 1997).

Besides the limitations of technology, governments consistently underestimate the limitations of human performance. Even autonomous AI is embedded in human-machine systems and most weapons are not truly autonomous anyway and some of the most autonomous are the dumbest, such as land mines. Humans are prone to status quo bias, groupthink, confirmation bias, short-term gain bias, limited short-term memory, and all sorts of other cognitive flaws.

The bloody irony is that even though the U.S. and other top military establishments have committed to information technology as their favorite “force multiplier” there has been no evidence on the battlefields of the world that this is true. The U.S., the greatest military power in history, hasn’t won a war since World War II (unless you count Grenada and Panama, which you should not). The Soviet Union/Russia has fared no better.

In 1985 Severo Ornstein and Lucy Suchman first raised pragmatic concrete concerns about automated military systems citing numerous examples of computer failures. Lucy Suchman has shown recently that the illusions behind Star Wars and the Strategic Computing Program persist in “the fallacy of claims for precision and accuracy.” The newest generation of AI has become a rationale for a recommitment to rationality in war generally, and precision targeting specifically, but it is still driven by “imaginaries of omniscience.” The hope is that the Fog of War has been magically dispelled by technology, but that cannot be because there are humans on all sides spreading confusion, blowing smoke (Suchman 2020, 2023).

These factors make the current wave of AI as limited for military operations as the programs of the 1980s, and there are new problems as well. Older systems did not have hallucinations, nor were they so articulate that they confused users into leaping the uncanny valley by anthropomorphizing systems into delusions.

There is also the problem of “brittle” AI and targeting failures. A U.S. Air Force study showed that the more data collected the worse the outcomes. Brittle AI “occurs when any algorithm cannot generalize or adapt to conditions outside a narrow set of assumptions.” Missy Cummings, a former Navy pilot and the author of the report, noted that if the system is trained on data without sufficient variation in terms of type, mode, or perspective, it is not effective. “When the data used to train the algorithm consists of too much of one type of image or sensor data from a unique vantage point, and not enough from other vantages, distances,

or conditions, you get brittleness.” Most worrying, the AI claimed it was performing at 90% accuracy when it was actually operating at 25% (Tucker 2021).

Algorithmic Intelligence systems of all types needs massive amounts of relevant data to train on. There isn’t enough in many cases. So, in many domains systems software engineers have resorted to what has been called cannibalism, feeding the AIs on AI-created data. The trouble is that even small amounts of fake data can corrupt systems, introducing “errors that build up with each succeeding generation” of the AI, leading to fatal “model collapse.” When one team of researchers trained an AI on data it produced itself, by the 10th generation it was answering questions about historical English architecture with “gibberish about jackrabbits.” Since many AI systems train on public web data, that is increasingly generated by other AIs, this is a compounding problem (Rao 2023). Military AIs need military combat data to improve, and the Ukraine and Israel’s war are currently the only good sources. The temptations of data cannibalism are equal to the potential profits, which are extraordinary.

A Human Rights Watch report from 2024 lists a number of other sources of error for newer systems—The Black Box effect, Automation Bias, Problematic Assumptions, Reproducing Biases (garbage in, garbage out), Digital Dehumanization, Over Reliance on Digital Tools, and Increasing the Tempo of War.

What do these limits mean for the Torture of Gaza? Consider Israel’s AI-enabled mobile phone tracker focused on North Gaza. When Israel says AI has evaluated an area as cleared, they are ignoring a number of problems. Human Rights Watch (2024) points out cell triangulation data is not as perfect as Israel assumes. It is approximated by the nearest working cell tower. When power is out in a neighborhood of North Gaza, the phone links to distant towers with electricity. When military commanders use such data to “calculate civilian presence as a way of informing decisions related to military operations,” mistakes are inevitable. Concluding nobody is in that neighborhood because of mobile phone data is irresponsible, yet common.

In May, 2024, Human Rights Watch discovered computer code posted on the IDF’s evacuation information website by mistake, that revealed the demographic data used for targeting decisions “for each of the 620 blocks” the IDF has divided the Gaza Strip into for targeting. “The data also included personal information: the surnames of the most populous extended families in each block.” It clearly dated back to mid-November

2023, thus making it irrelevant in the months that followed, as the civilian population was uprooted from one safe zone to another under waves of Israeli warnings and deadly attacks.

Based on a presentation by Unit 8200's AI and Data Science operations, Human Rights Watch staff (2024) have surmised that the Data Decision Systems (DDS) used for "finding new terrorists" first used in Gaza in 2021, "compiles surveillance data to rate people based on their suspected likelihood of association with a militant group." It uses "a type of semi-supervised machine learning called 'positive unlabeled learning' to train the central algorithm." Using simplistic binary logic, all information is either "positive" (evidence of a militant group connection) or "negative" (no evidence). The algorithm matches these qualities between suspects (everyone in Gaza). So if being in Hamas in 2014 correlates significantly with being in Hamas in 2024, then people who left Hamas in 2015 are still categorized as good targets. Or if cell phone data shows a mobile registered to someone was near several attacks on the IDF, that is proof that he (all militants are men in this system) is a danger, even if his phone was actually stolen months before. As Human Rights watch concluded, since "many data points would be unconfirmed if this technique were applied to a large population, this process relies to a large degree on unsubstantiated guesswork" (2024).

What is the result? An analysis by *The Financial Times* showed that in just a few months the Gaza Strip suffered more damage (by 10,000 airstrikes) than the three cities in Germany (Cologne, Hamburg, and Dresden) most bombed by the Allies in World War II, including two subjected to the creation of an artificial fire storm, a technology later used on Tokyo, which was perfected on Hamburg and Dresden. It used "a mix of high explosives and incendiary bombs" to create fire tornados that "caused streets to melt" (Dyer 2023). Technological fanaticism at work.

In recent years, the U.S. has developed non-explosive munitions that can reduce collateral damage almost to zero. It used such a missile—the Hellfire R9X—to kill al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul in August 2022. The building he was in suffered no major damage and the family members with him were all uninjured. Israel, which has such incredibly accurate munitions as well, has used the most destructive and lethal dumb weapons in its arsenal in the very heart of Gaza's most densely populated neighborhoods targeting low-level militants. Israel saves their "smart" missiles for high-value targets, at the cost of massive

civilian casualties. Satellite imagery has revealed hundreds of new craters more than 10 meters wide across the Gaza Strip that are normally associated only with 2000-pound bombs. In some areas of Gaza, so many of the bombs have been dropped that the multiple overlapping “kill radius” circles cover entire districts (Dyer 2023). It is systematic ethnic cleansing.

AI applications are almost always subsystems of larger networks. This is particularly true for military technology. The contemporary military is committed to a networked systems. This is their view of themselves, not as soldiers and weapons, but as weapon systems including both. Overall, it is a system of systems. The U.S. Air Force is leading efforts to create a Combined Joint All Domain Command and Control (CJADC2) network. Palantir is upgrading Maven (the most important U.S. combat DDS) for almost half a billion dollars as part of this. In theory, it will integrate information from all service branches, partners, and allies, into an internet of military “things” (systems), making information accessible anywhere and anytime for quick decisions on the battlefield. It will fail, as all the earlier attempts to create an “Electronic Battlefield” (Vietnam War) or Total Battlefield Awareness (Iraq and Afghanistan defeats) have. Illusions about the efficacy of the latest weapons and other systems is one way Western powers have managed to lose postmodern conflicts again and again (Albon 2024; Gray 1997, 2005).

Israel’s military data, AI and other programs, are not integrated to that extent yet; it is still a system of lesser systems. Looking at them, the newest and most deadly for Gaza first, it is possible to discern their powers and limits.

## THE GOSPEL, LAVENDER, WHERE’S DADDY, DEPTH OF WISDOM, NIMBUS

We prepare the targets automatically and work according to a checklist. It really is like a factory. We work quickly and there is no time to delve deeply into the target. The view is that we are judged according to how many targets we manage to generate.

—A source who worked with Gospel to target Palestinians  
(Abraham 2023)

We are not being surgical.

—General Aluf Tomer Bar, IDF Air Force Commander  
(Abraham 2023)

It is a system, as one anonymous user admitted, that is actually a “mass assassination factory” with an emphasis on “quantity and not on quality” (Abraham 2023). Along with their Power Target policy (buildings without military value but good to destroy for “shock” impact, i.e., terrorism), Gospel, Lavender, Where’s Daddy, and Depth of Wisdom have allowed the IDF to target almost all of the homes, and many of the tunnels, of over 40,000 Hamas members, other militants, journalists, and community leaders. This is how families are eradicated. As of the end of November 2023, over 300 families had lost 10 or more members (Renic and Schwarz 2023). Nine months later it was 902 (Haddad and Antonopoulos 2024). Many of the journalists killed in Gaza, over 106 as of January 8, 2024, died with their whole family (McGreal 2023; Abraham 2023).

Even the IDF called it a “target factory” in a statement released less than a month into the attack. To quote a Google translation of the IDF website:

It has been 27 days of combat that the IDF’s target factory has been operating around the clock. From the land, from the air and from the sea—the forces attack terrorist targets of Hamas in a non-stop operation. So far it is about more than 12,000 targets in the Gaza Strip, besides which thousands of other terrorist targets were criminalized during the fighting. (Israel Defense Forces 2023)

Being labeled a target by an algorithm magically “criminalizes” everyone there.

One of the key systems is Gospel, Habsora (הַרְלוֹשָׁב) in Hebrew—“Happy holy messages” to the Jewish tribes from God about victory over their enemies. A DDS that recommends “buildings and structures as targets rather than individuals,” it scores potential targets with a green/yellow/red light schema (McKernan and Davies 2024).

Aviv Kochavi, head of IDF up until January 2023, said that thanks to Gospel the number of targets they could acquire in Gaza went from 50 a year to 100 a day. In the first 35 days the IDF struck 15,000 sites in Gaza. In all of the 2014 attack on Gaza, which lasted 51 days, the IDF hit less than 5000 sites. Gospel is the difference (Davies et al. 2023). The way Israel uses the Gospel system is clearly a war crime (Liebergall 2023; Jones 2023).

While the IDF claims Gospel is an incredible system with a nice interface, the evidence shows the program isn't militarily effective. But it does provide political cover for targeting that is in violation of International Law, an AI alibi. No doubt, this is exacerbated by the limitations such programs always have, as explained earlier: automation bias, scenario fulfillment, misplaced concreteness, the limits of correctness, and so on.

Gospel was most likely "trained" on data from earlier "predictive policing" programs, especially in the Palestinian Laboratory (Loewenstein 2023). The 2017 digital surveillance campaigns against Palestinians that were run by the Israeli company Fifth Dimension and the U.S.'s Palantir are a clear precursor. Fifth Dimension is very much a military relative of Palantir. Its Chairman in 2015 was General Benny Gantz (ret.), former IDF Chief of Staff and Minister of Defense 2020–2022 and then a Minister without portfolio in Netanyahu's cabinet. Ram Ben-Barak, a former deputy head of Mossad, was its President. The 2017 operations collected social media, psychological profiles, official records, and hacked cellphone data to target Palestinians that might commit attacks, or seemed threatening in some other way. Despite many false positives, often based on misunderstandings of Arabic words or simplistic assumptions, hundreds of these "Facebook Terrorists" jailed without trial for posts they made, became "Facebook Prisoners" (Hirschauge and Shezaf 2017).

