
Lexicological Disjunction in Israel's Gaza War Rhetoric and the Western Complicity

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Abstract: This article examines the construction and framing of Israel's rhetoric in the Gaza War and its adverse effects on the lexicology of the word genocide and crime of genocide. This paper also quizzes Western complicity in the construction and reification of pro-Israeli genocidal speech. The central argument of this paper is that by denying that Israel committed genocide in Gaza, Israel and its Western European and American allies have colluded in disrupting the common understanding of genocide as contemplated in the Genocide Convention and universally understood. Furthermore, the West's discursive assault on the concept of genocide fatally corrupted the term and its broader applicability. The immediate consequences of this corruption are the lives of over 37,000 innocent lives in Gaza as of June 2024, the disruption of international law, and potentially, the commission of more similar crimes in the future, which will result in even greater global instability. This paper will rely on a close reading and analysis of published pro-Israel speeches by Israeli, the European Union, and the United States' leaders and influential political figures. These statements will be analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis, Articulation Theory and Hermeneutics.

Keywords: Gaza; genocide; International Criminal Court; Netanyahu; security council

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Introduction

On January 13, 2023, the Republic of South Africa took the state of Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at the Hague, charging the latter with potential genocide in the Gaza. Both South Africa and Israel were signatories to the Rome Statute, which established the Genocide Prevention Act of 1948. South African action was triggered by the Israeli Defense Force's indiscriminate killing of Palestinians in Gaza on October 7, 2023, after HAMAS militants attacked southern Israel and killed hundreds of civilians and soldiers. In the wake of the HAMAS' atrocity, Israel claimed the right of self-defence and retaliated by relentlessly bombing Gaza and militarily invading it. The Israelis targeted the besieged strip's infrastructure, residential homes, mosques, hospitals, schools, universities, water, and other essential facilities (Van Veen, 2024). Consequently, at the time of the ICJ hearings on February 27, 2024, approximately 23,000 civilians had been killed. Most of the victims were women and children. Additionally, as of December 2023, 70%

of the residential homes had been destroyed (Malsin & Shah, 2023). As of June 27, 2024, the number of dead Palestinians stood at over 37900 (Pietromarchi & Varshalomidze, 2024). Joe Biden, the president of the United States of America, described Israel's military actions in Gaza as "over-the-top" (Liptak, 2024). His rhetoric did not, however, meet his pro-Israel actions, which included supplying Israel with more weapons to continue its Gaza War. Israel's Gaza War was preceded and accompanied by the dehumanizing characterization of Palestinians as human animals and terrorists. There had been other statements like no one "is innocent in Gaza" by Israeli President Hertzog, "remember what Amalek did to you" by Netanyahu, and "turn Gaza into dust" (Dearborne.org, 2023) by an Israeli security officer. Defence Minister Yoav Gallant declared, "We are fighting human animals" (Fabian, 2023), an utterance that might constitute genocidal speech. Such genocidal speech, indiscriminate killings, and the apparent recklessness with which these seemed to be carried out, the weaponization of food, medicines, and water by blocking or restricting humanitarian assistance to the Gazans, were at the core of South Africa's arguments at the ICJ. The South Africans requested that the court issue orders that would prevent the crime of genocide in Gaza and protect the Palestinian civilians in Gaza (The Presidency: Republic of South Africa, 2024).

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide commits signing parties to the need to prevent and punish the crime of genocide, a crime considered to be the worst crime in international law (UN, 1951). Ironically, Israel, a settler state created from a British Mandate in 1947 on Palestinian territory in the shadow of the holocaust, now stands accused at the ICJ of the same crime that has stained the pages of the last century's history. It rejects the accusation that it is committing genocide and instead claims that it was a victim of a terrorist and genocidal act on October 7, 2023, when HAMAS agents killed over 1,300 Israeli civilians and soldiers. It justifies its deadly assault on Gaza, which has cost the lives of over 55,000 people (Aljazeera, June 11, 2025), mostly innocent children and women, on the grounds of the right of self-defence. It also rejects accusations that it has violated international law and prevented much-needed humanitarian assistance from reaching the starving, injured, and dying Palestinians (Deutsch et al., 2024). Its assertions are supported by its allies in the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union. The former United States government spokesperson John Kirby said that South Africa's accusations that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza were unfounded, even as the ICJ agreed that there was plausible genocide being committed in the strip (Sennet & Abdalla, 2024).

