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Genocide and Holocaust Accusations Against Israel in Academic Writing: Arguments and Counterarguments

Accusations of genocide against Israel within the academy began soon after October 7, 2023 – in some instances, before ground operations in Gaza even started – issued in public statements by academic bodies including university departments, professional associations, student unions, as well as in open letters and essays by prominent professors and intellectuals.

Common features of these accusations include “interpretative reversals” where Israel, the victim of a murderous terrorist attack, is recast as the perpetrator, deliberately targeting Palestinian civilians and seeking to subjugate Gaza by means of ethnic cleansing, starvation, and genocide. Israeli suffering is dismissed as an “instrumentalization,” as if the Hamas attack were merely a pretext for a disproportionate assault on Gaza, with annihilation as its ultimate objective. The accusers also presuppose that Israel is ethically, legally, and politically responsible for October 7 as the occupying, apartheid, genocidal state, while they see Hamas as a force of resistance against occupation (even if this doesn't always appear as an explicit statement). For this reason, charges of genocidal intent cannot be brought against it or are irrelevant because their actions are fundamentally liberational.

The general arguments common in academic writing accusing Israel of genocide:

- As a settler colony, Israel is essentially a genocidal entity (a “theoretical” argument);
- Israel instrumentalizes October 7 to justify waging a war of annihilation on Gaza, thereby continuing and intensifying the practice anchored in 75 years of occupation (an “empirical” argument);
- Israel systematically dehumanizes Palestinians, as Israeli politicians routinely refer to them as “barbarians,” “human animals,” or even “Nazis”;
- Accusing Hamas of genocidal intent is a rhetorical tool used by Israelis to justify genocide in Gaza (two “rhetorical” arguments).

Comparisons between the situation in Gaza and the Holocaust are an extension of the genocide accusation—present in political and public discourse, though not yet firmly established in academic writing. These comparisons are also logically difficult to defend. They deliberately overlook the actions of Palestinians or Hamas, portraying Palestinians as passive victims while focusing exclusively on Israel's supposed lack of legitimacy and inherent violence.

**Here is a breakdown of the general arguments above,
with counterarguments alongside.**



1

"Root causes" argument

Israeli occupation and oppression are the root causes of October 7

"Root causes" argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

Israeli oppression and occupation as root causes of October 7.

This argument consistently seeks to highlight Israel's "genocidal intention and practice" by citing so-called root causes of the conflict and war such as "seventy-five years of occupation and apartheid," "Israeli settler colonialism", "and 16 years of siege on Gaza." These root causes,¹ ignoring recent events and present-day contexts, would be solely responsible for the events of October 7.

- These root causes are used to explain the Hamas attack by placing it within a broader context of military oppression and conquest.
- Moreover, they serve to morally justify Hamas' actions by reversing the aggressor-victim roles and minimizing the significance of October 7. Sometimes even the most obvious and documented facts of the atrocities are being denied: mass rape, torture and even the systematic murder of civilians.

Counterarguments

Talking about "root causes" goes against the spirit of the social sciences, which usually fight essentialist perspectives. The argument for considering "context" cannot rely on rigid analytical categories. By doing so and by accepting an essentialist perspective in this case, it appears the goal is to downplay the significance of the individual event, in this case, the events of October 7.

- **October 7 as an event cannot be explained away**—let alone justified—by appealing to the preexisting "context" of alleged occupation and oppression, particularly when the interpretation is biased and flawed. Such reasoning ignores the fact that Gaza has been independently governed and unoccupied by Israel since 2005.
- **The stronger party can still be the victim.** It must be acknowledged that Israel was the target of an unprovoked, brutal attack on October 7. While Israel is undoubtedly the stronger military power, this does not negate its capacity to be victimized. Denying Israel's victim status constitutes an inversion of reality. As one analysis puts it, this inversion has at least three dimensions: first, self-justification ("we are only defending ourselves"); second, exculpation ("don't blame us, blame them"); and third—and most insidiously—denial, which is not just a rejection of truth but a further attack on the victims that no one should believe them.

