

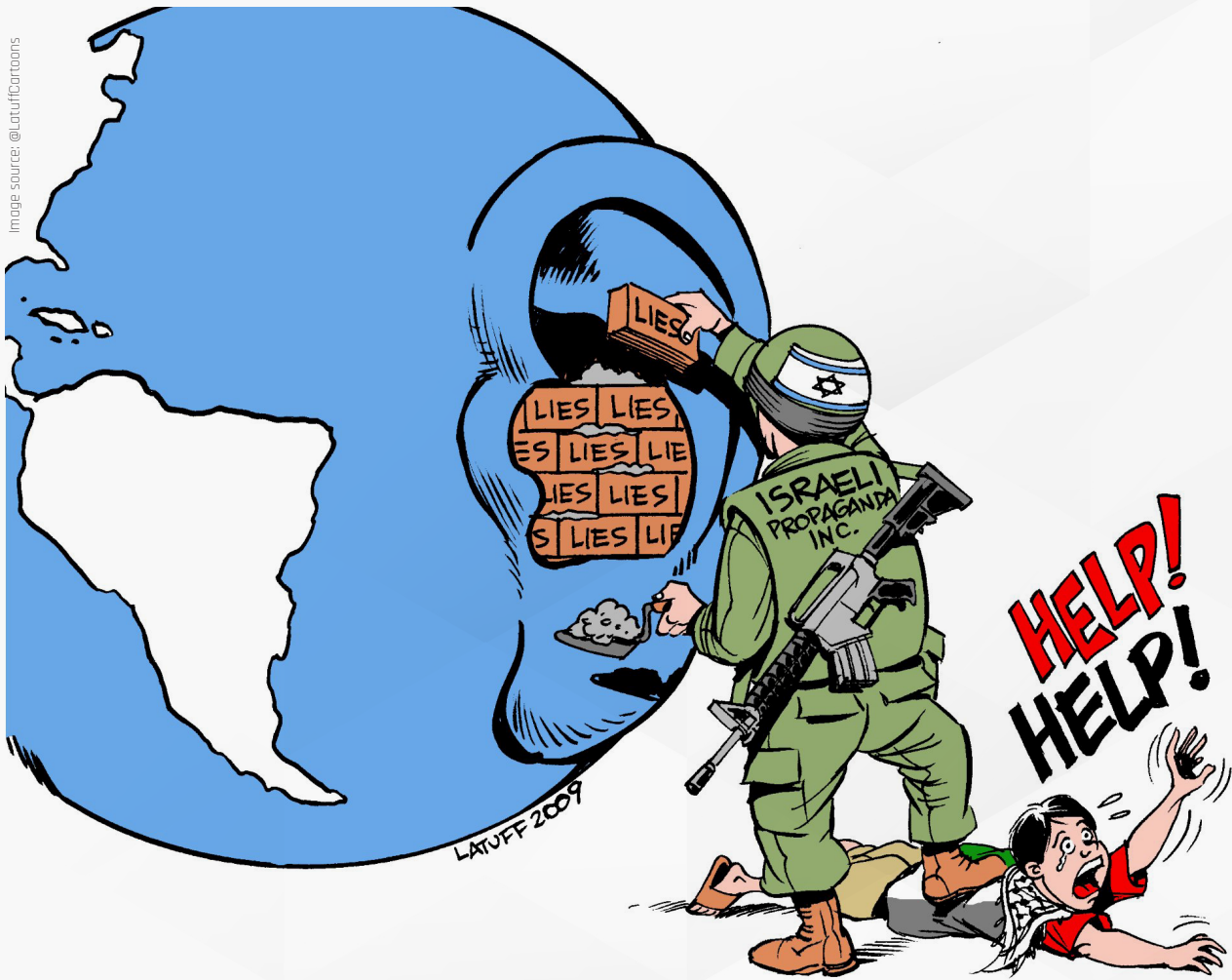


ISRAEL- PALESTINE

SEPARATING REALITY
FROM MYTH

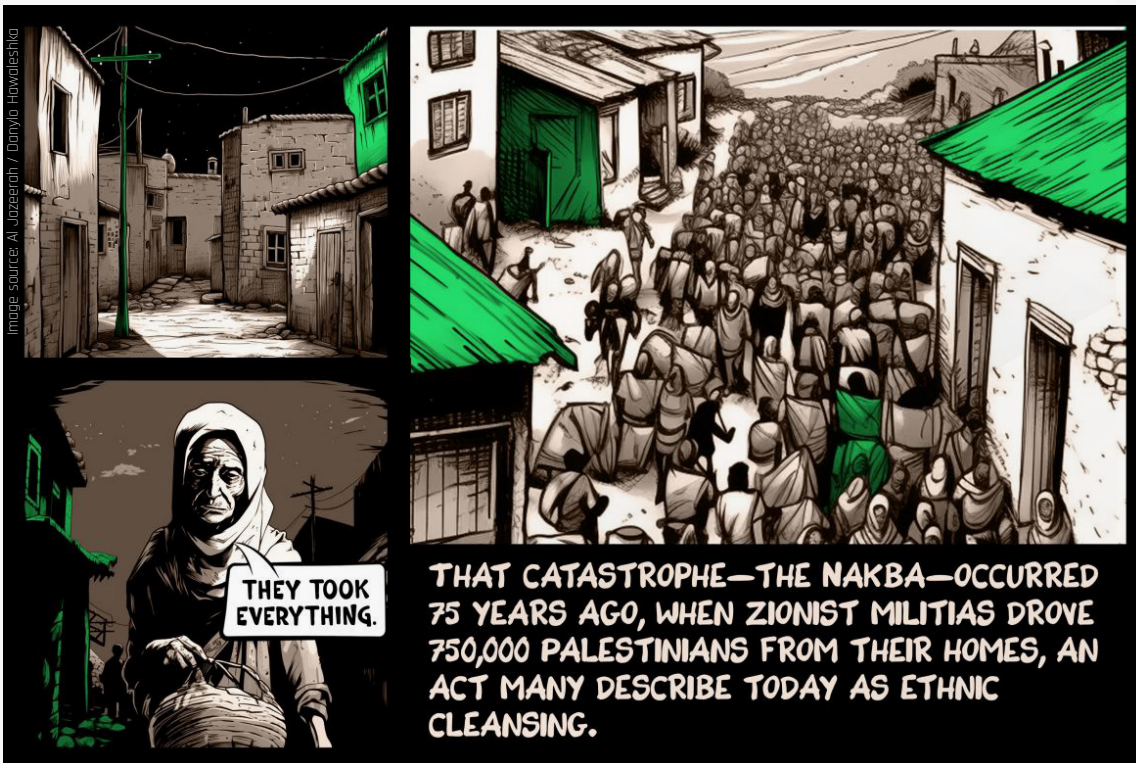
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ISRAEL-PALESTINE: SEPARATING REALITY FROM MYTH

