

By L. Michael Hager

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History is replete with genocide. Among the earliest was the Albigensian Crusade of 1209 that sparked the Cathar genocide in southern France. In the 20th century, the Turkish genocide of 1915 killed up to 1.2 million Armenian Christians; the Nazi Holocaust of 1941-1945 sent 6 million Jews to death chambers or execution sites; and the Rwanda Genocide of 1994 killed more than half a million Tutsis. Reports of more recent genocides appear in the major media, including Darfur (2003), Yazidi (2010), and Rohingya (2016).

While history books and newspapers give us written descriptions of genocide, never before have we seen one unfolding before our eyes, day after day, live or by video, on a television screen.

We didn't witness Hamas gunman storming into southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and taking 240 hostages, but we soon viewed many times afterward on TV horrifying video images of the brutal carnage. That same day, Prime Minister Netanyahu declared total war to eliminate Hamas, heedless of the likely consequences for Palestinian civilians in the densely populated Gaza Strip.

Was it reasonable to expect that a vengeance-driven military operation could totally eliminate Hamas? Was it reasonable to believe that the international laws of war could be respected in the tightly packed Gaza environment?

In his speech of October 10, President Biden endorsed the Israeli retaliation, sent U.S aircraft carriers to the Mediterranean and began providing arms for the IDF. Thus began the live-streamed Israeli war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and genocide of Gaza. Here below are some of what I saw and heard on CNN and the PBS News Hour.

October. The Israeli Defense Minister announces a total blockade that cuts off electricity, food, and fuel. Beginning on October 13, Israel orders the more than one million residents of Gaza City to evacuate and move south. On TV we see thousands of Palestinians fleeing their homes and ambulances bombed. Beginning with a bombing attack on the north on October 27, Israel launches a broad ground offensive. We learn of apparently targeted attacks on hospitals, mosques, churches, and schools, as well as on journalists, medical personnel, and UNRWA staff. Watching scenes of physical destruction from relentless bombing, the retrieval of the dead and injured from flattened buildings and the long procession of forcibly evacuated people heading south, we sense that these events are more than individual war crimes. The cries of bleeding children and their distraught mothers add audio to the visuals on the screen of white shrouded corpses.

November. Israeli aircraft attack the Jabalia refugee camp, causing massive casualties. The IDF occupies Al Shifa, Gaza City's largest hospital, falsely claiming that it concealed an underground headquarters for Hamas fighters. A truce beginning November 21 extended to a full week allows for the exchange of 105 hostages, a few of whom are interviewed on TV. More than 100 hostages remain, although some have died in the air attacks or from other causes. Recovery of hostages appears not to be a priority for Netanyahu.

December. Israel launches a ground and air assault in southern Gaza. We hear from Gazans who have relocated there or who are on the road southward complain of continued bombing of so-called safe areas—even after they were directed to those places by the IDF. Another major assault takes place in the central parts of the Strip. By the end of the month, the number of Palestinian dead reaches 21,978.

January. Israel announces a more targeted campaign, beginning in the north while intense fighting continues in the south. Israeli attacks continue on Khan Yunis, and we view the bloody outcome on our screen. In areas near the Egyptian border, where hundreds of thousands of desperate Palestinians seek safety, Israel bombs kill hundreds of people. By January 15 the IDF and IAF have killed more than 24,000 Palestinians (mostly women and children), with an estimated 8,000 lying dead under the rubble.

In the Genocide Convention of 1948, the signatories confirmed that genocide “is a crime under international law.” They defined *genocide* as acts “with intent to destroy...a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” by killing members of the group” or by “inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.” Also punishable is “direct and public incitement to commit genocide.” Under this definition, the U.S. is culpable along with Israel.

Today I watch the thousands of desperate Palestinians, many now riddled with disease and starvation. I see them huddled together in makeshift tents near the Egyptian border crossing. I wonder what options remain for this persecuted population.

Will Gazans accept offers of repatriation from other countries or will they forcibly escape to Egypt for safety, food, and life necessities? Will the Egyptians push them into the Sinai desert? Then Netanyahu can claim success for reenacting the 1948 *Nakba*. Will he also escape legal accountability for his acts of genocide, the ones I saw myself over the last 100 days on television?

L. Michael Hager is cofounder and former Director General, International Development Law Organization, Rome.