1. See for example: Susie Linfield, "Root-Causism", Sapir Journal, Winter, 2024, <https://sapirjournal.org/friends-and-foes/2024/root-causism/>

"Root causes" argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

- Most importantly, these "root causes" underpin the accusation against Israel, as its actions in the Gaza war are seen as a direct continuation of its prior "aggressions" and ongoing "oppression" of the Palestinians. In this view, as stated by hundreds of academic sociologists in their November 2023 statement, the Gaza war is merely "a continuation and escalation of the daily violence Palestinians faced for decades from Israeli colonization."² This interpretative approach emphasizes "context" as part of the conceptual framework, rather than empirical evidence. For example, a declaration by communication scholars highlights "the colonial context of Israel's more than 50-year-long military occupation of Palestinian territories," a situation repeatedly condemned by the UN and human rights organizations."³
- The concept of genocide attributed to "root causes" stems from the so-called "structural" theory of "settler colonialism." According to scholars like Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini, "settler colonialism" inherently involves genocide, even if there is no actual genocide being committed. In this view, even in the absence of overt acts of mass killing, "active" genocide inevitably emerges under colonial conditions because it is structurally embedded. As stated by a group of international lawyers: "The pre-existing conditions in the Gaza Strip had already prompted discussions of genocide prior to the current escalation."⁴ This line of reasoning supports the notion of an "eternal genocide"—a claim that Israel has been committing genocide for decades, even outside of wartime.

Counterarguments

- The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be reduced to a one-sided narrative that selectively acknowledges facts to fit a particular agenda. Without accounting for Israel's defensive wars, repeated peace offers rejected by Palestinian leadership, and the broader security context, such a narrative distorts the historical record.
- **The classification of Israel as a "settler colonial" state is driven more by conceptual assertion than empirical evidence.** First, it relies on a reductive binary framework—settler vs. native, indigenous vs. European colonizer, oppressor vs. oppressed. Second, it attributes to settler colonialism (and to the act of settlement itself) an inherent intent to "eliminate the native," encompassing ethnic cleansing, murder, and even genocide. Third, it draws misleading comparisons to other settler colonies—comparisons that are, at best, tenuous and, at worst, entirely unfounded. Ultimately, the portrayal of Israel as a settler colony is more political than scholarly, shaped by ideological overreach than rigorous analysis. This is especially true given the Jewish people's undeniable claim to the Land of Israel as their ancestral homeland.

2. The statement with comments can be read here: <https://israel-academia-monitor.com/2023/10/26/international-and-israeli-sociologists-in-solidarity-with-hamas/> (the original statement was since removed from the web).

3. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EGZ2ubh_rKyRq3TXPPELXBGKOrjplAKgMaWpnXAQptM/edit?pli=1 (emphasis is mine).

4. <https://opiniojuris.org/2023/10/18/public-statement-scholars-warn-of-potential-genocide-in-gaza/>

"Root causes" argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

Counterarguments

- Even if one were to accept the premise that Israel is a settler colony, equating colonialism with the concept of "eternal genocide" is fundamentally flawed. It undermines historical understanding rooted in empirical evidence and distorts the nature of conflict. Moreover, the settler colonial framework effectively absolves Hamas of genocidal intent or action, while stripping Israelis of their victim status. As one analysis notes:

"Blatantly disregarding the precepts of international law, the 'settler-colonialist' narrative has effectively reduced Israelis to the status of hostis humani generis—outlaws stripped of legal protection. Latter-day pirates, Israelis are deemed 'fair game'; according to this rationale, they may be killed with impunity by the likes of Hamas, Hezbollah, and other Iranian regional proxies."⁵

5. Richard Wolin, "From the 'Socialism of Fools' to the 'Jihadism of Fools': The Lessons of October 7", *Antisemitism Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (October 2024), 350.



2

Genocidal intent argument

Statements by Israeli politicians demonstrate
intentionality of Israeli genocide

Genocidal intent argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

What constitutes genocidal intent?

Accusers rely on a broad and flexible interpretation of genocide—one that does not require clear evidence of specific intent. Instead, they point to actions such as the temporary blockade of the Gaza Strip at the start of the war and again in early 2025, along with widespread destruction of housing and infrastructure, as sufficient indicators of genocidal intent.

Counterarguments

What constitutes genocidal intent?

The central point of contention is whether the Israeli government and military have acted with genocidal intent toward the Palestinians—an allegation that nearly all those arguing for genocide assert with confidence.