Israel's denial of committing the crime of genocide while defying the ICJ's orders aimed at ending the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is serious. For instance, the framing of its genocidal rhetoric in victimhood discourse and the American rejection of the charges levelled against Israel by South Africa at the ICJ renders the common understanding of the term genocide and the crime of genocide itself, obsolete, or subject to private interpretation. Furthermore, as the article will submit, the ramifications of the redefinition of the term genocide and the destabilization of the ICJ and the international legal system by Israel and its allies have gravely subverted international law. International law has been replaced by a narrowly defined and idiosyncratic concept of a "rules-based order," which suits the United States' foreign policy interests, and not the desire for global peace. Dugard (2023) opined that the axiom "rules-based order" was Anthony Blinken's (US Secretary of State) frequently used phrase, and it clearly sought to avoid any invocation of international law, rendering its meaning to sound like 'a job requirement for a top position in the US foreign policy apparatus.' The pro-Israeli propaganda produced in the United States and the West initially framed Israel's war on Gaza as self-defence and complying with international law. When Israel's destructive and indiscriminate bombing of civilian infrastructure and figures of war dead in Gaza continued to rise, global public opinion turned against Israel. However, rhetoric from the West, led by public officials like Ms Von der Leyen (EU president), continued with the pro-Israel mantra that Israel had the "right to self-defence" while adhering to international law (Wax & Barigazzi, 2023). Lindsey Graham, the Republican Party Senator for South Carolina, declared that his country's decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan in 1945 ended World War II. This was interpreted as a suggestion that Israel should use nuclear weapons in Gaza, especially his statement that the former country must "do whatever" it took to finish the Gaza War (WION News, 2024).

Evidence from international aid agencies operating in Gaza, such as the World Food Programme and UNRWA, painted a different picture in which the Israeli Defense Force deliberately limited the number of aid trucks getting into Gaza, blocked aid delivery trucks from reaching their destinations, made the roads impassable by damaging them, fired at ambulance crews and killed many of them, and shot at Gazans attempting to collect food from the few trucks that managed to enter the enclave. Furthermore, its navy completely blocked Gaza, making access to its ports by sea impossible (Sparks & Harb, 2024). There were reports of the Israeli navy shooting at Gazans attempting to fish near their coast and firing at Palestinians attempting to access food from

aid trucks (Aljazeera 2024). It appears that these deliberate acts of depriving the Gazans of humanitarian aid in violation of international humanitarian law and the ICJ ruling in the case of South Africa are part of a deliberate weaponization of famine as an ethnic cleansing and genocidal strategy (Human Rights Watch, 2024). President Lula da Silva of Brazil called Israel's war in Gaza a genocide on February 20, 2024, while attending an African Union meeting in Addis Ababa. His statement prompted an angry rebuttal from Israel's foreign minister who deemed it antisemitic and declared the Brazilian president "persona non grata" (Gregory, 2024). The framing of anti-Zionism as antisemitism is in line with the West's obfuscation of any criticism of Israel's excesses in Gaza. Blinken, the US Secretary of State, said that the US did not agree with Lula da Silva's characterization of Israel's Gaza War as genocide (Lewis, 2024). According to Berenbaum (2024), antisemitism is historically understood as discrimination against Jewish people on racial or religious grounds.

In the global discourse on Israel's war on Gaza, there is a semantic war that has manifested alongside the propaganda war being waged by belligerents. The semantic war is based on the definition of genocide. It is designed to distort the received understanding of international law on war and undermine the relevance of world governance institutions such as the United Nations, its Security Council, and organs such as the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNRA). The UNRA has specifically been targeted in Israeli propaganda as a terrorist-supporting agency that has lost its legitimacy and must be disbanded (Goldenberg et al. 2024). Although Israel's accusation that some UNRA workers participated in the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel is unfounded and without evidence, 16 donor states that support Israel suspended their funding to the agency, further worsening the human-induced famine in Gaza. Therefore, this article examines the construction and framing of Israel's genocidal rhetoric in the Gaza War and its adverse effects on the lexicology of the word genocide and crime of genocide. The purpose of the article is to demonstrate how framing war discourses through distorting the common understanding of terms as they are used and understood in international law goes beyond semantics as it also affects global leaders' political choices and their behaviour in public office.