Following Hamas' attack against Israel on October 7 2023, Tel Aviv launched its most deadly assault on the Gaza Strip to date, an operation seemingly designed to inflict collective punishment on the civilians of the coastal enclave. As has always been the case when Israel wages war on the beleaguered 2 million citizens of the strip, a range of false narratives around the situation are peddled by pundits, politicians and certain media outlets with pro-Israel biases. These false narratives come in different forms - which are unpacked below - but all serve one ultimate purpose: to justify Israel's oppressive policies against the Palestinian people. Firstly, this short guide will equip you with the knowledge of the core themes of these narratives, so that you are able to recognise them when you hear/see them. Secondly, it will give you the facts and counter-narratives necessary to pushing back against such disinformation.



FALSE NARRATIVE ONE: THIS ALL STARTED WHEN HAMAS ATTACKED ISRAEL!

Following the loss of Israeli civilian life on October 7th, the Israeli political, security and media establishment attempted to present Hamas' attack in a way that was divorced from any broader historical and political context. Unfortunately, many Western politicians and mainstream media outlets have also framed events in a decontextualised manner. At the outset, it is important to make it clear that attacks against civilians are not an act of resistance and constitute an act of terrorism, whether carried out by Hamas or any other faction. It is also important to be aware that the October 7 attack did not occur against a blank canvass, but a blood-stained historical backdrop: the massive oppression of the Palestinian people under the decades' old Israeli occupation. In other words, the clock did not begin on October the 7th when Hamas carried out its attack.

In fact, the conflict began over 70 years ago long before Hamas was even established in the late 1980s. In 1948, with the expulsion of the majority of historic Palestine's Arab inhabitants in order to make way for the establishment of Israel¹. Estimates say that around 700,000-800,000 Palestinian Arabs were expelled from their homes, and over 500 villages were depopulated and destroyed in an act of ethnic cleansing which

¹ Ilan Pappé. (2007). The Ethnic Cleaning of Palestine. Oneworld Publications.

Palestinians refer to as *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) ². Israel then further expanded its sphere of control of the Palestinians in 1967, when it began its military occupations of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza after defeating Syria and Egypt in the Six-Day War ³. In the decades since, following flawed peace processes and stillborn calls by the international community for a “two-state solution,” the oppression of the Palestinians living under military occupation has only grown.

The argument that Israel’s offensive on Gaza is simply a response to violence emanating from the strip is also proven fallacious by the fact that it routinely carries out military incursions and massive human rights violations in the occupied West Bank, despite the absence of active armed groups in that area. While Hamas maintains a presence in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, its *armed* presence is minor compared to the ruling Fatah party, which runs the Palestinian National Authority (PA), and laid down its arms in the fight against Israel in the early 1990s upon agreeing to a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Since then, Fatah has not engaged in sustained armed violence against Israeli security forces or civilians. Nevertheless, Israel routinely carries out incursions into the West Bank, where Palestinians are subject to suffocating Israeli military law and a pervasive surveillance system polices their lives. On the other and, the nearly 700,000 ⁴ Israeli settlers living illegally on annexed Palestinian land are subject to civilian courts. Israel has 175 permanent Israeli military checkpoints peppered throughout the occupied West Bank, alongside a giant separation wall that snakes through the territory, all of which contributes toward the breakup of Palestinian communities ⁵. This gross inequality, which is embedded into the institutional architecture of Israel’s occupation, has led to numerous international human rights bodies accusing Israel of the crime of apartheid ⁶.

In the face of numerous UN Security Council resolutions calling upon it to stop doing so, successive Israeli government have granted approval for the construction of illegal settlement blocks on annexed land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Around 700,000 settlers, or around 10% of Israel’s population, live in 290 settlements and outposts located on stolen Palestinian land ⁷. The Israeli state also oversees mass home demolitions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in order to make way for illegal settlement

2 Jerome Slater. (2020). *Mythologies Without End: The US, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1917-2020*. Oxford University Press.