As defined by the 1948 Genocide Convention the key aspect of the legal definition of genocide is intent: “The acts specified have to be undertaken with the intent to destroy the group. In some ways this is as important as the acts themselves.”⁶ A looser interpretation, by contrast, is based on the perpetrator’s knowledge of likely outcomes—namely: “that the act or acts are committed by the perpetrator knowing that they will or are likely to destroy the group”.⁷

At the same time, there is no direct evidence that Israel intentionally and systematically targeted civilians. On the contrary, evacuation orders and the designation of “safe zones” point to an intention to minimize civilian harm. Meanwhile, Hamas has brazenly and systematically looted and stockpiled food and humanitarian aid—depriving Gazan civilians of resources intended for them—yet it has not been accused of contributing to famine or abetting genocide through its role in obstructing aid.

6. Philip Spencer, *Genocide since 1945*, London, Routledge, 2012, 12.

7. Ibid.

Genocidal intent argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

Use of dehumanizing language as the main evidence for genocidal intent.

There is much emphasis put on declarations by certain Israeli politicians as a sign of the “dehumanization” and of Palestinians. The most emphatic argument bolstering the genocide accusation, or the argument in favor of the actualization of genocide, is the speech act of “dehumanization.” The first to come forward with the genocide charge was the genocide scholar Raz Segal, who by October 13 already issued his indictment. His main argument is the usage of such words by Israeli leaders as “human animals,” reinforced by Western leaders characterizing the perpetrators of October 7 as “sheer evil.” For Segal, this vocabulary dehumanizes Palestinians as such, both Hamas and the civilians. “This dehumanizing language is clearly calculated to justify the wide scale destruction of Palestinian lives; the assertion of ‘evil,’ in its absolutism, elides distinctions between Hamas militants and Gazan civilians, and occludes the broader context of colonization and occupation.”⁸

Consider the statement made by communication professors and media experts on Oct. 18: “Israeli government and army officials are using genocidal language in reference to Palestinians, including terms such as ‘human animals’, ‘barbarians’, and ‘savages.’” Similarly, the aforementioned “Sociologists in Solidarity with Gaza and the Palestinian People” wrote: “[T]he dehumanizing language used by heads of state, military leaders, and journalists throughout the West, has begun to increase anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim sentiment and violence.”⁹

Counterarguments

Rhetorical saber rattling vs. genocidal intent.

While the inflammatory rhetoric of certain Israeli politicians is given disproportionate weight—despite often referring to terrorists rather than the Palestinian population—other critical aspects of the conflict are largely overlooked. As international legal scholar Barak Medina noted: “The accusation of genocide is based exclusively on statements made by several Israeli politicians. Most of these statements were made by office-holders who have no control over setting Israel’s policies.”

While they may exert some influence over the war’s continuation—particularly when it appears to lack clear strategic objectives—they do not direct IDF operations or policy decisions.

8. Raz Segal, “A Textbook Case of Genocide”, Jewish Currents, Oct 13, 2023, <https://jewishcurrents.org/a-textbook-case-of-genocide>.

9. The statement with comments can be read here: <https://israel-academia-monitor.com/2023/10/26/international-and-israeli-sociologists-in-solidarity-with-hamas/> (the original statement was since removed from the web).



3

Premeditated genocide argument

Genocide did not just happen in the context of the war,
it was the Israeli intention from the outset

Premeditated genocide argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

In the quoted text, Segal refers to more than spontaneous or emotional dehumanization. According to him, “dehumanization” is not merely a byproduct of war rhetoric—it is consciously and cynically employed. It is calculated, serving an already existing plan to commit genocide against the Palestinians. If such intent truly underlies Israeli actions, then logically, this genocidal plan would have to predate October 7.

Less than a year later, Omer Bartov echoes this view. He asserts 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.” He concludes that Israel’s war rhetoric since October 7 has been “translated into reality”—fitting, in his view, the legal definition of genocide under the 1948 UN Convention: that Israel is 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.”

Counterarguments

What is invariably missing from the genocide accusations against Israel is any recognition of Hamas’s own premeditated genocidal intent.

Unlike the charges leveled at Israel—often based on interpretations of rhetoric—Hamas’s genocidal aims are clearly documented. They are explicitly stated in the original 1988 Hamas Charter and reaffirmed, albeit in more strategic language, in its revised 2017 version. The October 7 attack was not spontaneous but the result of years of planning, with Gaza’s material and human resources systematically funneled into that effort.