This study relies on Critical Discourse Analysis, Articulation Theory and Hermeneutics. Articulation theory states that "discourse structures constitute and organize social relations among elements such that their identity is modified" (DeLuca, 1999:336). Thus, articulation fixes meanings, human interactions, and identities within specific social and political discourses and contexts, resulting in the creation of discursive fields in which polarities may arise, and dominant discourses may rearticulate hegemonic verbal constructs. Hermeneutics refers to the interpretation of texts in order to obtain meaning. Its reliance on textual interpretations is substantively exegetical. George (2020) defined this as the philosophy of interpretation. Critical Discourse Analysis examines how meaning is created through textual analysis and examination of cultural connotations attendant to the essences of language use and power relations in context.

Method

The research methodology employed in this study is a desktop-based close reading of online articles and news reports on the Gaza conflict. The researcher, therefore, pored over the Internet searching for articles and reports on the conflict and analysed the language used by the belligerents, namely, the Palestinians and their backers on the one hand, and the Israelis and their allies, on the other hand, in all instances strictly applying hermeneutics, articulation theory, and CDA. The sources consulted were those that were already in the public domain in global news outlets and are available online. The researcher selected pro-Israeli utterances by political allies of Israel in the West and those made by Israeli politicians justifying their military actions in Gaza. These had been widely publicized in the global news and written articles or cited as evidence of genocidal speech by lawyers at the International Court of Justice. The researcher analysed the utterances for meaning through close reading and based on the context in which they had been made. While this study relies primarily on grey literature due to the limited availability of peer-reviewed sources on the subject, all materials were critically appraised for credibility, relevance, and rigour to ensure the reliability of the findings.

Gaza, genocide rhetoric, obfuscation, and the framing instruments

The United Nations Genocide Convention identifies the intent to commit genocide against a particular group of people as one of the key determinants of potential genocide. Genocidal speech by a dominant group's leadership often provides political justification for acts of brutality against a target group. Gross and Aolain (2021:7) posit that decisions are informed by how political issues are framed to influence the desired outcomes. Often, the framers are positioned in the upper echelons of the decision-making centres. As framers of discourses and policies, they set agendas and direct the resultant actions, including genocidal actions. Gross and Aolain (2021)

opine that the power to frame enables framers as architects of discourse to “manipulate the interpretation and meaning that recipients of that information are likely to attach” to what has been put in the public space.

When framing its justification for the Israeli military invasion of the Gaza after the Hamas atrocity on October 7, 2023, Israel’s Defence Minister Yoav Gallant made it clear that his country was fighting human animals. Gallant told the Israeli soldiers that he had released all the restraints as they were “fighting human animals” (Karanth, 2023). Israeli president Hertzog followed up with rhetoric that set the stage for collective punishment of all Gazans by declaring that no Palestinian civilians were innocent, implying that their ethnicity automatically conditioned them to criminality (The Wire Staff, 2023). He dismissed the notion that civilians were not aware of what Hamas was going to do on October 7, 2023, or that they were not involved. His view that all Palestinians were guilty of the attack had echoes of the “mowing the grass” ideology of the Israeli military regarding Gaza and the Palestinians. Byman (2014) describes this strategy as one designed to keep Hamas leaders continually weak by repeatedly striking them. It also includes a broader destruction of civilian infrastructure to remind “Hamas leaders that they and their people will pay a high price for attacking Israel.”

The genocidal intent of Israel’s cabinet members was projected to the global community when Mr. Israel Katz, a senior Israeli minister, said that the Palestinians must leave Gaza; they would not receive “a drop of water or a single battery until they leave the world” (International Court of Justice, 2024). He added that no humanitarian aid, electricity, water, or fuel would be sent to Gaza until all hostages were released by Hamas (Aljazeera 2023a). Defence Minister Gallant had previously declared that he had ordered a “complete siege” of Gaza City and that there would be “no electricity, no food, no fuel” and that “everything [was] closed” (International Court of Justice 2024). When explaining the indiscriminate bombing of civilians and the infrastructure in Gaza, Daniel Hagari, a member of Israel’s war cabinet, explained that his country’s emphasis was “on damage, not accuracy” (McKernan & Kierszenbaum, 2023). Nir Baraket, his colleague in the war cabinet, followed a similar line when he explained that saving hostages and civilian casualties would be secondary to destroying HAMAS (Surname et al. 2023). As the chief architect of the framing discourse on the Gaza War, Netanyahu had already set out the Israel agenda on the 7th of October 2023 on Israeli national television. He declared Israel would clear out the communities that had been ‘infiltrated by terrorists (Ngcukaitobi, 2024). The use of the expression “clearing out” implied a riddance of the targeted communities.