Gospel might also have trained on data from the Obama administration's "Disposition Matrix" database, a collection of biographies, possible locations, and operational details for "individuals believed to pose a threat to U.S. interests." At meetings, chaired sometimes by President Obama himself, some of them were chosen for assassination by drone strike or to be captured and interrogated at black sites. In 10 years (2001–2011) it killed 400 people in Pakistan, just one area of operations (Cobain 2013).

Lavender is the "smart" database used with Gospel. Programmed by Unit 8200, it was designed to produce more targets by capturing and decrypting all possible surveillance data (drones, satellites, ground cameras, body cams), intercepted communications, human analysis, and social media (even from the dark web) (McKernan and Davies 2024).

Gospel and Lavender work with Where's Daddy, which was designed to specifically track Hamas fighters to determine when they might be at their homes so they could be killed, along with their families and neighbors, by crude but powerful bombs since smart bombs are too expensive

for such low-level targets (Rommen 2024). The name itself reveals just how much the IDF cares about Palestinian families and other civilians.

Depth of Wisdom was developed to map Gaza's tunnel network. This big-data analytical tool provides a "full picture of the network both above and below ground with details, such as the depth of the tunnels, their thickness and the nature of the routes" (Shehabi and Lubin 2024). The mapping is done with drones using AI, such as those recently developed by Robotican, an Israeli startup (Anderson 2024).

No matter how much data is crunched, the targeting is not accurate. Neil Renic (University of Copenhagen) and Elke Schwarz (Queen Mary University London) analyzed the IDF's AI decision-making programs and conclude that they immorally target Palestinian civilians because they are designed to expand, not refine, targeting, as the results show. They significantly contribute to the likelihood of systematic mass killing. Using the work of Herbert Kelman on mass atrocities, they note that besides historical, often racially based, hostility, other processes he labeled "authorization," "routinization," and "dehumanization" are particularly powerful dynamics for the "weakening of moral restraint." As they point out, this is exactly what AI systems do to the humans they are "in the loop" with (Renic and Schwarz 2023).

Other independent experts point out that the evidence does not support Israel's claims that they are using AI technology to limit civilian casualties. Nancy Okail, president of the Center for International Policy, notes, "they are using it intentionally—as opposed to what it's supposed to be, which is helping with precision—to target civilians." Shaan Shaikh of the Center for Strategic and International Studies remarks acidly, "With over 30,000 casualties in Gaza, it's hard to tell if the IDF is using high-tech AI to identify targets or throwing darts at a map." Or as Heidy Khlaaf, an engineering director of machine learning at the United Kingdom-based Trail of Bits cybersecurity firm, put it, "Given the track record of high error-rates of AI systems, imprecisely and biasedly automating targets is really not far from indiscriminate targeting" (Gedeon and Miller 2024).

Israel pleads innocent of any crimes in every way, but the body count does not lie. And it isn't just the weapons and the DDS systems that kill; infrastructure is crucial for the wholesale killing, and Israel has just upgraded a key element—its cloud.

Nimbus, Israel's new cloud, was turned on in August 2024. It is a major undertaking as the leading bureaucracy proclaimed:



“Project Nimbus” is a multi-year flagship project and the first of its kind in the Israeli government which is led by the Accountant General of the Ministry of Finance through the Government Procurement Administration together with the Israel National Digital Agency, the Israel National Cyber Directorate, the Ministry of Defense, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) and other partners in the government. (Accountant General, Israel Ministry of Finance [2023](#))

Amazon and Google are major contractors. They have always insisted that Nimbus is totally civilian, but a *Wired* investigation (Haskins [2024b](#)) showed “the Israel Defense Force has been central to Project Nimbus since its inception, shaping the projects’ design and serving as some of its most important users.” It wasn’t hard. The head of Israel’s National Cyber Directorate, Gaby Portnoy, even said, “Phenomenal things are happening in battle because of the Nimbus public cloud, things that are impactful for victory.”

State-owned arms companies (Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries) are “obligatory customers” and so are required to use Nimbus. The IDF has their own “landing zone” in the infrastructure. Google’s Nimbus contract means they must share their “AI capabilities such as face detection, object tracking, sentiment analysis, and other complex tasks” with Israeli Nimbus users, including the military and security services (Haskins [2024b](#)).

These military applications and the digital infrastructure that sustains them are all based on older generations of tech. Most relevant here are the earlier weapons and helping applications used by Israel that have been labeled AI, some still very much in use.

### PEGASUS, IRON DOME, FIRE FACTORY, AND THE ALCHEMIST

The most notorious of all is Pegasus, a “cyberweapon” made by NSO (named for its founders Niv, Shalev, and Omri), the “notorious global offensive cyber company.” Pegasus spyware, that infects mobile phones with malware allowing complete monitoring, was sold to criminal organizations around the world, including authoritarian regimes. All with the approval and encouragement of the Israeli government, who used it to leverage Saudi Arabia and other regimes. It played a crucial role in the murder of at least two journalists, including Jamal Khashoggi (Gee [2024](#)).

Pegasus was first used against Palestinians to feed data into the total surveillance system which is still used for targeting. Only when it was revealed that it had been used on journalists and dissidents outside of Israel did the U.S. blacklist the company. Only when it was used on Israelis without warrants by the police did it become a major issue in Israel. As *Haaretz* journalist Yossi Melman argues, this is indicative of Israel's declining democracy (Melman 2024):

NSO is just a symptom of much malicious and widespread disease. It is a manifestation of an out-of-control culture which incubates arms dealers, security contractors and technological wizards, worships them and turns them into untouchable heroes for the homeland.

When WhatsApp sued NSO for illegally cracking into their program, the state of Israel moved to protect the company by seizing and then secreting key documents from it to cover up the illegal sales of Pegasus (Davies and Kirchaessner 2024). The trick led Apple to drop its lawsuit against NSO, because without the documents it would have to reveal its own technology to prevail. Still, many other suits continue (Gee 2024). Israel's intervention is not surprising, considering how closely the Ministry of Defense controlled NSO. Once it was discredited it was replaced by Paragon, which also makes spyware, with Unit 8200 veterans playing a major role in the company (Loewenstein 2023, pp. 146–147).

Another important Israeli application that pioneered the use of AI in deployed military and security applications is the famous Iron Dome air defense system. Built by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries, it was financed with over \$2 billion of U.S. taxpayer money. Iron Dome's Tamir missile is co-produced with Raytheon. Other missile systems that work with Iron Dome are Arrow, anti-ballistic missile batteries co-produced with the U.S. (50% Boeing), and David's Sling (originally called Magic Wand), a short-range missile system that replaces Patriot missiles.

One of the earliest DDS was Israel's Fire Factory. Its mapping function was probably the origin of Google's mapper Waze (bought for \$1.2 billion). Fire Factory, founded by yet more veterans of Unit 8200, was widely used in Israel's 2021 invasion of Gaza, which was labeled by the IDF the "first AI war" (Defense Redefined staff 2023).

As a report published on the West Point website explains,

One of the DDS the IDF used is the “Fire Factory,” which can meticulously analyze extensive datasets including historical data about previously authorized strike targets, enabling the calculation of required ammunition quantities, the proposal of optimal timelines, and the prioritization and allocation of targets. Operationally, it is an amalgamate of phase 2 (target development) and phase 3 (capabilities analysis) of the targeting cycle. Functionally, it resembles a blend of the U.S. Prometheus and FIRESTORM algorithms as fielded during Project Convergence-21. (Mimran et al. 2024)

Another DDS, the Alchemist is still in use. It “provides unit commanders with real-time alerts of possible threats on the ground, sent directly to their handheld tablets” (Shehabi and Lubin 2024).

These earlier AI surveillance and DDS programs had fundamental flaws which were passed on to later generations. If an AI is fed data based on earlier flawed programs, misunderstandings, and bad data then it can’t be relied on for ethical life and death decisions.

Even if the programs worked perfectly, which they cannot, their very design degrades ethical decision-making. Atef Safadi (2023) explains,

Militaries and soldiers frame their decision-making through what is called the “OODA loop” (for observe, orient, decide, act). A faster OODA loop can help you out manoeuvre your enemy. The goal is to avoid slowing down decisions through excessive deliberation, and instead to match the accelerating tempo of war. So the use of AI is potentially justified on the basis it can interpret and synthesise huge amounts of data, processing it and delivering outputs at rates that far surpass human cognition. But where is the space for ethical deliberation in an increasingly fast and data-centric OODA loop cycle happening at a safe distance from battle?

Actually, there is no such space.

In an article truncated by Israeli military censors, *Haaretz* reporters Orr Hirschauge and Hagar Shezaf revealed that numerous Palestinians in the West Bank were being jailed only because they fit a profile based on “predictive systems used for intelligence at Israeli security organizations” that mainly relied on social media information. They were labeled Facebook Terrorists, as is noted above. At that time in 2017 only two companies were supplying such programs: the politically connected Fifth Dimension and Palantir Technologies. Is it any surprise that these programs, which failed to protect Israel on October 7, are still being used

today (at great profit for the companies and their leadership, past and present)? (Hirschauge and Shezaf 2017).

The way this profiling of West Bank Palestinians works is Orwellian. When a young man is depressed and goes to a site of a previous attack to mourn where a friend died, the 17-year-old is arrested. Or if a widow posts a picture of her husband killed in a car accident and calls him a *shahid*, which the system translates as “martyr” (which is not what she meant), she is sent without trial to 8 months detention (Hirschauge and Shezaf 2017).

Israeli courts also misuse Arabic in the same way. For example, *shahid* is always translated as “martyr” in English but it also means “witness” or anyone who has lived their life in accordance with Allah who dies by accident. *Jihad* is translated as terrorist war, when it means any struggle, even a struggle with oneself to be more devout. Social media is no better. *Shahid* is the single-most censored word on Meta. After years of complaints the courts agreed to “review” the issue (*Al Jazeera* staff 2024; Mendel 2010). It remains under review.

It isn’t just that there are no rights for Palestinians for freedom of speech or movement. There is no freedom from ubiquitous observation, including surveillance of their social media and even encrypted messages, without a warrant. A Palestinian can be labeled a terrorist just because an algorithm predicts it. *Haaretz* even obtained a tape recording of an Israeli official exclaiming, “Unlike terrorists who belong to Hamas or the Islamic Jihad, if you get to their house a week before the attack the kid doesn’t know that he is a terrorist yet!” Of course, this is a fantasy. The thought crimes Palestinians have been persecuted for have never been linked directly to real attacks. However, “laboratory” studies continue.

## THE PALESTINE LABORATORY

In general the war in Gaza presents threats, but also opportunities to test emerging technologies in the field.

