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زبانهای اروپایی

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07.08.2024



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Israel's Barbarism Is Grossly Minimised

The fatality figures started to stall in the spring, around the time Israel completed its destruction of Gaza's hospitals and kidnapped much of the enclave's medical personnel, writes Jonathan Cook.



Ambulance on Oct. 7, 2023, operated by the Palestine Red Crescent Society in Khan Yunis, Gaza Strip, after it was heavily damaged by an Israeli military airstrike. (Tasnim News Agency, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0)

Gaza's Official Death Toll Is a Lie

The reported death toll in Gaza is way too low by every imaginable metric. We need to be stressing this — all the more so when Israel's apologists are vigorously engaged in a disinformation campaign to suggest that the figures are inflated.

On May 6, seven months into Israel's slaughter, there were reported to be 34,735 dead. That was an average of 4,960 Palestinians killed each month.

Today, nearly three months on, the reported death toll stands at 39,400 — or an increase of 4,665.

It should not need a statistician to point out that, were the rise linear, the expected number of deaths would stand by this point at around 49,600.

So, even by the simplest calculation, there is a large shortfall in deaths — a shortfall that needs explaining.

Such an explanation is easy to provide: Israel destroyed Gaza's institutions and its medical infrastructure, including its hospitals, many months ago, making it impossible for officials there to keep track of how many Palestinians are being killed by Israel.

The death toll figures started to stall in the spring, around the time Israel completed its destruction of Gaza's hospitals and kidnapped much of the enclave's medical personnel.

More than a month ago, Save the Children pointed out that some 21,000 children in Gaza were missing, in addition to the 16,000 known to have been killed by Israel. Many are likely to have suffered lonely, terrifying deaths under rubble — gradually suffocated to death, or dying slowly from dehydration.

But again, even those shocking figures are likely to be a severe undercount.

The linear figure entirely misses the bigger picture. How?

1. Because in addition to the continuing Israeli bombardments, Palestinians have had to endure three more months of an intensifying famine. With each day of a famine, more people die than died the day before.

The deaths in a famine are not linear, they are exponential. If five people died yesterday of starvation, 20 people will die today, and 150 tomorrow. That is how prolonged famines work. The longer you are starved, the higher the probability you will die of starvation.

2. Because Palestinians have had three more months deprived of medical care after Israel destroyed their hospitals and medical institutions. If you have a chronic illness — diabetes, asthma, kidney problems, high blood pressure, and so on — the longer you are forced to go without medical attention, the greater the chance you will die from an untreated condition. Again, the death rate in such circumstances is exponential, not linear.



Palestine Red Crescent Society ambulance adamaged by an Israeli airstrike, Oct. 7. (Tasnim News Agency, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0)

3. Because without medical care, all sorts of other things that happen in everyday life become more dangerous. Childbirth is the most obvious example, but even cuts and grazes can become a death sentence. So given the fact that Palestinians now have even less access to medical care than they had in the first six months of Israel’s war on Gaza suggests that people are being killed by life-events in even greater numbers than was the case earlier in Israel’s slaughter.

4. Because, for exactly the same reasons, those injured by Israel’s continuing bombardments are likely to have poorer outcomes than those similarly injured in earlier attacks. Fewer doctors means less chance of treatment, means greater chance of dying from your wounds.

5. Because we know that — given the insanitary conditions, the lack of water and food, the weakened health status of the population, and the destruction of hospitals — epidemics now are breaking out. The WHO has already warned of a likely outbreak of polio, but there are sure to be other diseases emerging such as cholera, typhoid and dysentery that have yet to be isolated and identified. Even the common cold can become a killer when people’s health status is this compromised.

A letter from researchers to *The Lancet* medical journal last month warned about the likely massive undercount of the dead in Gaza, even relying, as they had to, on the established death toll.

Their point was that indirect deaths — of the kind I enumerate above — need to be factored in as well as the direct deaths from Israeli bombs.

They very conservatively estimate that the total number who will die over the coming months — not just from bombs but as a result of the lack of medical care, insanitary conditions and famine — is 186,000, or 8 percent of the population.

But that figure assumes that Israel's current slaughter and starvation policies come to an immediate halt, and that international organisations are able to bring in emergency aid. There are precisely no signs that Israel is going to allow any of that to happen — or that Western states are going to put any pressure on Israel to do so.

The medical researchers suggest a less conservative estimate could ultimately put the death toll in Gaza nearer 600,000, or a quarter of the population. Again, that assumes Israel reverses course immediately.

Remember too that for every person killed, several others are maimed or badly wounded. According to the current figures, more than 91,000 Palestinians are reported injured, many of them missing limbs. But again, that is likely to be a massive undercount too.

Harrowing as these figures are, they are just numbers. But Gaza's dead are not numbers. They were human beings, half of them children, whose lives have been snuffed out, their potential erased forever, their loved ones left with an all-consuming grief. Many victims died alone in extreme pain, or endured unimaginable suffering.

None of their lives should be reduced to cold statistics on a graph. But if that is where we are, and sadly it is, then at the very least we need to point out that the headline figures are a lie, that Israel's barbarism is being grossly minimised, and that we are being lulled into a false sense complacency.

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.

By **Jonathan**

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August 6, 2024

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