Some of the articles alleging an Israeli plan to render Gaza uninhabitable were written even before the release of the Trump administration’s proposed Gaza reconstruction plan, which envisioned American-led rebuilding efforts. While the authors might have later felt vindicated upon learning of that plan—given the controversy it generated—it was already evident at the time that the proposal was unrealistic. It functioned more as a familiar Trump-style tactic to apply pressure and provoke out-of-the-box political thinking, rather than as a serious policy roadmap.

Premeditated genocide argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

Bartov further substantiates his diagnosis by referencing a plan allegedly outlined by retired General Giora Eiland, which has been discussed in the Israeli media. This plan, he claims, aims to depopulate Gaza through military pressure and starvation—a first step toward annexing the area north of the Netzarim Corridor. According to Bartov, this would allow for Jewish settlement in the north and set the stage for a gradual takeover of larger portions of the Strip, compressing the civilian population into smaller zones and ultimately leading either to mass displacement or widespread death. He concludes: “In short, this is a genocidal plan.”¹⁰

Counterarguments

A basic question the genocide narrative consistently fails to address is: where exactly would the Gazan population be “transferred” to? No country or territory on Earth is prepared to absorb more than two million people. The supposed “plan” is unviable on numerous levels, and its plausibility is often assumed rather than interrogated. A more pressing question should be: why were Gaza civilians unable to flee the territory when the war began? Why did neither the UN nor Arab states take steps to facilitate their evacuation or establish emergency refugee camps in Egypt? The absence of such efforts calls into question the sincerity of those invoking humanitarian concern.

Moreover, evacuation orders cannot credibly be characterized as “ethnic cleansing” or as a prelude to genocide. Their stated and evident purpose is to minimize civilian harm. One cannot simultaneously denounce these evacuations as morally wrong and accuse Israel of genocide for not preventing civilian casualties. To reject evacuation efforts while accusing Israel of intentionally targeting civilians is a contradiction.

10. Cited in: Arwa Mahdawi, “We are witnessing the final stage of genocide in Gaza”, The Guardian, 6 Nov 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/nov/06/we-are-witnessing-the-final-stage-of-genocide-in-gaza>

Premeditated genocide argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

Amos Goldberg reinforces this interpretation by linking intent, dehumanization, and outcome:

"As a historian, if you look at the overall picture, you have all the elements of genocide. There is clear intent: the president, the prime minister, the minister of defense, and many high-ranking military officers have expressed that very openly. We have seen countless incitements to turn Gaza into rubble, claims that there are no innocent people there, etc. [...] The outcome is as would be expected: tens of thousands of innocent children, women, and men killed or injured, the almost-total destruction of infrastructure, intentional starvation and the blocking of humanitarian aid, mass graves of which we still don't know the full extent, mass displacement, etc. [...] Gaza as we knew it does not exist anymore. Thus, the outcome fits perfectly with the intentions."¹¹

Counterarguments

What the cited texts omit entirely is the decisive role of Hamas—a group that openly prioritizes sacrificing Gaza's civilian population for propaganda purposes. This is, in effect, its primary "military" strategy.

Finally, the claim that Israel intends to annex Gaza is unfounded. Regardless of the rhetoric from extremist factions within the Israeli government, Gaza will not be annexed—not least because the vast majority of its population will remain in place.

11. "Israeli Historian: This is Exactly What Genocide Looks Like, an Interview with Amos Goldberg", https://jacobin.com/2024/07/amos-goldberg-genocide-gaza-israel?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR0jFf9vvqJ7niPAuAoWQX0ZdJDGLvwsOsQZda9oBZ8LuBMLu2TtfEMst8_aem_1U4WoTokH6DF5j6eSgT-mw



4

Annihilation of the Palestinian people argument

Palestinians were not just casualties of war;
they are being annihilated as a people

Annihilation of the Palestinian people argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

Some academics argue that Israel is conducting a war aimed at the destruction of the Palestinian nation and people, targeting them because of their identity. On October 15, scholars specializing in international law, conflict studies, and genocide studies issued a detailed statement warning of “the possibility of the crime of genocide being perpetrated by Israeli forces against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.” They wrote:

“The Palestinians of the Gaza Strip constitute a substantial proportion of the Palestinian nation and are being targeted by Israel because they are Palestinian. The Palestinian population of Gaza appears to be presently subjected by the Israeli forces and authorities to widespread killing, bodily and mental harm, and unviable conditions of life – against a backdrop of Israeli statements which evidence signs of intent to physically destroy the population.”¹²