—Avi Hasson, chief executive of Startup Nation Central, an Israeli tech incubator  
(Anderson 2024)

Antony Loewenstein’s concept of The Palestine Laboratory is crucial for understanding the Torture of Gaza. He explains in *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World* (2023) that Israel’s powerful and profitable high-tech military sector depends on having Palestine to test and validate their weapons. As with any complex product, the more it has been tested successfully, the easier it is to sell. Israel isn’t the only war lab, of course, there is a Ukrainian Laboratory producing excellent training data and profits, also at a bloody cost.

The scope of Israel’s military high-tech industry is impressive. In 2021, Israeli arms sales set a new record, going up 55% over the previous two years to \$11.3 billion, most of it to Europe and Asia. Israel is now one of the top 10 weapons dealers in the world (Loewenstein 2023, pp. 9–10). While the arms industries’ importance to Israel has become controversial there, even most critics feel that it is crucial to keep Israel strong. So, on balance, it is acceptable to sell arms to any horrible regimes that will buy them. And, of course, there is always the old trope, if they didn’t do it someone else would. It is estimated the 10% of the Israeli workforce, 140,000 workers, work in high-tech weapons production (Loewenstein 2023, pp. 9–10).

Even more Israelis work on regular weapons. The researcher Haim Bredsheeth Zabner says, “The economy abandoned oranges for hand grenades.” Best estimates are that there are over 300 multinational companies and 6000 startups that employ hundreds of thousands of people in Israel today working on arms-related products. Israel’s cybersecurity firms in particular are very successful, with 100 major deals in 2021 bringing in \$8.8 billion, 40% of the world’s funding for cybersecurity (Loewenstein 2023, p. 29).

A Stanford University study predicted Israel would lead the world in AI talent concentration in 2024. The Defense Industry is the main driver of this. There are 2300 AI companies in Israel, 25% of the country’s high-tech industry and more are coming. OpenAI founder and chief scientist Ilya Sutskever, for example, is building the R&D center for his new AI company there (Rom 2024).

The Palestine Laboratory is lucrative, not just thanks to all the closely monitored combat available for testing, but also because Israel can do things other countries cannot, like Torture Gaza, and still get Western support. In 2009, at the Paris Air Show, Antony Loewenstein visited the Elbit Systems (Israel’s largest defense contractor) booth and watched

its promotional video about killer drones, which included actual combat footage. Later, he looked into an attack featured in the video and discovered that it had killed a number of children and other civilian Palestinians. Loewenstein remarks, “This was my introduction to the Israeli arms industry, and the way it markets itself. No other arms producing country would show actual footage like that” (Loewenstein 2023, p. 8).

The Palestine Laboratory also distorts Israel’s foreign policy. Apparently, its importance is greater than the lives of Jews in the diaspora, human rights violations, or even rejecting cooperation with racist and fascist governments. When Israel makes decisions such as to support the Pinochet regime in Chile in order to preserve the state of Israel, with no concern about the experience of Jews in Chile, they are then turned into sacrificial assets (and encouraged to move to Israel to be safe). That the current Torture of Gaza is producing an upsurge in anti-Semitism around the world is a feature from this point of view, not a bug, if it drives more Jews to Israel (Loewenstein 2023, p. 20).

Guatemala’s dictatorship was openly anti-Semitic, but that didn’t stop Israel from making deals with it to improve their repressive apparatus. Israeli assistance to the Guatemalan regime included the installation of a sophisticated computer listening center by the Israeli company Tadiran Israel Electronics. Operational by 1980, it collected data on at least 80% of the population. It is likely the center was linked to the U.S. Army Southern Command at Fort Gulick in the Panama Canal zone. This mirrors U.S. massive surveillance systems established in Afghanistan and Iraq a few years later. In 1982 and 1983 Ríos Montt, the President of Guatemala by virtue of a coup, assisted according to many reports by Israeli military advisers, killed more than 75,000 people. Montt told an ABC reporter that “many of our soldiers were trained by the Israelis.” Israel clearly hoped that Guatemala would support it in the United Nations for its continued illegal occupation of the West Bank (Loewenstein 2023, pp. 39–40).

Israel’s policy of supporting and aligning itself with rightwing regimes continues to the present day, most recently in the intimate relationships with the Myanmar dictatorship and support for the government of South Sudan. Although in the case of Myanmar, because of a global ban on weapon shipments to that country currently embroiled in a vicious Civil War, they are now banned from Israeli arms fairs. Israel has sold key weapons to the dictatorship of Equatorial Guinea as well (Loewenstein 2023, pp. 53 and 55).

Russia licensed Israel Aerospace Industries' Search II drones a few years after suffering heavy losses to drones in 2008 during their invasion of Georgia. They were also supplied to al-Assad in Syria (Loewenstein 2023, p. 81).

Israel has led the world in military drone technology for some time. Since 2020 there has been an increased use of drones to directly target protesters, such as the "Sea of Tears" drones that drops tear gas. In 2022 Israel approved the use of drones for "targeted killings" in the West Bank (Loewenstein 2023, p. 77). There is also a "skunk water" drone developed to drop persistently (as in it stays on) foul smelling liquids on protesters. There are also "talking drones" flown over protests in the West Bank telling Palestinians to "Go home" in Arabic, and for the Jewish protesters with them, to not "Stand with the enemy" in Hebrew (Loewenstein 2023, p. 8).

Drones are crucial for the extreme surveillance governments and militaries long for. Such "watching" laid the foundations for the Torture of Gaza. As Human Rights Watch staff (2024) concluded:

Tools that employ machine learning and AI rely on enormous quantities of data to produce outputs such as threat predictions, target identification, etc. Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank are under constant, pervasive surveillance by Israeli authorities, and some of this data is now being used to inform military operations and planning in Gaza.

Israel's surveillance industry, largely unregulated, might be the most advanced in the world. Their AI-enhanced tools have been sold to Bahrain, Belarus, the Philippines, Uganda, Morocco, and Nigeria among others. For example, AnyVision runs many of the secret cameras throughout the West Bank, using AI for facial recognition and other biometrics. In late 2021 the company changed their name to Oosto as it has expanded to Russia, China, and the U.S., not just for police and military but also into casinos, factories, and fitness centers (Loewenstein 2023, p. 63).

Corsight AI is a partially Israeli-owned firm that is a key player in the facial recognition industry that is estimated to be worth \$11.6 billion by 2026. They have been implicated in working for police departments in Mexico, Brazil, and Israel. Former IDF colonel Dany Tirza partnered with Corsight AI to develop a body cam for cops that could pick out suspects, even if their faces were covered. Tirza lives in an illegal West

Bank settlement called Afar Adumim, and worked planning the wall that divides the West Bank and creates enclaves for illegal Settler incursions (Loewenstein 2023, p. 64).

Israel has pioneered facial recognition, including the Blue Wolf app in 2019 that compares captured faces to faces in the massive Israeli database called Wolfpack, the “Facebook for Palestinians.” It has personal details on almost every Palestinian in the West Bank, including education, photos, security levels, and family histories. Hebron might be the most surveilled of these locations. The IDF says the program is to “improve the quality of life for the Palestinian population” but they do not monitor the illegal Settlers who are attacking the legal inhabitants. Soldiers in 2022 surveilling the West Bank were ordered to collect at least 50 new Wolfpack entries on Palestinians a shift, and could not go off duty until they did (Loewenstein 2023, pp. 64–65).

Wolfpack is very similar to the Chinese social tech used against Uyghurs in Xinjiang and the failed attempt in the 1980s by the U.S. to capture all of the Human Terrain in Afghanistan. Cellebrite has sold its phone hacking tools across the United States to police departments. Shin Bet seems to be trying to succeed where the U.S. failed, by integrating the digital information from Wolf Pack with massive amounts of Human Intelligence (Loewenstein 2023, pp. 14 and 65).

Google facial recognition technology is crucial at the internal checkpoints that strangle the West Bank. Israeli police and soldiers use it to seek matches to Palestinian faces in their databases, using colored tablets. Amnesty International calls it “automated apartheid” (Kawash 2023).

In May of 2021, Shin Bet used GPS tracking implemented for the COVID-19 pandemic to send messages to Palestinians near or at the riots at the Al-Asqa Mosque. Israeli intelligence claimed information technology proved they had been at the riots and threatened “We will charge you. We will settle the score.” Shin Bet later admitted (in 2022) that many of these messages had been sent in error (Loewenstein 2023, p. 93).

But mistaken or not, the technology certainly made some people serious money. The profit motive is integral to the way countries prepare for and make war. Crucial for this is the traffic between military service in intelligence and electronic warfare and the companies that profit from it. Veterans of cyberwar Unit 8200 were heavily involved in NSO, and have been involved in starting over 1000 companies, according to *Forbes*. Being in Unit 8200 means 20% more pay than the industry average, and 80% of their veterans find positions within 3 months of leaving the service.



Other Israeli vets worked for DarkMatter, a UAI company for hacking and spying (Loewenstein 2023, p. 8).

Mer Security, whose CEO Nir Lempert is a Unit 8200 veteran, does business in more than 40 countries, including winning the contract to put hundreds of cameras in the Old city of Jerusalem. The chair of the board, Haim Mer, also a Unit 8200 veteran, argued that the Israeli police “needed a system in which ‘Big Brother’ would control and would allow for an overall view in the Old City area. Mer Security went on to build the Oscar (Open Source Collection Analysis and Response) tool that scrapes social media and other open sources (Loewenstein 2023, p. 8).

But not all Unit 8200 veterans are in it for the money. In 2019 Unit 8200 veterans started going public, some anonymously, objecting to many Israeli policies including violating human rights, extensive harassment, direct physical attacks, using sexual orientation for blackmail and extorting Palestinians in need of medical care to become spies. Every phone in the West Bank can be monitored, thanks to programs such as Pegasus. So it was easy to find people in debt, or gays or adulterers to blackmail (Loewenstein 2023, pp. 88–89). It is an agnostic system that can easily be turned on Israelis as well, and it has been.

When Ultra-Orthodox Jews resisted COVID-19 pandemic policies, the government sealed off the city of Bnei Brak where many lived. A company called Octopus Services (with many IDF connections) put in 500 cameras and surveillance balloons. The High Court, in denying relief to some of the surveilled citizens, used the same logic that justified monitoring Palestinians to defend the hyper surveillance of the vaccine-resistant ultra-Orthodox. Poetically, hypocritically, quite incorrectly, and somewhat bizarrely, they declared: “All these pass us by like a dystopian dream in a democratic state where civil liberties are at the core of its existence” (Loewenstein 2023, p. 96).

## THE U.S. MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL EMPIRE

Israel is an integral part of the U.S. system. American rhetoric aimed at limiting Israel’s increasing deranged aggressions is dwarfed by the reality that the U.S. supplies real-time intelligence to the IDF, has sent its own military to staff air defense systems in Israel and ships to the region to serve as another layer of air defense, subsidizes its military with massive aid and continues to send numerous weapons directly to the IDF. This includes the very bombs that are killing so many civilians in Gaza and

Lebanon, such as the GBU-31, GBU 39 (Boeing), and MK-8p4 bombs (General Dynamics) (Loewenstein 2023, p. 79). As Jewish Voice for Peace (2024) concludes, Israel “Is a core pillar of U.S. Dominance” (2024).