3 TRT World, ‘A Brief History of the Israeli Occupation of Palestine,’ accessed October 19, 2023: <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/a-brief-history-of-the-israeli-occupation-of-palestine-12733173>

4 United Nations, ‘Human Rights Council Hears that 700,000 Israeli Settlers are Living Illegally in the Occupied West Bank – Meeting Summary (Excerpts),’ 28 March, 2023, accessed: October 19, 2023: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/human-rights-council-hears-that-700000-israeli-settlers-are-living-illegally-in-the-occupied-west-bank-meeting-summary-excerpts/>

5 Amnesty International, ‘Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories 2022,’ accessed 9 November, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/report-israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/>

6 Amnesty International, ‘Israel’s Apartheid Against Palestinians: A Cruel System of Domination and a Crime Against Humanity,’ 1 February, 2022, accessed 9 October 2023: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/02/israels-apartheid-against-palestinians-a-cruel-system-of-domination-and-a-crime-against-humanity/>

7 Al-Jazeera, ‘Who Are Israeli Settlers, and Why Do They Live on Palestinian Lands?’ Accessed 8 November, 2023: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/6/who-are-israeli-settlers-and-why-do-they-live-on-palestinian-lands>

construction. In 2022 alone, 953 Palestinian properties were forcefully demolished by the Israeli state, displacing 1,031 people, which marked the third year in a row that over 1,000 people were made homeless as a result of this cruel policy⁸. It is worth noting that since 1967, Israel has annexed over 100,000 hectares of Palestinian land and demolished over 50,000 Palestinian properties, all in order to make way for its illegal settlement expansions⁹. Beyond land appropriation, in 2022 alone Israeli forced killed 151 Palestinians in the West Bank, and injured 9,875 as part of a surge of military incursions into the area¹⁰. That number has significantly spiked in 2023. Since the start of the year, Israeli forces and illegal settlers killed 371 Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, with 163 being killed since October 7 until the time of writing (November 9 2023)¹¹. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, that force is used to oppress the Palestinian people, and deny them their most fundamental human dignities.

In the specific case of Gaza, there is also a great deal of political context to unpack. In 2007, Following its so-called “disengagement” from Gaza in 2005, Israel placed the enclave under a strangling economic blockage. This ever-tightening siege pushed over 53% of Gazans, around half of whom are 18 years old or younger, below the poverty line¹². Following the imposition of the blockage, between 2008-2023, Israel carried out five major military offensives in the strip¹³. At the time of writing (October 19 2023), the combined Palestinian death toll from these offensives stands at well over 11,000, or one out of every 200 people in Gaza¹⁴. According to the UN, just the 2014 war on Gaza alone killed roughly 2,200 Palestinians, including nearly 500 children¹⁵. It left over 11,000 people wounded¹⁶, including 3,374 children, 1,000 of whom were left disabled for life¹⁷. 100,000 homes were destroyed, impacting the lives of more than 600,000 Palestinians¹⁸. Rebuilding costs were estimated to be \$4-6 billion over the course of 20 years¹⁹.

8 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'West Bank Demolitions and Displacement, December 2022,' 21 February, 2023, accessed 8 November, 2023: <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-demolitions-and-displacement-december-2022>

9 Amnesty International, 'Israel's Occupation: 50 Years of Dispossession,' 7 June, 2017, accessed 8 November, 2023: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/06/israel-occupation-50-years-of-dispossession/>

10 Amnesty International, 'Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories 2022,' accessed 8 November, 2023: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/report-israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/>

11 Al-Jazeera, 'One Month of Israel's War: What's Happening to Palestinians Outside Gaza?,' 7 November, 2023, accessed 8 November, 2023: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/7/one-month-of-israels-war-whats-happening-to-palestinians-outside-gaza>

12 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, '53 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza Live in Poverty, Despite Humanitarian Assistance,' 5 June, 2018, accessed 9 October 2023: <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/53-cent-palestinians-gaza-live-pov-erty-despite-humanitarian-assistance>.

13 These were/are: Operation Cast Lead (2008), Operation Pillar of Defense (2012), Operation Protective Edge (2014), May 2021, Operation Swords of Iron (October 2023/ongoing).

14 Ruby Mellan, Arthur Halocha and Julia Ledur, The Washington Post, 'Gaza Reports More than 11,100 Killed. That's One Out of Every 200 People,' November 13, 2023, accessed November 14, 2023: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2023/gaza-rising-death-toll-civilians/>

15 Mairav Zonszein, The Guardian, 'Israel Killed More Palestinians in 2014 Than in Any Other Year Since 1967,' 27 March, 2015, accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/27/israel-kills-more-palestinians-2014-than-any-other-year-since-1967>