Counterarguments

There is no credible evidence that Israel “kills Palestinians because they are Palestinians.” Notably, about twenty percent of Israel’s population consists of Palestinian Arabs who are relatively well integrated and share the same historical background as Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

Moreover, a crucial element is consistently omitted from statements accusing Israel of genocide: the role of Hamas. As Barak Medina notes:

“Supporters of the genocide accusation insist on ignoring Hamas’s extensive military use of civilian infrastructure, the practice of using civilians as human shields, and other factors essential to evaluating IDF activities. [...] To sum up, the only evidence presented to support the accusation of genocide is the scale of destruction in Gaza and certain statements by Israeli politicians.”¹³

This does not preclude the possibility that Israel has committed war crimes—including, as Amos Goldberg has suggested, “summary executions”—which are distinct from genocide. However, because specific war crimes, even if substantiated, lack the emotional and political weight of genocide, some activists prefer to invoke genocide to issue sweeping condemnations of Israel.

12. <https://opiniojuris.org/2023/10/18/public-statement-scholars-warn-of-potential-genocide-in-gaza/> (emphasis is mine)

13. Ibid.



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5

Legal definition of genocide as too narrow argument

The definition of genocide under international law
is faulty and insufficient

Legal definition of genocide as too narrow argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

Some theoreticians argue that Israel could still be committing genocide even if its actions do not meet the definition established by international law, which they consider too restrictive. This perceived limitation of international law is commonly explained in two ways.

- According to some, Israel can still commit genocide even if it does not meet the standard set by international law, since the international law allows for self-defense by established ("imperial") states. These states were the ones to craft the law and design it to preclude resistance against an imperial power. Therefore, it becomes extremely difficult to make the case for genocide in a protracted conflict. As Dirk Moses has put it:

"The natural right of self-defense plays a foundational role in the self-conception of Western states in particular, the formation of which is inseparable from imperial expansion. Since the Spanish conquest of the Americas starting in the sixteenth century, settlers justified their reprisals against indigenous resistance as defensive 'self-preservation.' If they felt their survival was imperiled, colonizers engaged in massive retaliation against 'native' peoples, including noncombatants."¹⁴

Counterarguments

Broadening the concept of genocide is a dubious enterprise: how could the judgment of one or two theoreticians serve as the measure of the most serious accusation?

- At the same time, even if the self-defense of the colonizer was often realized as genocide of the indigenous, it certainly cannot be applied to the case of Israel. Since it harkens back to the flawed colonial argument, it doesn't take into consideration that Gaza wasn't even occupied by Israel at the time of the October 7th attack.

In fact, the insistence that Gaza was under Israeli occupation, points to the "need" to keep Israel within the alleged colonial construct. If it were to be asserted that Gaza were quasi-independent and run by Hamas as a governmental force, with Israel only enforcing an arms blockade, that would undermine the entire framework on which accusations against Israel are based.

14. A. Dirk Moses, "More than Genocide", Boston Review, Nov 14 2023, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/more-than-genocide/>

Legal definition of genocide as too narrow argument

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

- According to others, Israel can still commit genocide even if it does not meet the standard set by international law, since international law cannot capture extremely serious cases. To them, the judicial concept is insufficient, and it instead should be framed sociologically, which allows a much broader interpretation, and considers the context and process of the war. This position was formulated by Martin Shaw¹⁵, and Amos Goldberg¹⁶, and seems to have been tacitly used by human rights NGOs (like Amnesty International) and also by particular countries (for example, Ireland) in their genocide accusation against Israel. Shaw alleges that genocide has been committed through Israel's military campaign by enlarging the scope of legitimate military targets, resulting in "disproportionate violence", driven by a "destructive thrust". Shaw alleges that "mass killings, huge displacements, destruction of infrastructure, hunger, thirst and disease" were somehow strategically intended by the Israeli leadership to punish the Gazan population, which it took to be the supporter of Hamas.

Counterarguments

- Abandoning the judicial concept of genocide would blur the lines of responsibility. Currently, none of the genocide accusations against Israel adequately address Hamas's actions. **If intent is disregarded, or reformulated as "hidden" or gradually developed, while presupposing the will to "collective punishment" as in Shaw's article, only the outcome—the severe suffering of the population and destruction of infrastructure—would matter.** Under such a framework, genocide accusations could be confirmed simply by (often manipulated) visual imagery, without considering who is actually responsible on the ground. This approach would effectively rewrite the laws of war and align with the distorted narratives prevalent in today's media.