The phrase ‘clearing out’ may connote ethnic cleansing and may mean physical harm as a method of eviction from a particular geographical area. This conclusion is reinforced by Netanyahu’s warning that the enemy would pay an unprecedented price. Further escalatory genocidal rhetoric from Netanyahu invoked the biblical extermination of the Amalekites when God ordered the ancient Israelites to “remember that which Amalek did to Israel” (1 Samuel 15 v 2, King James Bible). Netanyahu harnessed and weaponized the biblical injunction, appropriating the divine edict for modern secular Israel’s military purposes in Gaza, where the residents were cast as Amalek, the enemy. He told the Israeli Defence Force to “remember what Amalek has done to you” quoting directly from the Old Testament (Times of India, 2023). The victimhood framing of the language and biblical context of its usage placed Palestinians in the victimizer space, thus justifying their extermination. Given the extermination of the Amalekite people in biblical history, the framing of the Gaza War discourse by its chief architect in morally acceptable retribution terms was unmistakable. Not surprisingly, an Israeli security officer called for Gaza to be flattened to the ground in his angry outburst toward an Arab journalist. Smotrich, a cabinet member from Israel’s far right called for the expulsion of Gazans and the resettlement of the strip by Israelis (Krever et al., 2024).

Israel Katz, the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, justified the calls and the collective punishment of the Gazans when he said that cutting off water and fuel supplies was what would happen to children’s killers and slaughterers (The Wire Staff, 2023). Israel’s Minister of National Security echoed similar genocidal sentiments when he said, “When we say that Hamas should be destroyed, it also means those who celebrate, those who support, and those who hand out candy — they’re all terrorists, and they should also be destroyed” (Ngcukaitobi, 2024).

In his submission to the ICJ, South African advocate Thembeke Ngcukaitobi (cited in Timeslive, 2024) aptly summed up the genocidal rhetoric from Israel’s political elite:

Members of the Knesset (‘MKs’) have repeatedly called for Gaza to be “wiped out”, “flatten[ed]”, “eras[ed]”, and “[c]rush[ed] ... on all its inhabitants”. They have deplored anyone “feel[ing] sorry” for the “uninvolved” Gazans, asserting repeatedly that “there are

no uninvolved”, that “[t]here are no innocents in Gaza”, that “the killers of the women and children should not be separated from the citizens of Gaza”, that “the children of Gaza have brought this upon themselves”, and that “there should be one sentence for everyone there — death.

Ngcukaitobi’s submission above delineates the victim versus victimized relationship in the Gaza War and situates Israel as the self-righteous avenger positioned against terrorist Gazans. The architects of the hate speech discourse, which is conveniently framed as just recompense for the victimization of innocent Israeli non-combatants, seemingly enjoy the agencies of military supremacy, and the political platforms of creating and disseminating genocidal discourse without fear of international discrimination. When read together with the biblical ‘justification’ with which the discourse framers among the Israeli political elites associate the Hamas atrocities of October 7, 2023, and the dehumanization of the latter social group as natural terrorists, human animals, women, and child killers, the moral imperative for annihilation is established. The global audiences, more so the Israel-supporting West, are persuaded to accept Israel’s war on Gaza as a moral imperative: a divinely sanctioned penalty on the unjust.