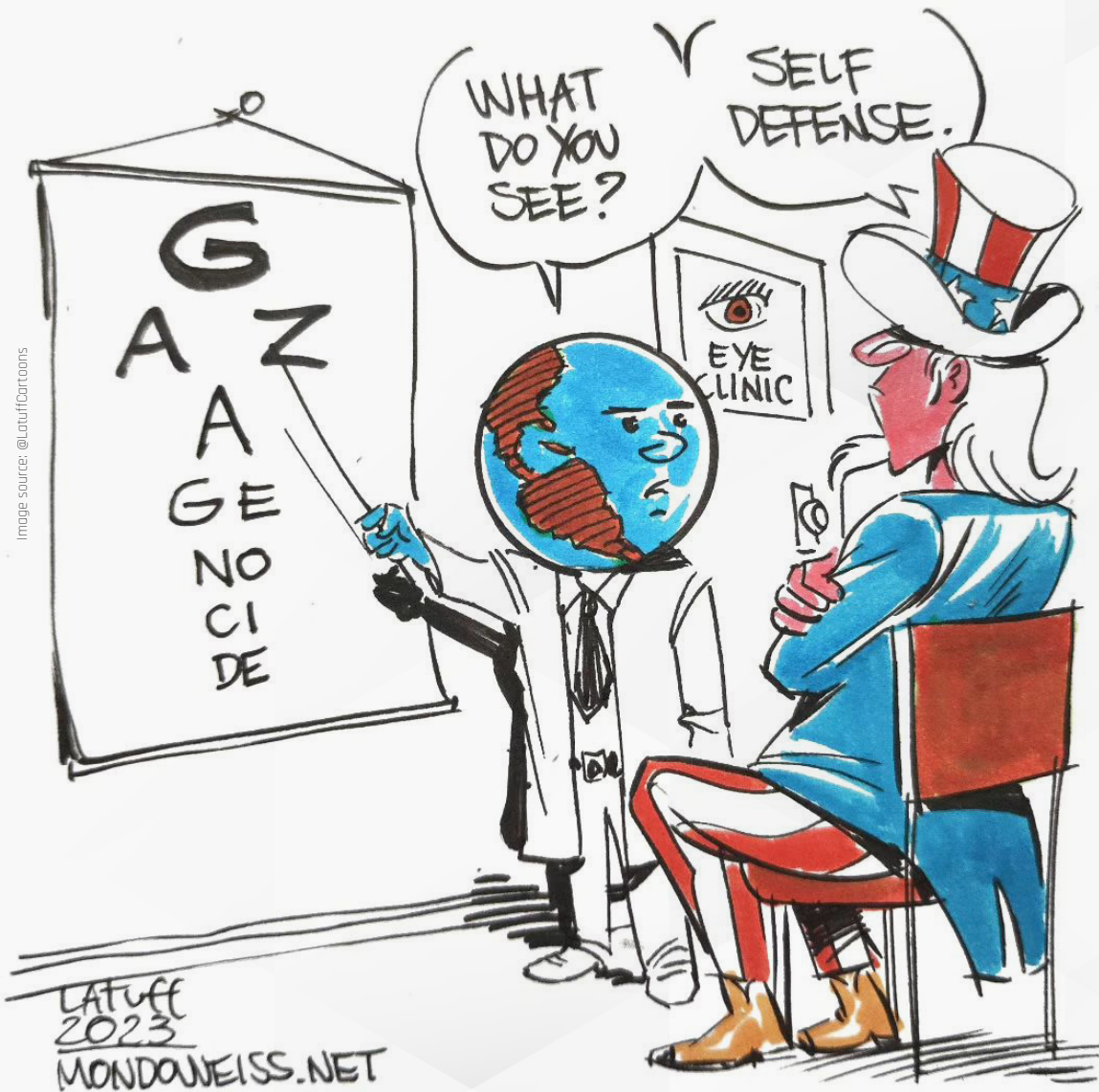
16 United Nations, 'UN Gaza Inquiry Finds Credible Allegations of War Crimes Committed 2014 by Both Israel and Palestinian Armed Groups,' 22 June, 2015, accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2015/06/un-gaza-inquiry-finds-credible-allegations-war-crimes-committed-2014-both#:~:text=The%202014%20hostilities%20saw%20a,a%20third%20of%20them%20children>.

17 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, '2014 Gaza Conflict,' accessed 19 October 2023: https://www.unrwa.org/2014-gaza-conflict?__cf_chl_tk=rivglylBRRDRUPm_fgtUU5zGzVZaagQjQmbusJbp4g-1697727821-0-gaNycGzNDXs#:~:text=66%20Israeli%20soldiers%20and%20five,a%20result%20of%20their%20injuries.

18 Defence for Children International, 'Operation Protective Edge: A War Waged on Gaza's Children,' 16 April 2015, accessed 19 October 2023: https://www.dci-palestine.org/operation_protective_edge_a_war_waged_on_gaza_s_children_resource

19 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 'A Week After Cairo Conference UNRWA Steps up Recovery and Reconstruction Efforts in Gaza,' 20 October, 2014, accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/week-after-cairo-conference-unrwa-steps-recovery-and-reconstruction-efforts>

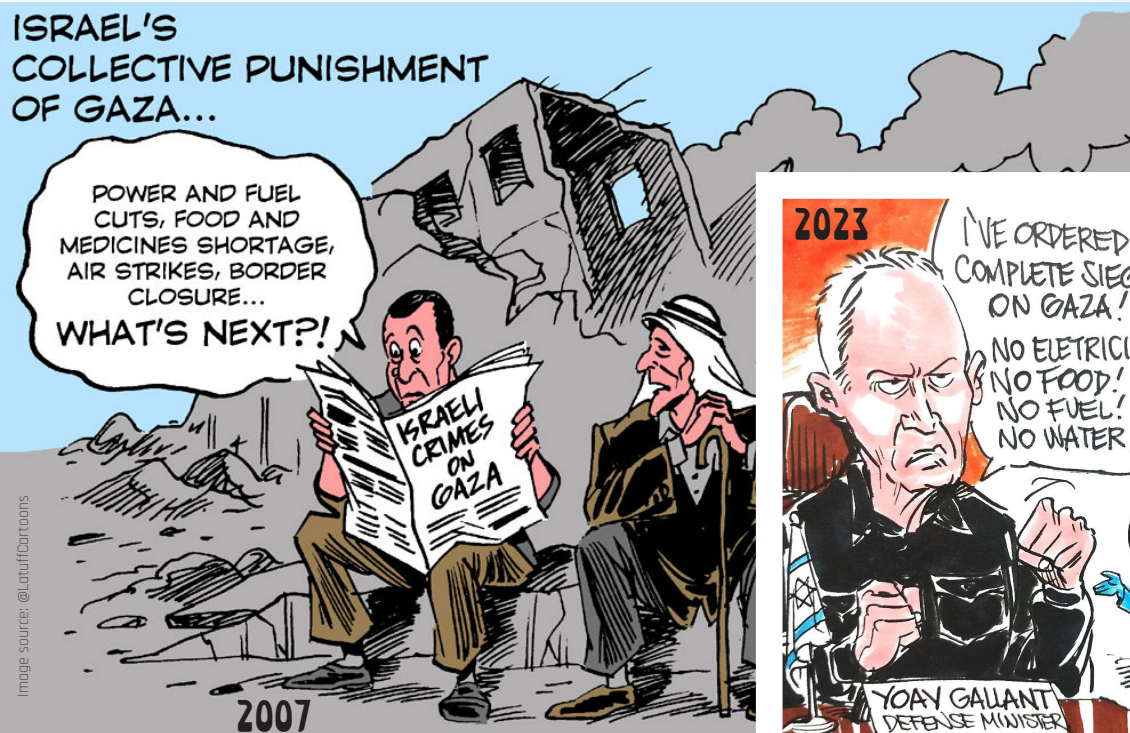
19 Haaretz News, 'Housing Group: 20 Years to Rebuild Gaza After Fighting With Israel,' 30 August, 2014, 19 October, 2023: <https://www.haaretz.com/2014-08-30/ty-article-20-years-to-rebuild-gaza/000017f-e83e-dc91-a17f-fcbf0d100000>



