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By Jonathan Cook

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The Comma That Erases Genocide

Israel wants to muddy the waters — as it always does — so it can carry on with its genocide, writes Jonathan Cook. Here's an example of how the Western media help it along.



The International Court of Justice at The Hague, on May 24, 2024, when it ordered Israel to stop its assault on Rafah. (ICJ)

Jonathan-Cook.net

Israel's claim that a single comma exempts it from having to respect the International Court of Justice's order on May 24 to immediately halt its murderous attack on Rafah should be ridiculed.

Instead it is being given space to breathe by complicit media like *The Guardian*.

The paper's diplomatic editor offers an "analysis" that takes seriously claims by Israel and the two judges at the ICJ — one an Israeli — who dissented from the ruling approved by the other 13. They argue the following:

"The world is wrong to think that the ICJ has required Israel to halt its Rafah assault and any actions elsewhere in Gaza that are genocidal. Instead, a comma in the text qualifies the ruling to mean the court wants Israel to halt its actions in Rafah and elsewhere *only* if they are genocidal. Because Israel's actions are not genocidal, the court is not, in fact, asking Israel to halt anything."

How a single comma is allowing Israel to question ICJ Rafah ruling

Patrick Wintour
Diplomatic editor

Israel is among those arguing that international court of justice directive is ambivalent and far from a blanket order to halt its offensive



That argument is preposterous on its face. It would be a less forceful statement than the one the court issued back in January, when Israel's genocide was far less developed than it is now.

But there's another glaring flaw in the argument's logic that *The Guardian* somehow overlooks. If the two dissenting judges are really so sure that is what the overwhelming majority meant — that Israel is barred only from carrying out actions if they are already proven to constitute genocide — why on earth did they dissent?

Were this really the case, there could be only one possible interpretation of their decision to dissent: that they favour giving Israel the green light to commit genocide.

[See: *ICJ Orders Israel Stop Rafah Attack*]

This isn't rocket science.

Israel wants to muddy the waters — as it always does — so it can carry on with its genocide. The “fierce and continuing debate” about the comma, as *The Guardian* characterises it, is being aired so that Israel can continue murdering children in Gaza until the ICJ makes a definitive ruling on the question of genocide in a few years' time.

By then, Gaza will be even more of a smoldering ruin than it is already. By then, the Palestinian population will be either dead or have been ethnically cleansed.

Imagine if it were Vladimir Putin's Russia arguing over a comma as a pretext to avoid implementing a clear ruling by the ICJ to halt atrocities in Ukraine. The ignominy *The Guardian* and the rest of the media would heap on the Russian president would be relentless — and deserved.

[Related: *ICJ Rules Against Ukraine on Terrorism, MH17*]

So why are Israel's genocide-justifying evasions not treated the same way?

- Because, however unwilling we are to face the facts, Western establishments, including our state-corporate media, are fully onboard with this genocide. The only concession they are willing to make is to the optics.
- Because Western elites, like their more openly colonial forebears, are racist towards members of the Global South like the Palestinians.
- Because the West's war machine — into which Israel is so tightly integrated — endlessly enriches those elites through “defence” contracts and resource theft.
- And because Israel is central to the narrative we imbibe daily that it is we in the so-called West who are the real victims, not the people whose lives are torn apart by our bombs and our globe-spanning financial institutions.

The Western media takes seriously the debate about a comma because it helps us to avoid confronting a simple truth: The monsters are us.

Jonathan Cook is an award-winning British journalist. He was based in Nazareth, Israel, for 20 years. He returned to the U.K. in 2021. He is the author of three books on the Israel-Palestine conflict: *Blood and Religion: The Unmasking of the Jewish State* (2006), *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East* (2008) and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human*

Despair (2008). If you appreciate his articles, please consider offering your financial support.

This article is from the author's blog, Jonathan Cook.net

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