U.S.-Israel technological integration is particularly deep in the realm of military AI. Project Maven is very much like Gospel, Lavender, Where’s Daddy, Depth of Wisdom, and the Alchemist all operating together. Maven “the Pentagon’s marquis artificial intelligence program,” takes in data from satellites to ground sensors, social media to encrypted communications, and signals intelligence to human, and “helps” decision-makers react to it (Albon 2024).

In May of 2024, Palantir won the \$480 million contract to implement Maven Smart Systems to improve Maven’s data analysis, refine its decision-making, and expand its user base to the five major combatant commands and thousands of new users (Albon 2024).

One source of data for Maven’s insatiable processors is the drone called Gorgon’s Stare. Medusa was one of the Gorgons, without an Aegis to hide behind, her look would turn you to stone, as with the gaze of her two sisters. The technological Gorgon flies in battlefields and cities around the world, collecting massive amounts of visual information through its nine cameras. They can capture large areas (dozens of square miles probably but the actual amount is top secret) in high fidelity and store it for examination later, say after a bomb has gone off. Going back in time and zooming in they can sometimes even see who planted it. The current system grew out of earlier aircraft and drone surveillance platforms used by the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan and by Israel over both Palestine and itself (Michel and Meyers 2019).

While it is crucial to know about these projects, it is by understanding the companies involved, and the importance of the profits generated by them in creating them that explains why we have all this high-tech military AI and related tech that doesn’t win wars. Following the money, we see it leads to some new and important players (Palantir, Anduril, and some smaller AI firms), mainstream digital firms (Intel, IBM, Oracle, Hewlett-Packard, Cisco, Dell), and the old stalwarts of the military-industrial complex (Boeing, Northrup, General Dynamics). Palantir is the most important of the new players, in large part because of the connections of its founder Peter Thiel, detailed in Chapter 2.

Founded in 2003 by Peter Thiel and other rightwing rich men who are into LOTR (see Chapter 2) and a more authoritarian America, Palantir

has become a powerful military and intelligence contractor. They also have some contracts for decision systems, databases, system integration, and so on with local governments and private companies, but war and rumors of war is their focus and it is lucrative (Palantir website).

The journalist Caroline Haskins (2024a) visited “Palantir’s first-ever AI warfare conference” and found it “soul destroying.” The mortal blow was delivered when she went to “a panel in Palantir’s booth titled Civilian Harm Mitigation.” What it came down to was bragging about how Palantir’s Gaia map program facilitates “the target nomination process,” or in other words “helps people decide which places got bombed.” The interactive map showed all sorts of features, including “bright blue blobs” representing hospitals and schools. While the operators could call up texts about them it also could just feed them a “dumbed-down version of information about where children sleep and families get medical treatment.” The program is agnostic about targeting such sites.

Palantir’s little sister is the military AI firm Anduril, whose leadership (Peter Luckey and Trae Stephens) share the same rightwing politics and authoritarian fantasies as Palantir’s do. Anduril raised \$1.5 billion to make an AI platform (Arsenal) to help “build tens of thousands of autonomous weapons” yearly. They are so proud of it, and optimistic about the profits (it does fit with the DoD initiative called Replicator that aims to automate the production of thousands of expendable intelligent autonomous systems), they have even released a manifesto for changing the whole U.S. weapons production cycle through AI (Knight 2024b). What could possibly go wrong? Anduril also won the contract inspired by the War in Ukraine, from the U.S. Air Force and Navy for the Collaborative Combat Aircraft, a new generation of killer drones with “autonomous and swarming capabilities” (Knight 2024a). Of course, the older more established participants in the military-industrial complex are making their profits as well.

Since this Torture of Gaza began, Intel has decided to invest \$25 billion in a chip plant in Israel, Microsoft has launched a new Azure cloud “region” to fit with the massive (\$1.2 billion) Nimbus cloud Google and Amazon are building, Google is allowing the government to use their face recognition programs, IBM designed and operates Israel’s population monitoring system (as they did for South Africa’s apartheid regime), and other companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Cisco, and Dell sell components directly to the IDF and the security services. Microsoft, Nvidia, and

others also have research and development centers in the country (Kwet 2024).

Social media plays an important role for collecting intelligence and influencing public opinion. Israeli operatives directly intervene on Facebook and other platforms. Human Rights Watch has documented that continuing their repression of pro-Palestinian comments, in October and November of 2023, Instagram and Facebook actively suppressed content by Palestinians and their supporters. They found 1049 cases of postings “censored or otherwise unduly suppressed” that were pro-Palestine, but left alone in cases that were pro-Israel. In over 300 cases users were not allowed to appeal or complain about their censorship. When Human Rights Watch put out a call for information on social media censorship, Facebook “flagged it as ‘spam’” and Instagram removed all comments on it, “citing a violation of its Community Guidelines.” They conclude that “censorship of content related to Palestine and Facebook is systemic and global” (Human Rights Watch staff 2023).

YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and even TikTok (owned by China) have been accused of similar censorship (Kwet 2024). Still, important as the censorship and manipulation of social media is, actually controlling people’s movement, as opposed to their memes, is the physical side of surveillance. Much of it happens at international borders or airports, but in Israel it happens everywhere, especially within the West Bank, and now Gaza. So border technology is a priority for Israel, as it is a key fantasy for the racist rightwing in the U.S., whipped into a frenzy in October of 2024 by the Republican Party as it embraced more and more fascist tropes and policies.

U.S. border security firms lease a range of technologies from the Tel Aviv-based surveillance and security company Windward, and other Israeli firms. Former General and head of the CIA, David Petraeus, and former IDF chief of staff Gabi Ashkenazi are advisers to Windward, founded by two IDF navy intelligence officers (Loewenstein 2023, p. 138). The giant Elbit Systems company is also involved in U.S. border security, as is Brinc, backed by Peter Thiel. Elbit works closely with Lockheed-Martin, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Northrup Grumman, and Boeing on projects as well (Loewenstein 2023, pp. 139–140). The cooperation between the governments of Israel and the U.S. is even closer than the corporate links.

An investigation by *Intercept* reporters Ken Klippenstein and Matthew Petti uncovered documents using the Freedom of Information

Act showing the Biden administration sent an Air Defense Liaison Team of targeting specialists (“intelligence engagement officers”) to Israel in November of 2024, probably to analyze satellite data in real time. Meanwhile, the U.S. was operating drone surveillance of Gaza, ostensibly only to facilitate hostage rescues. But U.S. policy is to give Israel all the raw data available, so that justification is nonsense (Klippenstein and Petti 2024).

The U.S. has long-standing policies against committing or supporting assassinations, and that includes targeting civilians and other related war crimes. The Leahy Law also mandates that foreign military units that commit “gross violations of human rights” be sanctioned. The few times the Department of State has acted on Israeli violations, Secretary of State Antony Blinken blocked them (Klippenstein and Petti 2024). Israel is too important to the American Empire to allow the proper and fitting application of the law to be carried out.

In his detailed history of Palestine and Israel, Prof. Adam Hanieh explains why this is. He shows how U.S. support for Israel is based on Israel’s dependence on the U.S. As an immigrant nation—Settler, Israelis, activists, and professors agree—Israel is always at conflict with neighbors and the original inhabitants.

But Israel’s ability to maintain a permanent state of war, occupation, and oppression would be deeply imperiled without continuous American backing (both materially and politically). In return, Israel serves as a loyal partner and a bulwark against threats to American interests in the region. Israel has also acted globally in supporting repressive US-backed regimes across the world – from Apartheid South Africa through to military dictatorships in Latin America. (Hanieh 2024)

Therefore U.S. support for the Torture of Gaza is really just business as usual for the dominant world power of the last 100 years.

Owen Jones (2024) asks, if Netanyahu is guilty, how can the UK and U.S. be innocent? After all, “Rarely has a state been so open about its criminally murderous intentions.” How indeed? As Jewish Voice for Peace asks,

Over the last eight months, Israel’s genocide has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and reduced most of Gaza to rubble. In the face of all this horror, many of us are asking ourselves: How could the U.S. government continue to support this? (2024)

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## CHAPTER 5

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# End Times

**Abstract** This chapter first asks, is victory possible? For Israel it is not. Then it looks at the deeper issues raised by “The Trap of Terrorism” and the growing danger of Israel’s expanded regional war (military operations in the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iran) leading to the possibility of “General War.” The role of technology in these escalations is clear, so that leads to question “Can AI Be Controlled?” Looking first at military AI and then the whole field, it seems probably not. The chapter ends with an explanation of how this conflict, and the driving dynamics of high-tech and ancient myths, could produce the Torture of Gaza with nothing but “The Paradox of Hope” to sustain us.

**Keywords** Victory defined · West Bank annexation · Regional mid-East War · Israeli fascism

### WINNING THE BATTLES; LOSING THE WARS

By the end of the Fall of 2024, Israel and Palestine were both hostages to Netanyahu’s government and the leadership of Hamas. Again and again Netanyahu blocked any hope of ending the killing in Gaza, Lebanon, and elsewhere. Hamas will not surrender or pursue peace, except as a prelude to more war (Bar’el 2024), whatever ceasefires are agreed to. Netanyahu

and the Hamas leadership need each other to survive. Winning is not a near-term goal for either, nor is peace.

Netanyahu claims he wants the total military defeat of Hamas, but many believe he is more interested in his own career. He also hopes to ethnically cleanse and permanently occupy Gaza (Benn 2024), which is what his political allies want. Ariel Kallner, a member of the Prime Minister's Likud party, explained his Gaza war policy: "Right now, one goal: Nakba! A Nakba that will overshadow the Nakba of 1948" (Baroud 2023).

While Gaza suffers horribly, Israel might be in more trouble in the long run. Predictions of Israeli collapse have come from the heart of the military and government. Major General Yitzhak Brik (ret.) has concluded, "The country really is galloping towards the edge of an abyss. If the war of attrition against Hamas and Hezbollah continues, Israel will collapse within no more than a year." He added,

Terror attacks are intensifying in the West Bank and inside the country, the reservist army is voting with its feet following recurring mobilizations of combat soldiers, and the economy is crashing....Israel has also become a pariah state, prompting economic boycotts and an embargo on arms shipments. (Brik 2024)

Brik concludes that Netanyahu is a dictator and his followers' sheep.

Victory means different things to different people. For both the Netanyahu coalition in Israel and Hamas in Gaza, victory is the fantasy eradication of the other, from the River (Jordan) to the Sea (Mediterranean)—a slogan both sides use. This is not going to happen. Total genocide is no longer possible in the context of our postmodern world where pervasive digital and media technologies make large-scale massacre and successful ethnic cleansing impossible to hide. But that does not mean it isn't being attempted, and genocide is a crime even when it does not succeed.