What has been described above is but a small sample of the horrors that the Palestinian people of the West Bank and Gaza have been forced to endure. Repeated calls for the lifting the blockage on Gaza, made not only by the Palestinians but numerous states at UN fora, have gone unheeded. Therefore, it should be understood that there is a broad and deep historical context to the events that ensued since Saturday, October the 7th 2023, namely the brutal military occupation of the Palestinian people and the siege of Gaza.

False narrative: This all started when Hamas attacked Israel!

Counter-narrative: While attacks on the Israeli civilians were unjustified, the clock did not begin on October 7th 2023. There is a broader context to this conflict which is the original displacement of Palestinians in 1948, the decades' old military occupation of Palestine which began in 1967, and the siege of Gaza which began in 2007.



FALSE NARRATIVE TWO: ISRAEL DOES NOT OCCUPY GAZA

In 2005, Israel dismantled its illegal settlement blocks from Gaza and redeployed its occupying troops from the area. Ever since, it has become commonplace to hear apologists the Israeli state's crimes make the claim that Israel no longer occupies Gaza under international law. Some may argue that because Israel does not have its 'boots on the ground' in Gaza in the same way that it does in the West Bank, then it does not make sense to say that Israel occupies Gaza. However, international law experts have long asserted that the issue is not quite that simple.

Article 42 of the 1907 Hague Regulations puts forward the legal standard for defining an occupation, saying that: "[t]erritory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation extends only to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised"²⁰. It is widely accepted among experts of international law that the test for establishing whether an occupation exists under Article 42 of the Hague Regulations is whether a state has "effective control" over the

²⁰ International Humanitarian Law Databases, 'Regulations: Art. 42,' accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-ii-1899/regulations-art-42#:~:text=42-,Art.a%20position%20to%20assert%20itself.>

territory/people in question²¹. This does not mean that the state, in this case Israel, has to have its soldiers on the ground in the territory, in this case Gaza, to control it. Rather, it simply requires that Israel be able to exercise enough control over the lives of Gazans to significantly effect civilian life in the strip²². This is clearly the case, considering that Israel maintains control over Gaza's population registry, that is, who is able to live in Gaza, its land borders, its air space, its maritime zones, its telecommunications lines, its imports and exports, its sewage systems and electricity grids, among other things.

The level of control that Israel maintains over Gaza has led international law experts to conclude that Tel Aviv is still an occupying power there. For example, former UN Special Rapporteur, John Dugard, argued that, "statements by the government of Israel that the [2005] withdrawal ended the occupation are grossly inaccurate"²³. Mr Dugard argued that following Israel's so-called withdrawal, "Gaza became a sealed-off, imprisoned and occupied territory"²⁴. There are a number of responsibilities under international law that flow from Israel's status as an occupying power, including the responsibility to ensure that the occupied peoples are able to live safe and orderly lives, to ensure the provision of food and medical care to the occupied population, to avoid collective punishment of the occupied population, and to avoid attacks against the property of the occupied peoples²⁵. It is clear that in its latest attack on Gaza, and those prior, Israel has consistently violated its legal responsibilities as an occupying power.

False Narrative: Israel does not occupy Gaza!

Counter-Narrative: As many international law experts have argued - including UN experts - Israel meets the legal criteria for "effective control" over the lives of Gazans needed for establishing the existence of an occupation. Because it is an occupying power, it has legal responsibilities toward the people of Gaza, which it routinely violates.