The American connection in the genocidal intent and framing mechanisms

Israel is a settler colony in the Middle East that relies on military muscle and support, both military and diplomatic, from powerful countries in the Global North, such as the USA. John Kirby, the spokesperson for Biden’s White House firmly confirmed the “ironclad” western support for Israel view with his defence of Israel’s targeted killing of seven World Central Kitchen (WCK) workers on February 2, 2024. As the global condemnation of this atrocity grew louder, Kirby claimed that there was no evidence that Israel had committed any war crimes or violations in its Gaza War, and that it must be allowed to investigate itself on the WCK killings (Middle East Eye, 2024). This position not only contradicted the global outrage against the killings but also undermined the position of the ICJ that there was a plausible genocide in Gaza (International Court of Justice 2024). The political elite in Washington across the political divide has turned a blind eye to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Gaza. For instance, US senator Andy Ogles created a political storm on February 21, 2024, when he called on Israel to “kill them all” (meaning the Palestinians in Gaza) (Houghtaling, 2024). This call for genocide made by a senator in a country that finances Israel’s military, props its economy, and provides diplomatic coverage to it at the international forums exposes the United States’ complicity in the framing of genocidal speech, and, in the outcomes of such framing in Gaza. Previously, the Republican Party representative Michelle Salzman answered, “All of them” when asked by the Democratic Party Florida representative Angie Nixon: “We are at 10,000 dead Palestinians. How many would be enough” (Salam, 2023)? The Republican Senator for Michigan Tim Walberg called for the nuking of Gaza, urging that no food aid be provided by the United States of America. His exact words to Israel were to “get it over quickly, like Nagasaki and Hiroshima,” referring to the USA’s atomic attack on these Japanese cities during the Second World War in 1945 (Vargas, 2024).

The United States committed to giving Israel \$14.3 billion in military assistance as additional aid for the Gaza war (Guyer, 2023). The Biden-led government even illegally bypassed Congress to ship arms and money to Israel, in support of its war efforts. The pro-Israeli propaganda produced in the USA and the West initially framed Israel’s war on Gaza as self-defence and complying with international law. Israel’s powerful allies gave it diplomatic cover at the UN and in other international platforms. The same powers reframed Israel’s war on Gaza as the right of self-defence under the aegis of their newly framed rule-based international order. Israel is already in violation of international rules of war and international humanitarian law in its indiscriminate killing of civilians, a collective punishment strategy that has spawned its weaponization of famine, destruction of life-supporting civilian infrastructure, and blocking access to food, medicines, and water (Amnesty International, 2024). In the period between October 7, 2023, and March 4, 2024, the United States of America vetoed three United Nations Security Council resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza (Fassihi et al., 2024). The latest resolution sponsored by Algeria on February 20, 2024, occurred even as the ICJ had found that Israel’s actions in Gaza could amount to genocide and ordered it to ensure that humanitarian aid reached Palestinians and avoided killing civilians, among other orders (OHCHR, 2024). The United States also supported Israel’s claim that it was defending itself, while President Biden complained that the killings of over 27,000 Palestinians in Gaza were “over the top” (Abutaleb, 2024). He had previously stated that HAMAS had killed babies, cut off their throats, and raped women; a claim that the White House subsequently walked back (Aljazeera 2023b). The effect of Biden’s verbal prevarication on Israel’s actions in Gaza and, simultaneously, the diplomatic cover and

his continuing military support only emboldened Israel's defiance of global opinion and the ICJ. Additionally, this stance ensured that the received or common application of the concept of genocidal intent, based on the legal definitions contemplated in the statute, is now undermined and questioned.

Israel, aided by its American and European allies, continued to deny that it was using starvation as a weapon of war and that it sought to displace the Palestinians from Gaza. Ironically, members of Israel's cabinet, such as Smotrich, publicly stated this intention and continued to use genocidal rhetoric against the Palestinians (Bowen, 2024). The genocidal rhetoric from Israel and some US senators had no effect on Gaza. Evidence from international aid agencies operating in Gaza, like the World Food Programme, UNRWA, and others, painted a bleak picture. Amnesty International (2024) in its February report accused the Israeli Defense Force of deliberately limiting the number of aid trucks entering the Gaza. It also accused the country of blocking aid delivery trucks from reaching destinations such as northern Gaza and ignoring the ICJ's order to effectively and immediately introduce measures to protect Palestinian civilians in Gaza from the risk of genocide.