Ancient stories (often with bizarre self-serving modern interpretations) justify contemporary policy thousands of years since the tales were first told. There is no doubt most people in the Middle East simply want a chance to live in peace on their land, to be treated fairly, to have sustaining work. But for some on both sides, their identity is so closely tied to the stories that entitle them to the land, that they put that ahead of peace. Ahead of morality. Ahead of international law. While this is true of both

sides in this conflict, they do have profound differences. For one thing, Israel can kill tens or even hundreds of times more Palestinians than vice versa. For another, only Hamas is fighting a postmodern war. Israel thinks military victory is possible. It is not. But political defeat certainly is.

Consider:

1. A year into the Torture of Gaza, Israel claimed it had killed 17,000 enemy fighters. Even if there was no new recruitment, almost 20,000 fighters remained (Fabian 2024). In all likelihood Hamas is bigger than ever, even if half of its membership is now new. This is a well-known dynamic.

The lesson is that you can only win in urban warfare by protecting civilians. In this kind of a fight, the center of gravity is the civilian population. And if you drive them into the arms of the enemy, you replace a tactical victory with a strategic defeat.

—U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, December 2, 2023

2. Palestinian groups are starting to work with each other, from Hamas to the PLO. If they manage to actually unite, this would be a fundamental defeat for Israel.
3. Israel has lost the support of most of the world. Israeli exceptionalism for war crimes, crimes against humanity, violating UN resolutions, dispossessing and killing civilians, selective and sectarian laws and prosecutions, and the imposition of an apartheid system is over. The academic boycott of Israel is spreading faster than ever (Kashti 2024), even the American Association of University Professors no longer opposes it (Maltz 2024).

For some years support for Israel has been weakening around the world, but right after October 7, 2023 it remained strong in Europe and North America. That has deteriorated significantly. Spain and some other European countries have become vocal critics of Israel's policies. In the UK and U.S., the Labor and Democratic Parties are splitting over the issue. The Islamic world is pulling back from Israel and Malaysia banned Israeli shipping in December 2023.

By September 30, 2024 the UK had restricted 30 arms licenses, almost 10%, for not letting humanitarian supplies into Gaza. Italy, Israel's third-largest arms supplier, will make no new arms contracts. Spain stopped all

arms sales to Israel October 7, and seven months later banned ships with weapons for Israel from using Spanish ports. Canada and Belgium voted in March of 2024 to stop all military sales (Holmes 2024).

A further decline in Israel's international standing is inevitable.

4. Jewish Israel has never been so divided politically (McKernan and Kierzenbaum 2024). Its very democracy is at stake. In mid-August of 2024 Dahlia Scheindlin asked in *Haaretz*, "How close is Netanyahu's Government to Taking Down Israel's Rule of Law?" Her answer was, very close indeed. One telling example, the policy of Attorney General Gail Baharav-Miara to prosecute soldiers who raped imprisoned Palestinians is widely denounced as traitorous (Karanth 2024).
5. Israel is losing their single irreplaceable, ally: the United States. Support by American Jews for Israel was not strong even before the current Torture of Gaza. A 2021 survey found that 34% of Jews agreed that, "Israel's treatment of Palestinians is similar to racism in the United States." 25% agreed that "Israel is an apartheid state" and "22% agreed that Israel's is committing genocide against the Palestinians" (Loewenstein 2023, p. 51). According to a poll by the rightwing think tank Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs (JCFA), six months after October 7, 2023, the number of American Jews who agreed Israel was committing genocide in Gaza had climbed to 30%, with another 18.6% unsure. Over half supported President Biden's symbolic, brief, stoppage of heavy bomb shipments to Israel (JCFA 2024).

Among non-Jewish Americans, the numbers are significantly worse for Israel. A year after the October Hamas attack, support for Israel had dropped from 50% to 25%, compared to 15% for Palestine and 31% equally for both. Only 18% of Americans supported increasing Israeli military aid, although that is what the Biden administration proceeded to do (Potts 2024).

6. Besides the danger of expanding war to Israel, other unexpected problems resulting from the year-long Torture of Gaza include threats to the regions' water supply (Scheindlin 2024) and the

spread of infectious diseases, including polio, hepatitis A, measles, whooping cough, and tetanus (Efrati 2024).

7. The military destruction of Hamas is a defeat for Israel. If the remnants of the leadership of Hamas can mobilize their increased support, it will be stronger and more extreme. Or, Palestinian rage at both Israel and Hamas (and the ineffectual PLO) will foster the rise of some new terrorist group, maybe more interested in revenge (with weapons of mass destruction) than power.

Equally frightening for Israel would be a shift in Palestinian politics away from fundamentalist Islamists and performative terrorism and toward governance, tolerance, mass resistance, and finding a road to peace. This would capitalize on the growing worldwide acceptance of Palestinian rights that has been bought with the lives of the tens of thousands of innocents murdered by the IDF. Reciprocal terrorism, as the Hamas attack of October certainly was, will only lose the support of international civil society and doom Palestine to more predation by militant Zionists.

Soon after Israel's attack on Gaza, even President Biden sensed that Israel was going too far, calling their bombardment "indiscriminate" (Wendling and Plett 2023). Former UK Minister of Defense Ben Wallace went further: "What I am saying is Israel needs to stop this crude and indiscriminate method of attack. Netanyahu's mistake was to miss the attack in the first place. But if he thinks a killing rage will rectify matters, then he is very wrong" (McDonald 2023).

While polling from late October 2023 suggested that 70% of Israelis believed the country should fight until Hamas was "eliminated," a May 2024 survey by the Israeli Midgam Institute found that 62% now believed "total victory" in Gaza was impossible (McKernan and Kierszenbaum 2024).

If Israel's true goal was to destroy Hamas and then leave Gaza, they never had a chance. Hamas is an idea. You cannot destroy an idea, but trying to can certainly make it stronger. Hamas has never enjoyed the support it has now. Policies aimed at your enemy can blow back on you, making them stronger or, even worse, making you more like them.

In his November 7, 2023 article "Israel Could Lose" Jon Alterman analyzes the strategy of Hamas.

Hamas sees victory not in one year or five, but from engaging with decades of struggle that increase Palestinian solidarity and increase Israel's isolation. In this scenario, Hamas rallies a besieged population in Gaza around it in anger and helps collapse the Palestinian Authority government by ensuring Palestinians see it even more as a feckless adjunct to Israeli military authority. Meanwhile, Arab states move strongly away from normalization, the Global South aligns strongly with the Palestinian cause, Europe recoils at the Israeli army's excesses, and an American debate erupts over Israel, destroying the bipartisan support Israel has enjoyed here since the early 1970s. Rumbblings of a regional war suit Hamas well, prompting global debates about the cost of an alliance with Israel. Israel's ability to sustain its own solidarity through this process is not Hamas' main concern. Rather, its goal is to estrange Israel from its international partners and turn it into the pariah that Hamas believes it to be.

Much of this has already been achieved. According to John Ganz (2023), "Israel Has Already Lost" because Israel has squandered much of their international support, they would have to commit total genocide to militarily destroy Hamas. The only real solutions are political, and certainly not more indiscriminate attacks on civilians. In July of 2024 even Defense Minister Gallant testifying before the Knesset said, "I hear the heroes beating the drums [of war], 'total victory' and nonsense." Netanyahu denounced him, of course (Shpigel and Lis 2024).

Raja Shedadeh, of the human rights organization Al-Haq, asked on October 5, 2024, "When will this horror end?" His answer offers little hope, because it will only be when "Israel realizes that the cost of destroying us is too high" because it would involve their own self-destruction. That is a very high bar.

Israel's identity as a Jewish state is based on what Cypriot psychiatrist Vamik Volkan terms "chosen traumas" (Shedadeh 2024). Repeated pogroms and anti-Semitism in Europe spawned both Zionism and Hasidism. Then came the industrialized genocide of the Nazi Holocaust, which in turn created the conditions that enabled both the founding of Israel and the *Nakba*. Since then every wound to Jewish Israel, every attack and killing even when avenged 100 to one, 1200 to one, whatever the numbers, the trauma (and for all too many God's word) justifies Israel's ensuing Sacred Violence.

This calculus of trauma has been institutionalized into public education, so new generations also feel justified in oppressing Palestine. Israeli philosopher Nait Peled-Elhanan studied many of the most widely used



Israeli history texts for secondary schools published between 1998 and 2009, focusing on how they explained some of the well-documented massacres of Arabs carried out by Zionists during the *Nakba*. She found that the texts “implicitly legitimate the killing of Palestinians as an effective tool to preserve a secure Jewish state with a Jewish majority” (2010). It is horrible but necessary, and therefore justified. That same logic animates how the majority of Jewish Israelis see the Torture of Gaza...and the Settler terrorism on the West Bank...and the invasion of Lebanon...and the bombing of Yemen...and the long distance assassinations in Beirut, Damascus, and Teheran. And yet, no victory is in sight.

A year after the October 7 attack, *Haaretz* editor Aluf Benn (2024), noted that “even with the IDF occupying about a third of Gaza’s territory, to many Israelis, the current situation feels like defeat.” He calls it a “calamitous stasis,” pointing to Israel’s declining economy and “growing global isolation.” Life within Israel remained remarkably the same after a year of the Torture of Gaza. The same political and military leadership, expanding war, hostages abandoned, Hamas, Hezbollah, Yemini Houthis, and Iran unbowed and heavy fighting continuing in North Gaza, 14 months after Israel first invaded. Even after the killing of Yahya Al-Sinwar a few weeks after Benn’s article was published, nothing changed except the death count, which continues to rise.

Benn called for using the assassination of Hezbollah’s leader Nasrallah to break this pattern. But that didn’t happen. No killing—of leaders or of thousands of children—has broken the pattern. Netanyahu continued to pursue his “futile quest for ‘total victory’” that will entail “more casualties and economic damage.” Accepting a Palestinian state is the only way forward, but Israel goes “in the opposite direction” toward “a Jewish state from the river to the sea...preferably no political rights to non-Jewish subjects, even those who hold Israeli citizenship.” His conclusion is dark:

Israelis are being led to accept deeper institutionalized apartheid in the West Bank, permanent occupation in Gaza and perhaps south Lebanon, and growing autocracy and theocracy at home. Sadly, after a year of war, the long-term threats to Israel’s democracy and liberal values have only become graver. (Benn 2024)

Equally bleak is the analysis of Brigadier General (ret.) Dov Tamari. He has been pointing out for years that Israel has not won a war since

1967, because that was the last war against conventional armies; you can't vanquish a terrorist group. Long before October 7, 2023 he correctly predicted that the status quo in Gaza was unsustainable and that the IDF could easily be surprised by an attack by Hamas (Melman 2024).

Every human society [that exists] in the framework of a state finds itself in a social narrative, willingly or unwillingly. Our narrative is from Holocaust to revival, which was born with the establishment of the state, and at a certain stage, that changed to what is called 'spatial nationalism.'