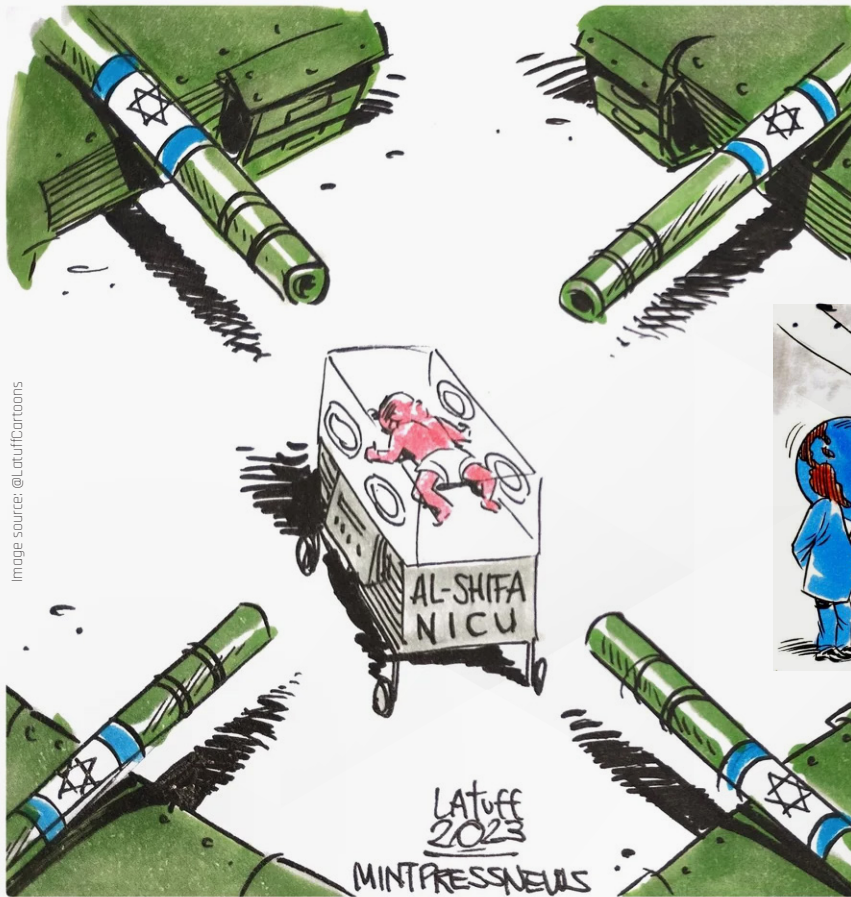
21 George Bisharat et al., (2009), 'Israel's Invasion of Gaza in International Law,' Denver Journal of International Law & Policy, accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1199&context=djilp>

22 Shane Darcy & John Reynolds, (2010), 'An Enduring Occupation: The Status of the Gaza Strip from the Perspective of International Humanitarian Law,' Journal of Conflict & Security Law, accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26294629>

23 United Nations, 'Human Rights Situation in the OPT - Sp. Rapporteur (Dugard),' accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-179636/>

24 Rory McCarthy, The Guardian, 'Occupied Gaza Like Apartheid South Africa, Says UN Report,' 23 February, 2007, accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/feb/23/israelandthepalestinians.unitednations>

25 International Committee of the Red Cross, 'Occupation and International Humanitarian Law: Questions and Answers,' 4 August, 2008, accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/634kfc.htm>



FALSE NARRATIVE THREE: THE ONLY REASON THAT SO MANY GAZAN CIVILIANS ARE KILLED IS BECAUSE HAMAS USES THEM AS HUMAN SHIELDS!

There is no doubt that the weaponry of Gaza-based militant groups has at times been stored in locations of a civilian character²⁶. Hamas and Palestinian militants are obligated under international humanitarian law (IHL) to reduce the risk posed to Gazans by carrying out military operations away from civilian areas. Yet, it must be noted that this is almost an impossible task, considering that, as pointed out below, the Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, making it very difficult for Palestinian militant groups to operate away from areas with a high concentration of civilians. Moreover, IHL makes clear that the presence of military targets in a civilian area does not deprive that civilian area of its civilian character²⁷. As per the principle of proportionality, a cornerstone of the Geneva Conventions and the laws of war, it is prohibited to carry out attacks which would cause a loss of civilian life “which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated”²⁸.

²⁶ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, ‘UNRWA Condemns Placement of Rockets, For a Second Time, in One of its Schools, 22 July, 2024, accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/unrwa-condemns-placement-rockets-second-time-one-its-schools>

²⁷ International Committee of the Red Cross, ‘Practice Relating to Norm 5. Definition of Civilians,’ accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/pt/customary-ihl/v2/rule5#:~:text=be%20a%20civilian,-.The%20civilian%20population%20comprises%20all%20persons%20who%20are%20civilians,.protection%20under%20international%20humanitarian%20law.>

²⁸ International Committee of the Red Cross, ‘Case Book: Proportionality,’ accessed 19 October, 2023: https://casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/proportionality#:~:text=The%20principle%20of%20proportionality%20prohibits,and%20direct%20military%20advantage%20anticipated”.

So, for example, when Israel carries out an airstrike on a civilian object, such as an entire apartment block with scores of innocent families inside as it has done multiple times in the past, it cannot justify this under IHL by claiming the presence of some Hamas fighters, or a Hamas weapons' storage facility. Israel is bound by the principle of distinction, another bedrock of the Geneva Conventions, to "distinguish between civilians and combatants at all times"²⁹. In other words, Israel has a legal responsibility to avoid targeting areas that will cause massive suffering to civilians, regardless of any Hamas presence. Hospitals have a particular protected status under articles 18 and 19 of the fourth Geneva Convention, say that medical facilities are protected during war time, and to attack them is considered a war crime³⁰. Again, this is not nullified by the presence of any Palestinian militants or weaponry.