From denial to deconstruction; the unbroken line of hate speech

The Genocide Convention of 1948 was created in the wake of the holocaust and not merely for the protection of Jews, as Israeli political leadership prefers to frame it. Any attempt to render the original definition of the term genocide is to deconstruct it, its iteration in genocide discourse, and its use in political and legal terms. Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, has consistently rejected accusations that the Jewish state was committing genocide in Gaza. He has denounced such accusations as antisemitic and hypocritical. Speaking after South Africa's submissions at the ICJ, he accused South Africa of hypocrisy after it accused Israel of committing genocide in Gaza (Reuters, 2024) and alleged that South Africa was a sponsor of HAMAS's terrorism and was its legal arm (Ngenkakumana, 2024). He also claimed that the ICJ's ruling calling on Israeli officials to avoid killing Gaza civilians, permit humanitarian intervention in Gaza and desist from genocidal speeches was of non-effect and declared that not even the ICJ "will stop us" (Euronews, 2024). He invoked the Holocaust as he described the Hamas militants who attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, as the "new NAZIS" (Middle East Monitor, 2024). His arguments, therefore, suggest that the crime of genocide can only be committed by non-Jews toward Jewish people.

The problem created by the contestation over the application of the term genocide requires that the original intentions of the framers of the Genocide Convention be the starting point for proper application of the term. The intent to commit the crime was among the key elements to be considered when determining whether the crime of genocide was committed. Embedded in the intent to commit the crime of genocide is the articulation of genocidal speech, and the call to ethnically cleanse a particular geographical area for the advancement of certain political goals. It also considers evidence inferred from the words and deeds of the perpetrator, evidence of the intention to destroy a particular group based on the words of the perpetrator, evidence showing the perpetrator's use of pejorative terms, encouragement to commit harm to the target group, evidence that the perpetrator ordered the destruction of the said group and that after the commission of the crime, that the perpetrator was satisfied (CMN – Case Matrix Network, n.d.).

Discussion

Some of the most publicized genocidal statements that accompanied Israel's war on Gaza have been analysed using articulation theory and Critical Discourse Analysis. In Table 1 below, the statements made by Israeli political leaders, security officers, and some American politicians are examined. The statements are evaluated in terms of their denotative and connotative meanings, given the political positions of the speakers in relation to their domestic and international audiences, and the power dynamics at play in the context of the Gaza war. Furthermore, the implications of the utterances are evaluated from a social, historical and political perspective in the context of their usage.

The statements in the table reflect either the intention to destroy the Palestinians of Gaza or to cause them harm. Critical Discourse Analysis analyses language use in relation to the creation, maintenance and legitimation of power in social, historical and cultural contexts. From a discourse analysis view, the above statements made by powerful political leaders regarding Israel's conduct of its war on the comparatively weaker residents of a besieged Gaza enclave are neither anecdotal nor merely careless. Rather, they seem to be intentional, systemic, and square with the events unfolding in Gaza, which the ICJ and humanitarian organizations have expressed clear concerns about. All the utterances call for and justify the indiscriminate destruction of life and property in Gaza.

Table 1. Genocidal statements with speakers identified by name, official position and country.