15. Martin Shaw, "Inherently Genocidal", Journal of Genocide Research, 2024, 1–5. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14623528.2023.2300555>

16. Amos Goldberg, "The Problematic Return of Intent", Journal of Genocide Research, 2024, 1–10. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14623528.2024.2413175>



6

Comparisons to the Holocaust

Comparisons to the Holocaust

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

Explicit comparisons of the Gaza war to the Holocaust usually come from politicians and activists. Academics prefer implicit allusions to the Holocaust, typically the slightly more general genocide accusation.

On February 18, 2024, Brazilian president Lula declared that the Gaza war is a continuation and escalation of the daily violence Palestinians faced for decades from Israeli colonization:

"It's not a war of soldiers against soldiers. It's a war between a highly prepared army and women and children. [...] What's happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people hasn't happened at any other moment in history. Actually, it has happened: when Hitler decided to kill the Jews."¹⁷

On January 25, 2025, at a symposium organized by the anti-Zionist French Jewish Union for Peace (UJFP) and the decolonial Jewish collective Tsedek, marked the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Rony Brauman, a former president of "Doctors Without Borders" declared that "Gaza is going to supplant Auschwitz in the metaphor of absolute cruelty," and "the memory of Auschwitz appears as a kind of spit in the face of the Palestinians." This statement expresses the idea that Israel is acting worse than the Nazis.

Counterarguments

The argument against comparing October 7 to the Holocaust rests on two core claims. First, it reflects a flawed understanding of antisemitism. It suggests that the motives of Hamas and the civilians who participated in the massacre were not antisemitic, but instead driven by grievances like "occupation" or "apartheid"—without explaining how Hamas or October 7 should be characterized. Second, this misunderstanding leads to a misreading of the attack as a pogrom or Holocaust-style event, which, in turn, is said to fuel a genocidal Israeli response aimed at revenge for a "genocide" that did not occur.

The reluctance to directly compare the IDF to the Nazis is understandable: any detailed comparison quickly falls apart both logically and factually. Instead, critics lean on symbolic gestures—invoking "the memory of Auschwitz," the victims' suffering, or the world's inaction—as safer rhetorical ground that still implies moral equivalence.

17. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240218-brazil-s-lula-accuses-israel-of-genocide-in-gaza>

Comparisons to the Holocaust

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

Pankaj Mishra, an Indian writer and essayist wrote in a recent article in response to the Gaza war:

"Of course, the heartlessness accompanying an industrial-scale slaughter is not unprecedented. For decades now, the Shoah has set the standard of human evil. [...] [P]eople [...] recognize with a shock that everything is possible, remembering past atrocities is no guarantee against repeating them in the present, and the foundations of international law and morality are not secure at all."¹⁸

This would mean that the Gaza war amounts to the "industrial-scale slaughter" in which the Holocaust analogy is obvious.

Mishra's case is built through a list of alleged Israeli actions—many of them factually false—which for him signal "the ultimate atrocity":

"the frank and routine resolves from Israeli leaders to eradicate Gaza; their implicit sanction by a public deploring inadequate retribution by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza; their identification of victims with irreconcilable evil; the fact that most victims were entirely innocent, many of them women and children; the scale of the devastation, proportionally greater than that achieved by the Allied bombing of Germany in World War II; the pace of the killings, filling up mass graves across Gaza, and their modes, sinisterly impersonal (reliant on artificial intelligence algorithms) and personal (reports of snipers shooting children in the head, often twice); the denial of access to food and medicine [...]"

Counterarguments

Mishra, for example, hints at Holocaust analogies by referring to "industrial-scale slaughter," evoking the gas chambers without saying so outright. Lacking real evidence—and knowing that explicit comparisons would be absurd—he turns instead to emotional appeals: portraying Israelis as "heartless," their actions as "impersonal," and recycling debunked claims like Israeli snipers targeting Palestinian children. He furthers the implicit comparison by noting the abandonment of Gaza by the world's powers, likening it to the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, which also went unanswered by the Allies or nearby civilians. This creates a structural analogy: Gazans are to the IDF what the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto were to the Nazis. The Holocaust remains the unspoken backdrop.

18. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/02/07/pankaj-mishra-world-after-gaza-book-israel-war-global-order-history/#fn:2>

Comparisons to the Holocaust

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

To be sure, Mishra places less emphasis on a direct comparison between the Nazis and the IDF than on the abandonment of victims. He casts himself as a moral witness, scolding world leaders and public opinion for leaving Gaza to suffer “the ultimate atrocity.” In doing so, he likens their inaction to the abandonment of the Warsaw Ghetto—standing in for the Holocaust more broadly—by both the Poles and the Allied powers.

Counterarguments

What Mishra fails to confront is the war itself. Had Hamas released the hostages and surrendered after its defeat, the war would have ended—and with it, the civilian casualties. This alone disproves the idea that Israel sees Gazans as irredeemably evil or seeks their annihilation. But for Mishra, Hamas doesn’t exist. It never appears as a party that started the war or bears any responsibility for Palestinian suffering.



7

Manipulating Holocaust Memory to Commit Genocide

Comparing October 7 to the Holocaust
as a pretext for Israel to commit genocide on Palestinians

Manipulating Holocaust Memory to Commit Genocide

Arguments Purporting Israeli Genocide/Holocaust

Many historians reject comparing October 7 to the Holocaust—not because of the Holocaust's uniqueness, but because they deny October 7 was driven by antisemitism. They argue: "[A]ppealing to the memory of the Holocaust obscures our understanding of the antisemitism Jews face today, and dangerously misrepresents the causes of violence in Israel-Palestine."¹⁹

The methodological argument ultimately shifts into a political one: evoking the struggle against barbarism and comparing Hamas to the Nazis is said to justify the collective punishment—or even potential genocide—of the Palestinians. According to this view, Israelis should avoid Nazi analogies because they are dangerous. Yet Israelis do use them, and, critics argue, they do so not out of genuine conviction, but as a rhetorical strategy to legitimize acts of collective revenge. In this interpretation, the Nazi comparison is not a sincere response to October 7, but an instrumental tool to justify violence. "Israeli leaders and others are using the Holocaust framing to portray Israel's collective punishment of Gaza as a battle for civilization in the face of barbarism, thereby promoting racist narratives about Palestinians. This rhetoric encourages us to separate this current crisis from the context out of which it has arisen."

Counterarguments

To frame Hamas as a legitimate "resistance" movement, as many of these interpretations do—implicitly or explicitly—is plainly absurd. Hamas is an Islamist and antisemitic organization, which is more bent on destroying Israel at all costs than achieving Palestinian national aspirations. Arguments claiming that labeling October 7 a "Holocaust" or calling Hamas "Nazis" enables collective punishment or genocide focus solely on rhetoric, not on actual conduct. Words may indicate intent, but real-world evidence must come from the war itself—and the counter-evidence is overwhelming.

The open letter's authors also conflate Hamas with the Palestinian people. Terms like "Nazis" or more often "barbarians" are directed at Hamas, not civilians—but the authors fail to explain how one should refer to Hamas if such terms are off-limits. One could even argue that Hamas's motives are explicitly antisemitic and genocidal. Its Charter and public statements speak not only of eliminating Israel but of killing Jews. While the Holocaust analogy may be exaggerated, the intent to commit genocide was unmistakably present on October 7.

19. Omer Bartov et al.: "An Open Letter on the Misuse of Holocaust Memory", NYRB, Nov. 20, 2023, <https://www.nybooks.com/online/2023/11/20/an-open-letter-on-the-misuse-of-holocaust-memory/>

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As a journalist, he occasionally writes about the political and social situation in contemporary Hungary.

About the Elizabeth and Tony Comper Center for the Study of Antisemitism and Racism at the University of Haifa

We are a university-based research center focusing specifically on contemporary antisemitism, with international scholars and programs.

Our Mission: To foster robust academic discourse on contemporary antisemitism.

We have an accomplished group of international academics specializing in geographies across the globe – from India to the former Soviet Union, from France and Hungary, to the US and Canada – who publish and speak on topics in contemporary antisemitism.

We will host Contemporary Antisemitism Haifa 2026, the largest, now-annual academic conference on contemporary antisemitism, in partnership with the London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, and the Center for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights at Gratz College and the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism at Indiana University.



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