It must also be remembered that Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas on earth, with a population of 2.3 million and 14,000 people per square miles. The idea that Israel could fire missiles into such an area without massive civilian loss of life, is simply absurd. Experts claimed that during its 2014 one-and-a-half month war on Gaza, Israel dropped 10,000 tonnes of explosives³¹. Palestinian authorities alleged that the number was in fact 20,000 tonnes³². Within the first 6 days of Israel's October 2023 aggression, it was revealed that the Israeli Air Force had dropped roughly 6,000 bombs on Gaza, meaning that it had used about 1,000 bombs per day. This is more munitions than the US used on Afghanistan during any single year of its 20 years of occupying that country³³. Considering the sheer firepower that Israel is unleashing on a densely populated, impoverished coastal enclave which has no air-defence system for intercepting incoming missiles, it is little wonder that there is such a high Palestinian fatality rate.

False Narrative: The Only Reason that So Many Gazan Civilians are Killed is Because Hamas Uses Them as Human Shields!

Counter-Narrative: The main reason that so many civilians are killed is because Israel refuses to abide by international law by differentiating between military and civilian targets. The presence of Hamas does not give Israel the legal right to attack civilian areas. The high intensity of indiscriminate Israeli attacks on Gaza - one of the most densely populated areas in the world - will inevitably kill lots of civilians.

²⁹ The International Committee of the Red Cross, 'The Principle of Distinction,' accessed 19 October, 2023: https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/war-and-law/03_distinction-0.pdf

³⁰ Al-Jazeera, 'Israel-Gaza: What International Law Says About the Deadly Hospital Strike,' 18 October 2023, 19 October 2023: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/18/israel-gaza-what-international-law-says-about-the-deadly-hospital-strike>

³¹ Ruth Pollard, 'Gaza Team Defuses Live Bombs and Shells Without Protective Suits,' Sydney Morning Herald, 8 August, 2014, accessed 19 October 2023: <https://www.smh.com.au/world/gaza-team-defuses-live-bombs-and-shells-without-protective-suits-20140808-101qme.html>

³² Ministry of Interior Palestinian National Authority, 'Gaza Bombed with 20,000 Tons of Explosives,' accessed 19 October, 2023: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140903032637/http://www.moi.gov.ps/en/Details.aspx?id=68571>

³³ PBS News Hour, 'Examining Intelligence Assessments of Who is Responsible for Gaza Hospital Blast,' 18 October 2023, accessed 19 October 2023: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/examining-intelligence-assessments-over-who-is-responsible-for-gaza-hospital-blast#:~:text=Israel%20has%20dropped%20more%20bombs,of%20war%2C%20as%20you%20know>



FALSE NARRATIVE FOUR: ONLY THE PALESTINIAN SIDE ARE GUILTY OF TAKING HOSTAGES!

It is without a doubt that Hamas took Israeli civilians and foreign nationals hostage when it carried out its attack against Israel on October 7 2023. MEND calls for Hamas to release those hostages immediately. However, Israel is also guilty of taking Palestinians civilians hostage and holding them in its prisons, in some cases for years at a time without charge or trial, as part of a process called administrative detention. In recent years, Israel has filled its prisons with a total of 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners, most of whom have been seized from the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Among them, there are 270 child prisoners and 3398 administrative detainees³⁴. In fact, according to the UN, since 1967, Israel has detained more than 800,000 Palestinians³⁵. There have also been numerous reports that Palestinian men, women and children have been sexually abused and tortured while in Israeli custody³⁶. Multiple UN human rights experts have condemned Israel over the years for its mass incarceration of Palestinians. For example, in May

³⁴ Al-Dameer, Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, accessed 9 November, 2023: <https://www.addameer.org>

³⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied Since 1967, Francesca Albanese,' p.2, July 2023, accessed 9 November, 2023: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session53/advance-versions/A_HRC_53_59_AdvanceUneditedVersion.pdf

³⁶ Ibid

2023 UN experts decried Israel's "cruel and inhumane detention policy and practices," which they said could not be separated, "from the colonial nature of its occupation, intended to control and subjugate all Palestinians in the territory Israel wants to control"³⁷.

Around 500-700 Palestinian children, some as young as 12 years old, are prosecuted every year by Israeli military courts, usually for the crime of throwing stones against the Israeli occupation forces³⁸. Often Palestinian children are whisked away following sudden Israeli military incursions into villages and towns in the West Bank, usually at night. It is common for these Palestinian abductees to be detained on secret information. For example, one investigation carried out by an Israeli human rights organisation found out that in 2022, out of 125 cases of child abductions it analysed, not one Palestinian family had received summons before Israeli forces stormed their homes³⁹. Shockingly, research carried out by Save the Children found that 86% of Palestinian children in Israeli custody are beaten, 69% strip-searched and 42% "are injured at the point of arrest, including gunshot wounds and broken bones"⁴⁰. Taking the all of the aforementioned into consideration, it is quite evident that Israel is guilty of practicing hostage-taking against the oppressed people of Palestine.

False Narrative: Only the Palestinian Side are Guilty of Taking Hostages!

Counter-Narrative: For years, Israel has been taking Palestinians from their homes and incarcerating them without charge or trial under a policy known as administrative detention. Israel currently holds over one thousand Palestinians in its prisons who have not been charged with anything, along with hundreds of children under the age of 18. The UN has also accused Israeli personnel of sexually abusing Palestinian men, women and children in Israeli prisons.