Spatial nationalism justifies Israel's continued expansion. Even in 1950, the General Staff and the rest of the IDF "top brass" were arguing that the "armistice" borders (actually the internationally agreed-upon boundaries) were not expansive enough, that "it was necessary to expand." In the end, using "defense, diplomatic, and economic justifications" the IDF sought to "create a subversive culture that aims to constantly exploit any opportunity to accomplish the idea of expanding" (Melman 2024).

In the end, he asks,

What were they thinking in the General Staff on October 7? That we would be able to wage a long war while we are shutting off water and electricity for more than 2 million people and trying to starve them? I don't know where this is going to lead, but it is clear to me that the Israeli narrative of from Holocaust to revival, which was accepted in the world beforehand, has lost. (Melman 2024)

But they weren't thinking, they were feeling.

## THE TRAP OF TERRORISM

Terror is a relationship.  
—Diane Nelson

(Gray 2005, p. xi)

Virtue without limits becomes terror.  
—Jean Bethke Elshtain

(Gray 2005, p. 3)

Understanding the Torture of Gaza starts with realizing that for all the pretensions of rationality war-makers claim, war is always profoundly emotional. The conflicts in the Middle East prove this. The emotional resonances go back thousands of years, but the proximate trigger of what is happening now was the European anti-Semitism that culminated in the Nazi Holocaust. The Palestinian scholar Abdaljawad Omar has charted how that trauma shaped the Zionism which now justifies persecuting the Palestinian people (2023). This is not a new dynamic. Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, and other Jewish intellectuals warned about the danger of Jews adopting “the organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal” of Nazism when they denounced Menachem Begin in 1948 (Hill 2023). Benjamin Netanyahu and his Revisionist Zionist backers are the direct descendents of Begin’s movement.

The roots run deep. There is a long Western history of anti-Semitism, but there is also the Jewish response to it, which included both leftist and “revisionist” (rightist) Zionism. Israel’s current war on Palestinians embodies this nasty dialectic of history coming to fruition. Hard though it is to believe, Revisionist Zionism is fascism. There is a direct line from Zeév Jabotinsky to Begin to Netanyahu, something not admitted after the Holocaust (Pernstein 2024; Kaplan 2005).

Israel becoming what it most hated and feared can be charted through the rise of Revisionist Zionism to power. Rick Pernstein’s “The Neglected History of the State of Israel” (2024) tells this story in the context of his own childhood, assisted by the careful scholarship of Eran Kaplan, who wrote *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and Its Ideological Legacy* (2005).

A number of Jews proudly proclaimed themselves fascists back in the 1930s (Tamir 2014; Sarfatti 2017), most of them Revisionist Zionists. What did they mean by that label? There are many ways to define fascism, even by fascists. There is always some claim to be pro-worker, socialism in one state, yet Mussolini and Hitler did not ban corporations. Indeed making corporations subservient to the nation was a key part of their program, which the Italian dictator even called “corporatism.” Along with all sectors of society, especially the proletariat and bourgeoisie, submitting to the State and the State being personified by one man, there is a profound emotional factor involved. On the surface it seems to be love of the führer but fear and hatred are the real drivers of fascism.

Pervasive fear and hatred can take over individuals, masses, countries, and empires. Klaus Theweleit shows in his powerful and disturbing

two-volume analysis of the psychosexual architecture of Nazism, *Male Fantasies* (1987), that fascists are doing what they need to do, that fascist terrorism flows from the terror that fascists feel. We can learn from this history, but it isn't simple.

Because history repeats itself, sometimes as rhyme, sometimes as farce, but those are not the only options. History can be a dynamic, even dialectical, process. In the case of the Holocaust, Israel and the War on the Palestinians it is a dark dialectic indeed, with Israel morphing into what it most hates and fears. It is important to remember that Palestinians are no more immune to this evil twist of fate than Jews, or anyone else.

This isn't a fringe academic idea, an evil Freudian tango dreamt up by depraved postmodern professors. Lately more and more Jews, even Israelis, argue it has already come to pass. One of them is Omer Bartov, a military historian and IDF veteran. He is Sabra, first-generation born and raised in Israel. One branch of his family is from the same part of Galicia as ancestors of one of the authors. Bartov's book on this heritage, *Tales of the Borderlands* (2022) is a beautiful evocation of a lost civilization.

But his main work is as a historian of the Nazi military. Consider these quotes from Bartov's historical analysis of the Nazification of the German army, the Wehrmacht. We have taken the liberty of making a very few substitutions—**Israel** for *Germany*, **Zionism** for *Nazism*, **IDF** (Israel Defense Forces) for *Wehrmacht*, **Palestinians** for *Jews*, **Settlers** for *SS* and **Netanyahu** for *Hitler*.

The **IDF** was the army of the people, and the willing tool of the regime...It is in this manner too that the connection recently emphasized between the **IDF's** criminal conduct...and the extermination of the **Palestinians** should be understood, whether we speak of the generals or the privates. Indeed, [despite] differences of age, social background and education...the soldiers were more, rather than less likely than the civilians to belong to those categories supportive of the regime, its ideology, and its policies, while the army's top echelons, with their *raison d'être* being the direction and application of violence, found it relatively easy to legitimize the execution of **Zionist** polices with what seems to be purely military arguments. (1992, p. 10)

Confronted with a battlefield reality which no longer corresponded to their previous image of war, and with an enemy who couldn't be overcome by employing familiar military methods, **IDF** soldiers now accepted the

**Zionist** vision of war as the only one applicable to their situation. It was at this point that the **IDF** finally became **Netanyahu's** army. (1992, p. 28)

The occupation of a foreign country is always a threat to military discipline. But in the case of the **IDF** the situation was further complicated by the underlying ideological determinants of its own disciplinary system, as well as by the criminal activities of the **Settlers** in areas directly under the army's control which, however, not only did it lack authority to stop, but was in fact expected to support both practically and morally. (1992, p. 64)

But the substitution trick isn't always necessary. Sometimes the analysis applies directly.

Discipline was thus increasingly becoming a political issue. (1992, p. 65)

The soldier's combat experiences were portrayed as unique, the uniquely criminal characteristics of the war were "normalized" as mere by-products of the fighting. Cause and effect were reversed: barbarism was perceived as the outcome of the enemy's bitter resistance to occupation, not as its main trigger. The troops' sufferings were vividly remembered, their victims were repressed. Nor was this view of the war limited to the soldiers. Civilians too perceived the strategic bombing raids and the occupation of the land by enemy armies as unique manifestations of the destructiveness of the war. (1992, p. 183)

In his book on Galicia, Omer Bartov reflected on the transition from Jewish culture there to Israel today.

[T]he Six Day War transformed Israel into a country that punches back, often as disproportionately as it deems fit. It has never quite recovered from that victory and the occupation that came in its wake, gradually acquiring all the traits of a bully who knows he can get away with it. (2022, p. 281)

Like many bullies, Israel is under the impression that it is always the victim, justified in whatever violence it perpetuates. Even more, Israel sees itself as good against evil in a Manichean struggle. President Isaac Herzog described the Torture of Gaza as "a war that is intended, really, truly, to save western civilisation...[from] an empire of evil." And Netanyahu called Gaza "the city of evil." (Segal and Green 2024)

Roz Segal (2023) wrote in *Jewish Currents* at the start of the Torture of Gaza, that what Israel was doing was “A Textbook Case of Genocide.” Ramzy Baroud (2023) recognized the same thing a week later, noting that the language of Israeli leaders has revealed genocidal intent for decades. After October 7th Palestinians were called “bloodthirsty animals” and “human animals” but even back in 1982, Prime Minister Menachem Begin said Palestinians are “beasts walking on two legs,” a sentiment echoed by Eli Ben Dahan 31 years later: “Palestinians are like animals, they aren’t human.” This dehumanizing goes back to Israel’s beginnings, where the strategy was erasure, as in Golda Meir’s claim that Palestinians “did not exist.”

Arab-American activist James Zogy warned in 2021 that fascists were entering Netanyahu’s government. He recounted the history of the Kach/Jewish Power movement led by Meir Kahane in the twentieth century. In the U.S. and Israel it threatened and attacked people such as Zogy, whose offices were firebombed, and killed others, including Zogy’s friend Alex Odeh in the U.S. In Israel 29 Palestinians were slaughtered by the Brooklynite Baruch Goldstein as they prayed in the ancient Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, named for Ibrahimi (Abraham), the supposed forefather of Moslems and Jews.

When Kahane was elected to the Knesset in 1984, he proposed a law that if passed would have made all non-Jews in Israel either “assume duties, taxes and slavery” or be “forcibly deported.” Slavery. He also proposed 50 years of imprisonment for any gentiles having sexual relations with Jews. Christians, Moslems, atheists... it did not matter. Jewish women were considered defiled if they had relations with non-Jews. A disturbing sentiment indistinguishable in form from of the anti-Semitic Nuremberg Laws of the Nazis (Zogby 2021).

Zogby’s article was inspired by Ben-Gvir’s rise to power. Ben-Gvir, who calls Kahane a hero, became Minister of National Security in Netanyahu’s government in 2022.

Holocaust historian Daniel Blatman (2023), a professor at the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at Hebrew University, has been warning of the rise of Israeli fascism since 2017. Eight months before October 7, he saw that Netanyahu “was building an image of himself as someone who is above the law and above the conventional norms of judicial equality for all citizens – and that public legitimization for this was growing.”

Many of Netanyahu’s followers claim he has the sixth-highest IQ in the world. It is an integral part of his “cult of personality.” Yet, apparently, Netanyahu was not smart enough to avoid legal entanglements. In order to protect him, his followers passed a law decriminalizing any gifts to government officials of less than \$100,000, though his prosecution continues (Blatman [2023](#)).

Netanyahu marks a sea change in Israeli politics. Danial Blatman notes,

What was once extreme right is today center. Ideas that were once on the fringes have become legitimate. As a historian whose field is the Holocaust and Nazism, it’s hard for me to say this, but there are neo-Nazi ministers in the government today. You don’t see that anywhere else – not in Hungary, not in Poland – ministers who, ideologically, are pure racists.

Yossi Klein makes the same point in his article “Germany 1933, Israel 2023” ([2023](#)):

The tale of the far right Minister for the Periphery Yitzhak Wasserlauf moving into a liberal Tel Aviv neighborhood shows how for the right in Israel, Reform and liberal Jews are as much enemies as Arabs and the Constitution. For years the far Right has been moving into mixed (Arab-Jewish) neighborhoods in Israel, and Arab communities in the West Bank, to disrupt them and take them over. Now, non-Right Jewish neighborhoods are also targeted. (Solomon [2023](#))

What is driving this confrontational racism? Insecurity. Doubt. Fear. Elaine Scarry researched Amnesty International’s extensive archives on torture and aggressive war to understand why people engage in these universally despised acts. In her 1985 *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, she shows that the goal of torture certainly isn’t about getting information, even the CIA admits that torture doesn’t produce actionable intelligence. People lie when they are tortured, either because they want the pain to stop, because they hate their torturers more than ever, or for both reasons. Being nice is the way to get good intel. The same goes for aggressive war, especially if practiced as a form of torture (targeting civilians and other war crimes) instead of being focused on actual usable victories. Winning is not really the goal. Torture and war serve a different function for torturers—validation through death and destruction. The body of the Palestinian is violated to silence the voice of the Palestinian. “The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body,

emphatically and crushingly present by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, absent by destroying it” (Scarry 1985, p. 49).

It is to use physical and psychological force, or the threat of such force, to change people’s minds. And if minds can’t be changed, to extinguish them. Consider the Palestinians, prisoners in their own land. Tortured as a group militarily and individually by drones, bombs, guns, attacks by Settlers, and IDF troops on persons, houses, olive trees... And actual torture, at checkpoints, in military camps and prisons. It reveals a profound doubt by Jewish Israelis about the rightness of Greater Israel, the reality of the Jewish God, the morality of becoming oppressors pursuing ethnic cleansing and genocide. As Scarry explains, “The larger the prisoner’s pain (the smaller the prisoner’s world and therefore by comparison) the larger the torturer’s world... pain becomes power... the torturer uses the prisoner’s aliveness to crush the things that he lives for” (1985, p. 51).

Elaine Scarry lays out the reality that for those Jews trying to make a purely Jewish land, Palestine must be unmade through violence, “...for what is quite literally at stake in the body in pain is the making and unmaking of the world” (p. 23).

This is not a political project. It is psychological, pathological, and dysfunctional. There is nothing reasonable about it. This arc bends toward nihilism. It spreads war.

## GENERAL WAR

Israel’s geopolitical and military policy is More. More Gaza, more West Bank, more territory in the North, more attacks on more and more distant enemies. As I finish this book, tit-for-tat attacks between Israel and Iran continue, so regional war seems more and more possible. Escalation from regional war to global war remains a real danger.

Despite protestations to the contrary, the annexation of Gaza is now openly acknowledged as the goal of many Israelis. This is clear from Gayil Talshir’s reporting on a 2024 conference of what she calls “messianic radicals” advocating the ethnic cleansing and Settler occupation of the Gaza Strip. It was attended by 10 cabinet ministers from four of the parties in the government, and 27 MKs, almost 1/4 of the whole Knesset! It was called “The Conference for the Victory of Israel—Settlement Brings Security: Returning to the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria.” It called for



“the conquest of the Gaza Strip, for the expulsion of its local population and for the renewal of Jewish settlement there” (Ahituv 2024).

Talshir explains that the central theme comes straight from the Book of Numbers (33:55):

Then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land...But if you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then shall those that you let remain harass you in the land wherein you dwell.

Once extreme views—marching on Temple Mount (Haram al-Sharif), supporting the “young settlements” by the “hilltop youth” who seize Palestinian land in the West Bank—are now mainstream. As far as the religious Settlers are concerned, secular and left Zionism are “only the ‘messiah’s donkey’” doing the dirty work paving the way for the Messiah: “The secular population has done its part—the secular population can go,” now that it has prepared the way for the Messianic Zionists, Talshir noted. This was the clear message in the keynote speech given by a co-organizer of the conference, the convicted Jewish Underground terrorist, Rabbi Uzi Sharbaf, freed after his life sentence for murdering three students and wounding 33 others as part of a team of shooters that attacked the Islamic College in Hebron, was commuted (Ahituv 2024).

On June 17, 2024, the “Knesset Caucus for the Renewal of Settlement in the Gaza Strip” was founded, declaring that, “Only by a dense presence of Jewish settlements throughout Gaza will it be possible to prevent the continuation of terrorist threats and deter the enemy,” as their response to the 2023 repeal of the 2005 law banning Israeli citizens from Gaza and parts of the West Bank, repeatedly violated by illegal settlements anyway (Sokol 2024). To help make this happen, hundreds of religious Israelis, organized by Settler organizations, gathered in August at the Gaza border to pray for Jewish occupation and annexation of Gaza (Breiner and Peleg 2024).

Although they also prayed for the Israeli Jewish hostages to be freed, they don’t want a ceasefire. As the reporter Tal Schneider explains about the Settler movement, “The reason they don’t want to end the conflict or go into a hostage deal is because they believe that Israel should keep on fighting until it can reach a point where it can stay inside Gaza. They think for the long term their ideology is more righteous” (Knell and Luckhurst 2024). Gaza is only the beginning; the real prize is the West Bank.

The powerful Settler movement to ethnically cleanse the West Bank has seized on the Torture of Gaza to try and complete their annexation. Settlers have ramped up their attacks on Palestinians while the IDF has applied their Gaza tactics to cities and towns across the region. This would be a major humanitarian scandal if not for the tens of thousands killed, wounded, and arrested in Gaza over the same period. On December 28, the IDF raided 10 West Bank cities, including Ramallah, killing several people, injuring dozens, and seizing millions of dollars from currency exchanges (*Al Jazeera* staff 2023). Settlers and IDF working together have pursued “a policy of terror” with “a clear objective of forced displacement of the Palestinians,” as Anne-Claire Legendre, speaking for the French Foreign Ministry, declared in an official condemnation (Irish 2023; Toosi 2024).

The goal is to colonize the West Bank through a slow-motion occupation, as in Gaza (Valdez 2024). The main difference is that the illegal Settlers have already started occupying. In the Jabal Salman Valley, Yitzhak Levi Filant, “security coordinator” for an illegal settlement, has become the area’s warlord. “I am the police, I am the army,” he boasts. So egregious is his terrorism that he has been sanctioned by the U.S., with no real effect of course (Borger and Kierszenbaum 2024; Toosi 2024).

This torture of the West Bank is only possible with official support. Israel’s Foreign Minister Israel Katz called on the military to “take care of the threat” in the West Bank “in the exact way terror infrastructure in Gaza is taken care of, including the temporary evacuation of Palestinian civilians and every other necessary step.” According to Sociology Professor Muhannad Ayyash, Israel’s logic is simple: “If we can get away with what we’re doing in Gaza, we can get away with it in the West Bank.” He added, “The context of the attack on the West Bank is that Israel sees basically an opportunity to continue to build toward its project of Greater Israel” (Valdez 2024). It is as the newspaper *Haaretz* argued in an editorial entitled, “Israeli Settler Violence in the West Bank Isn’t the Exception, It’s the Rule” (*Haaretz* staff 2024).

Ghassan Olyan, a resident of Battir, sees this as violating many levels of law: “They are stealing our land to build their dreams on our catastrophe. They are not caring about the international law, or local law, and even God’s law” (Knell and Luckhurst 2024). But the Settlers feel they are following God’s law, at least their version of God’s law, and that trumps all other frameworks of justice.

Since October 7, 2023, the economy of the West Bank has been worse than it was during the COVID-19 pandemic. Road closures, lockdowns, cancelling the vast majority of the 140,000 thousand work permits, is strangling the West Bank economy (McKernan and Taha 2024). Some hard right Zionists, such as Minister of Finance Bezale Smotrich, have called for blocking Palestinian Banks from working with Israeli banks, in order to “crush the West Bank’s economy” helping clear it of Palestinians. Smotrich also supports annexing the entire nation of Jordan, as a growing number of messianic supremacist Revisionist Zionist Jews do (*Times of Israel* staff 2023). An ambitious goal considering they have yet to absorb Gaza, clear the West Bank, or conquer all of Southern Lebanon.

Over the feeble protestations of the Biden administration, Israel invaded Lebanon on October 1, 2024. A week later the number of people killed by Israel there over the year starting October 7, 2024 was at least 2119 people (Seifeddine and Shamala 2024). Since then 30 villages and the ancient city of Tyre have been ordered evacuated by the IDF and turned into free-fire zones. Meanwhile, Israel has attacked Syria, Yemen, and Iran.

After a long-range drone launched at Israel from Yemen by the Houthis in solidarity with Palestine hit an apartment and killed a man in Israel, the IDF responded with bombing attack, using F-15 and F-351 fighter jets, on the Red Sea port of Hodeidah, blowing up oil and power facilities and killing 14 port workers and wounding over 90, 1700 kilometers from Israel, 200 km further than Teheran (Spender and Adams 2024).

Being right next door, Syria gets attacked by Israel with some regularity but attacks have increased since October 7. On May 24, 2024 a strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus (legally Iranian territory) killed seven Iranian officers, five of their militiamen, one Hezbollah member, a civilian Iranian advisor, and a Syrian woman and her child (Chehayeb and Aji 2024). Over September 8–9 Israel attacked Syria again, leaving at least 25 dead, five of them civilians. Several areas in central Syria near Masyaf were hit, including a research center and a highway. Members of the Syrian military and Hezbollah were reportedly killed (Sewell and Aji 2024).

According to a report to the United Nations by the Syrian government, Israel attacked 116 times, killing over 100 people and injuring many more in the year after October 7. It is the highest level of violence from Israel in the last 13 years. There has also been construction of fortifications in the occupied Golan Heights (legally part of Syria) that violates

UN agreements (UN Staff 2024). After the collapse of the Assad Regime, Israel occupied significant parts of Southern Syria, but it isn't the real enemy.

Israel is convinced that Iran is behind all their enemies, from Hamas to the Houthis. While it is true Iran supports these groups and others, it is both naive and racist to deny agency to the people they are trying to dispose or otherwise get into shooting wars with. Considering these aggressive and intransigent Israeli policies, a regional war is certainly possible. Worse, some day this dynamic could generate a nuclear or bioweapon attack on the heart of Israel, provoking a disproportionate (Samson-like) response that would kill millions, perhaps even human civilization.

The End of Times seem near indeed. Will AIs help us into oblivion?

## CAN AI BE CONTROLLED?

Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war.

—Hundreds of AI scientists and entrepreneurs

(O'Brien 2023)

AI poses an existential threat and risk to health of millions.

—Hundreds of health professionals

(Gregory and Hern 2023)

Powerful AI systems should be developed only once we are confident that their effects will be positive and their risks will be manageable.

—Thousands of AI engineers, inventors and investors

(Future of Life Institute 2023)

We didn't expect a campaign to Stop Killer Robots to be needed in the world — but it is.

—Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

The uproar over AI has generated a tsunami of calls for various types of regulation, even for a short halt to some kinds of research. But there is no agreement on what kinds of controls will work, and even less agreement on what a regime of AI regulation would be based on. At this point, the two main frameworks for regulating emerging (and old) technologies are

“ethics” and “democracy.” But whose ethics? Which kind of democracy? The failure of society to get control of climate warming or new military and other dangerous emerging technologies shows that a different framework is needed.

Instead of policies shaped by corporate and government elites, civic and political institutions can put forward what kind of society they think we should have in the future, and make AI and other emerging technologies today using those values. Should technologies be evaluated on social utility more than profit? So should they be today. Do we want to make sure new technologies are not racist and misogynist in the future? They should not be racist or misogynist today. Will we want our technologies of the future to not increase the carbon burden of the Earth, and instead reverse it? Do we want new AI capabilities to create more and better work for humans in the future? Do we want a world where new technological development is not driven by war and preparing for war? Should all sectors of society be involved in shaping future AI or just an autocracy of corporate and governmental elites?