³⁷ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 'Israel: UN Experts Demand Accountability for Death of Khader Adnan and Mass Arbitrary Detention of Palestinians,' 3 May, 2023, accessed 9 November, 2023: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/israel-un-experts-demand-accountability-death-khader-adnan-and-mass>

³⁸ Defence for Children International, 'Number of Palestinian Children (12-17) in Israeli Military Detention,' 11 August, 2023, accessed 9 November, 2023: https://www.dci-palestine.org/children_in_israeli_detention

³⁹ Hamoked Center for the Defence of the Individual, 'On Flimsy Grounds: Israel's Pervasive Night Arrests of Palestinian Children,' January, 2023, accessed 9 November, 2023: https://hamoked.org/files/2023/1666020_eng.pdf

⁴⁰ Save the Children, 'Stripped, Beaten and Blindfolded: New Research Reveals Ongoing Violence and Abuse of Palestinian Children Detained by Israeli Military,' 10 July 2023, accessed 14 November, 2023: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/new-research-reveals-ongoing-violence-on-palestinian-children-#:~:text=Save%20the%20Children%27s%20new%20consultation.place%20in%20the%20children%27s%20home>.



FALSE NARRATIVE FIVE: FORTY ISRAELI BABIES WERE BEHEADED

On the morning of 10 October, three days after Hamas' attack against Israel, shocking reports spread across Western mainstream media alleging that the Gazan militants had decapitated 40 Israeli babies at the Kibbutz of Kfar Aza ⁴¹. The story had its origins in the report of an Israeli news channel, which claimed that the information had been given to it by "an IDF commander" ⁴². The psychological impact that this narrative had upon Western audiences played a major role in galvanising early support for Israel's subsequent mass bombing campaign on Gaza and likely made Israel's disproportionate response seem more justifiable to some. This was only further fuelled by politicians and media talking heads from across the Western world who chose to repeat the story. For example President Biden claimed he had seen pictures of the dead babies, but this was quickly retracted by a White House spokesperson who admitted that he had not seen such evidence, only unsubstantiated allegations in Israeli news reports ⁴³. The Daily Mail, the Times, The Metro, The Independent and others all repeated the allegations in Britain ⁴⁴. However, it turned out all of these reports lacked hard evidence, and they lacked evidence for one simple reason: the beheadings of 40 babies never happened. Eventually, Israeli media outlets and even the Israeli government itself confirmed that

⁴¹ Kat Tenbarge and Mellisa Chan, NBC News, 'Unverified Reports of '40 Babies Headed' in Israel-Hamas War Inflamm Social Media,' October 12, 2023: <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/unverified-allegations-beheaded-babies-israel-hamas-war-inflamm-social-rcna119902>
⁴² Lazar Berman, Times of Israel, 'Israel Takes Foreign Journalists to See Massacre Site of Kfar Aza,' October 10, 2023: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-takes-foreign-journalists-to-see-massacre-site-in-kfar-aza/>
⁴³ Al-Jazeera News, 'White House Walks Back Biden's Claim He Saw Children Beheaded by Hamas,' October 12, 2023: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/white-house-walks-back-bidens-claim-he-saw-children-beheaded-by-hamas>
⁴⁴ Hamza Yusuf, Declassified UK, 'Beheaded Babies - How UK Media Reports Israel's Fake News as Fact', January 4, 2024: <https://www.declassifieduk.org/beheaded-babies-how-uk-media-reported-israels-fake-news-as-fact/>

there were never 40 beheaded babies⁴⁵. At least two Israeli babies were killed, which is of course a great tragedy⁴⁶. However, this compares with around 710 babies that Israeli has killed in Gaza out of a total of 11,300 children⁴⁷.

The reality was that Western media outlines fell in lockstep behind lies that had been spread by right-wing, pro-war elements within the Israeli government - despite the fact that even Israeli journalists embedded within the Israeli military claimed that there was no mention among personnel of "beheaded babies"⁴⁸. Indeed, the writings were on the wall suggesting that the story was not true from early on. For example, Sky News claimed that it had asked the IDF "on three occasions" to confirm the story, which they did not do⁴⁹. In the end this was a story not about beheaded babies, but rather one about that shows us just how deep the pro-Israel bias in our media is, to the extent that outlets were willing to abandon bedrock principles like fact-checking in order to defend its war on the Palestinians of Gaza.

False Narrative: 40 Israeli Babies Were Beheaded

Counter-Narrative: There was never any evidence to support this claim. In fact, Israeli media outlets and the Israeli government itself eventually confirmed that there was no evidence and that the alleged event never took place! This was just a right-wing Israeli narrative that was used to dehumanise Palestinians and justify attacking them.

⁴⁵ Assma Mead, William Audureau and Samuel Foley, Le Monde, '40 Beheaded Babies: Deconstructing the Rumour at the Heart of the Information Battle Between Israel and Hamas,' April 3, 2024, available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2024/04/03/40-beheaded-babies-the-itinerary-of-a-rumor-at-the-heart-of-the-information-battle-between-israel-and-hamas_6667274_8.html

⁴⁶ Nir Hasson and Liza Rozovsky, Haaretz, 'Hamas Committed Documented Atrocities. But a Few False Stories Feed the Deniers,' December 4, 2023: <https://archive.ph/20231220010209/https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-12-04/ty-article-magazine/premium/hamas-committed-documented-atrocities-but-a-few-false-stories-feed-the-deniers/0000018c-34f3-da74-afce-b5fbc24f0000>

⁴⁷ Save the Children, Gaza: At Least 3,100 Children Aged Under Five Killed With Others at Risk as Famine Looms, October 10, 2024: <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/gaza-least-3100-children-aged-under-five-killed-others-risk-famine-looms>

⁴⁸ @OrenZiv_, X, October 11, 2023: https://x.com/OrenZiv_/status/1712039990610260177

⁴⁹ @SaulStaniforth, X, October 10, 2023: <https://x.com/SaulStaniforth/status/1711863985132195946>

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