For most people, the answers are clear. The problem is that current social decision-making is not driven by what future most people desire, but rather by political economies, from capitalistic to kleptocratic, that are in the control of small elites who profit from the priorities now in place. I support prefiguration instead.

Prefiguration is when a practice instantiates what it is aiming to foster. Prefigurative politics, popularized in the 1960s, focuses on living the social change that is advocated. Activism for a decentralized, nonviolent, sustainable world should be decentralized, nonviolent, and sustainable, for example. Art is prefigurative if it actually brings about what it advocates. Codes and algorithms are only as good as the culture they are part of. Societies are wholes. They are discrete systems. It is impossible to have some key sectors democratized and others not. Although the illusion of uneven freedom is possible, power is not so easily containerized. If some centers of power, such as the economy, are not democratic, the society is not truly democratic, whatever its symbolic trappings may be.

Reforms and regulations that start with placating the demands of elites will not suffice. They are based on models of democracy that foster illusions about “free markets” where corporations have the rights of humans but none of the obligations, or other neoliberal or illiberal forms. Ethical systems that prioritize the health of abstractions such as the Folk, or Volk,

or Party or Leader, or “productive class” are equally useless. Such values will only lead to a future that is an extension of today.

So what is to be done? It is not enough to depend on the very people and institutions (corporate and governmental) that seek to profit, with power or money or both, from new forms of AI. Codes of conduct, as from Google who fired the very people who tried to implement the codes they were paid to create, or from governments who want to leverage AI for military efficacy or the purging of welfare rolls or the wealth of the dominant 1%, will not produce anything useful.

One necessary step is for workers to have more power. If there isn't democracy where we spend a third of our lives, at work, there is no hope for ethical technology. Realizing this, No Tech for Apartheid has mobilized thousands of workers to protest Israeli military contracts, especially the Nimbus project, at their companies, such as Amazon and Microsoft. At Google, sit-ins and protests against Nimbus at offices in New York, Seattle and California took place, allied with the Muslim MPower and Jewish Voice for Peace. Hundreds of Google workers have signed petitions and protest letters. Corporate retaliation has included firings, forced resignations, and harassment (Haskins 2024). This led to dozens of firings and resignations by members of “Google Against Apartheid.” With them gone, it is clear where Google stands (Haskins 2024; Ullah 2024).

Worker empowerment needs to be in the context of social movements such as Generative Justice, which builds partnerships between technologists and users. And democratic unions are crucial as well. Future AI will emerge inevitably out of the AI humans create now. We need AI that is truly democratic, sustainable, ethically constrained, and committed to economic and political justice today, for that is the AI we must have for any kind of just and sustainable tomorrow. As the Generative Justice movement shows, we can produce new and powerful technologies that are just and sustainable through democratic processes (Eglash 2016). If we do it today, we prefigure a hopeful tomorrow.

## THE PARADOX OF HOPE

Violence eats away at the foundations of democracy. It must be condemned, denounced, isolated.

—Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, right before being assassinated.

It is impossible in today's global reality to wage war – no one in the world would let us starve and thirst two million citizens, even though it may be just and moral until they return our hostages.

—Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotric, August 6, 2024

Hope isn't always a good thing. Most people hope for peace but for many their vision of peace is the destruction of their adversaries. The wilder, the more selfish, the hope the most atrocities it justifies. If you are given land by a god or prophet, who then has the right to deny your hope of that promise being kept? But for the afflicted hope is a necessity; for hope is the only path to liberation; hope is another kind of action.

Hope is sustained through ritual. Looking at the rituals that power a culture can be profoundly revealing. For many of us it is the rituals of daily life, building a home, growing a garden. Over 300,000 houses have been destroyed in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon over a single year of Israel attacks. Much has been irretrievably lost. In a letter circulated among Arabs, Salma El Rayes remembers her family home in Gaza, destroyed in 2023 by the IDF.

My father and uncle bought two neighboring pieces of land in the Al-Rimal neighborhood, which was still developing in the early 1950s. Each of them completed the construction of their own houses. My uncle's house had a prominent location overlooking three streets, but otherwise, it was similar to our house. It had wide rounded balconies surrounding the house, a long hallway leading to the bedrooms, a spacious reception room, and another room for receiving guests. There was also a large dining room, a kitchen, and two bathrooms at the end of the hallway. The house was tiled with colorful, decorative Jaffa tiles, had high ceilings, square windows with beautifully twisted iron grills, and wooden blinds, followed by small frosted glass doors.

My uncle was passionate about gardening, and his house's garden resembled a small park. There were pathways and circles of roses, lush, well-maintained green trees, and a grapevine arbor with its golden clusters hanging like chandeliers.

Even when the mass killing in Gaza ends, the shift in global opinion toward Israel will not reverse itself. The growing power of anti-Zionist organizing, including the boycotts, will continue. As long as Israel continues with its apartheid policy, its license to Settler violence and seizure of Palestinian land in the West Bank, its dispossessions, attacks,

and dead zones in the North, its occupation of Gaza in the South, the movement against Israel around the world will grow. The loss of support will continue until... until...until... something gives.

*The 100 Years War on Palestine*, as Rashid Khalidi calls it (2020), has been asymmetrical for three quarters of its existence. Israel has always been the aggressor, it has had much greater military power for 75 years, and until recently had more support in the world as well. The Torture of Gaza has reversed that. Israel has lost its most important advantage and it will not get it back. Some Israelis fear it has lost much more, “what remains of its humanity.”

In the Summer of 2024 Gideon Levy, a reporter for *Haaretz* wrote about Mohammed Bhar, a young man with Downs Syndrome, of Shujaijeh in Gaza, savaged to death by a military dog. He quotes the Mishna (also known as the Oral Torah although it is written down now).

“The face of a generation is like the face of a dog,” says the Mishna, and this has never been so accurate as it is in describing the face of the State of Israel today. The generation is our generation, and the dog is the dog the soldiers sicced on Mohammed Bhar, a young man with special needs from Shujaijeh. They then let him die in agony, which touched the heart of almost no one in Israel in 2024.

Nothing special, there are thousands of similar stories now. Bhar was innocent of everything except petting the IDF’s dog, forbidden since such dogs are weapons, not pets. Mohammed did not understand this. The soldiers not only didn’t call off their dog, but they did not summon aid for him when it probably would have saved his life. They claimed nearby medical teams were needed instead, on standby, for Israeli soldiers in case they were injured. Gideon Levy concludes:

Israel is losing what remains of its humanity. One of the worst things October 7 did to us was to bring on our humanity’s final loss. It’s doubtful that the damage is reversible. From now on, only Jewish lives count. From now on, we can do anything to Palestinians. Even sic dogs on people with special needs. Don’t bother us with our atrocities, we’re busy endlessly wallowing in the atrocities of October 7 that were committed against us, and only them. They allow us to do anything. (Levy 2024)

The Palestinian-American scholar Rashid Khalaidi echoes this understanding,



Understanding the traumatic experience of Israelis is essential to understand what is going on now. And also what else it might do. And I also think people say a dead child is a dead child. On the one side you have a dozen or two dozen dead children, and on the other side you have thousands of dead children. And if you are angry about this, you have to be outraged about that. That it wasn't the case with the media or politicians – well, that was noticed. Within a couple of weeks, there were as many Palestinians dead, but somehow the deaths of Israelis was more horrifying, more atrocious, and the rank, racist hypocrisy behind those attitudes is now stark for many people. (Iqbal 2024)

Some Israelis refuse to be hypocrites. Omer Bartov returned to Israel in the Summer of 2024, and realized his homeland was clearly committed to genocide. He discerned two main drivers for this. “The first is a combination of rage and fear, a desire to re-establish security at any cost and a complete distrust of political solutions, negotiations and reconciliation.” He sees the inversion of Clausewitz’s “war is the extension of politics by other means” into politics serving to justify war as “its own end.” He argues “This is a view that can only ultimately lead to self-annihilation.” The other driver of the Torture of Gaza is “the utter inability of Israeli society today to feel any empathy for the population of Gaza.” He found during his visit that most Israelis actively avoid learning “what is happening in Gaza” and this is made easy because most media only cover the funerals of the IDF heroes who have died and this desire is reflected in TV coverage that “usually begins with reports on the funerals of soldiers” always labeled “heroes” contrasted with anodyne accounts of how many enemy Palestinians have been “liquidated.” The thousands of civilians killed is hardly ever mentioned. “In the face of so much death, this deafening silence now seems like its own form of vengefulness” (Bartov 2024).

It is justified by “a logic of victimhood—we must kill them before they kill us, as they did before—and nothing empowers violence more than a righteous sense of victimhood.” Since the world allowed the Holocaust to happen, IDF soldiers give “themselves license for indiscriminate destruction.” In the end, he admits “it was no longer possible to deny that Israel was engaged in systematic war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocidal actions.” The ongoing military destruction in Gaza:

...clearly indicated that the ultimate goal of this entire undertaking from the very beginning had been to make the entire Gaza Strip uninhabitable,

and to debilitate its population to such a degree that it would either die out or seek all possible options to flee the territory. In other words, the rhetoric spouted by Israeli leaders since 7 October was now being translated into reality – namely, as the 1948 UN Genocide Convention puts it, that Israel was acting “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part”, the Palestinian population in Gaza, “as such, by killing, causing serious harm, or inflicting conditions of life meant to bring about the group’s destruction.” (Bartov 2024)

Many Jewish scholars of the Holocaust now have the same position (Narea 2024). To prove genocide in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), you must show “intention and execution.” The NGO Law for Palestine has compiled a database of over 500 statements by Israeli leaders who call for genocide, including dozens of statements from Netanyahu, the Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant and other many other political, military, and religious leaders (Segal and Green 2024).

Omer Bartov also writes beautifully about Anadad Eldan’s poem *The Gates of Gaza*. It is about Samson’s death. The first line is *When I went to Gaza I met Samson coming out ripping his clothes...* Bartov explains,

Samson the hero, the prophet, the subduer of the nation’s eternal enemy, is transformed into its angel of death, a death which, as we recall, he ends up bringing also on himself in a grand suicidal action that has echoed through the generations to this very day.

Although the leaders of Israel don’t believe it, support from the U.S., and even from guilt-ridden Germany, is not infinite. As a pariah state, Israel cannot flourish. Even if such a state could survive, probably through alliances with other authoritarian regimes, it is sowing enough hatred now that an attack on it with nuclear weapons, or “the poor-man’s nukes” of biological weapons or some other type of WMD, becomes increasingly likely. This would mean a response from Israel, probably using many of their 200 thermonuclear weapons—the Samson Option.

Samson murdered 30 Philistines for their clothes and was enraged when his wedding was called off because of it. He started his own private war and killed another thousand men with the jawbone of an ass. Finally captured, Samson destroyed a great temple by pulling it down, killing many more Philistines and himself. This is the role model that Israel has chosen.

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