Source of statement	Labels/words used	Interpretation	Reception/connotation	Effects	Purpose
Yoav Gallant – Former Minister of Defence of Israel	I have removed all restriction on the IDF in Gaza.	The Israeli soldiers can do as they please in Gaza, without any fear of accountability.	Israel operates above the law, national or international. It enjoys special impunity.	Incite the IDF to commit atrocities without restraint.	Instruction to soldiers to ignore any legal or moral restrictions.
Daniel Hagari – Israeli Defence Forces Spokesperson (IDF)	Emphasis is on damage, not accuracy	There is no regard for the rights of Gaza’s civilians, they are expendable.	The lives of Palestinians do not matter where Israeli national interests are concerned.	Dehumanize Palestinians.	Desensitizing and conditioning the audiences.
President Hertzog – Israel’s president on Israel’s military approach in Gaza.	There are no innocent Palestinians or babies. Everyone is a potential terrorist.	All Palestinians are by nature, terrorists and therefore deserve to be purged.	There is no moral or legal standard to be applied in Gaza as its citizens have innate criminality.	Demonize the Palestinians and deny them any human sympathy.	Justifying the genocidal actions before an international audience.
Bezalel Smotrich — Israel’s far-right Minister of Finance in the Netanyahu coalition government overseeing the Gaza/ Israel War	The Palestinians must be expelled from Gaza and the Israelis brought back to occupy Gaza.	The project of ethnic cleansing in Gaza privileges the Israeli settlers, regardless of international law.	The Gaza strip is, above and beyond the Israeli military operations, a territory earmarked for colonial expansion. The war is a means to that end.	Colonial expansion through genocide.	Preparing Israeli nationalists and the global community for further Israeli expansionism through genocide.
Prime Minister Netanyahu – Israel’s Prime Minister describing the Palestinians of Gaza.	Remember what Amalek did to you. We are fighting the HAMAS terrorists.	The annihilation of Palestinians is divinely sanctioned, as was the case with Amalek. Palestinians are the descendants of Amalek.	The Modern Israel state is the natural heir to ancient Israel and its privileges as God’s chosen people, making its enemies God’s enemies.	Israel is above human laws, as God’s chosen nation.	Appealing to the IDF and the Western audience’s religious and cultural sensibilities.
Nir Barkat – Israel’s Economy and Industry Minister	Saving hostages and civilians will be secondary to destroying Hamas	Even the rights of HAMAS’ hostages do not matter when compared to the grand scheme against Gaza.	The means used in destroying Hamas justifies the end, even if the collateral damage is excessive.	Well established Principles of war will not be applied.	Conditioning the Israeli and global audiences to the indiscriminate and disproportionate IDF battlefield/Gaza tactics.
Israel Katz – Israeli Foreign Minister and Likud Party member.	When we say that Hamas should be destroyed, it also means those who celebrate, those who support, and those who hand out candy — they’re all terrorists, and they should also be destroyed.	The justification for the destruction of all Palestinians in Gaza lies in the fact of their ethnicity and the geographical space they occupy.	In the Israeli psyche, there is no distinction between civilian and combatant in Gaza, or the Gaza-based militias and the Gaza residents. Hitting both is both justifiable and natural.	All Gazans are guilty as charged and deserve to be destroyed.	Rationalizing the human costs of the war and desensitizing the global community on the plight of the victimized ethnic group.
Israeli security officer	Level Gaza and turn it to dust.	The order to the army is to destroy everything and everyone in Gaza.	The dust metaphor suggests the deliberate intention to obliterate everything in Gaza, whether animate or inanimate, culpable in the attack of 7 October or not.	To dehumanize the Gazans.	Incitement of IDF to genocide and projection of power and violence as exclusive.
President Biden – former United States president.	The HAMAS terrorists killed babies, cut off their	The rationale for the Gaza war is that the strip’s rulers are inhumane.	There is the inclination to dehumanize HAMAS as a terrorist organization deserving	Mobilize American and world opinion against HAMAS.	Construction of Israeli victimhood narrative as a justification for retributive actions

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Source of statement	Labels/words used	Interpretation	Reception/connotation	Effects	Purpose
	throats and raped women.		of obliteration. Establishing the veracity of the rape and infanticide allegations is immaterial.		and tacit American involvement.
Andy Ogles – American politician and Member of the House of Representative	Kill them all.	The call is to destroy all the Palestinians in Gaza.	The injunction is clearly genocidal and rejects Palestinian humanity.	Dehumanize the Palestinians.	Incite and justify genocide.
Nicolla Saltzman – United States politician	All of them.	A call to extermination.	The import of the statement is genocidal.	Dehumanize the victims of violence.	Encourage perpetrator of violence.
Tim Walberg – Member of the United States House of Representative	Get it over quick, like Nagasaki and Hiroshima	The call is for total annihilation of Gazans.	The implication of the call is that the Gazans deserve a nuclear bomb, whose effect is to annihilate them.	Incite Israel to escalate war in Gaza to genocidal proportions.	Justify genocide.

Eight out of the twelve speakers directly call for the total annihilation of all Gazans. They are problematic for the Israeli self-defence argument and the denial that the Gaza War has genocidal intentions. Three demand that all Gazans must be called and one specifically calls for nuclear weapons to be used in Gaza. Another leader calls for the ethnic cleansing of the people of Gaza. The statements are equally damning for Israel’s Western backers who reject genocide accusations against Israel.

The Israeli leaders’ argument that no one in Gaza is innocent, and that in destroying the enclave and its people, it is not committing genocide, is problematic in several ways. First, it implies that the crime of genocide in today’s world is only applicable when Jews are the victims, and not when they are the culprits. Hence to Israel and the West, accusing Israel of genocide crosses the line, is erroneous or antisemitic. Netanyahu declared that Brazilian President Lula da Silva’s criticism of Israel’s conduct in Gaza in which he compared it to the Nazi genocide had crossed “a red line” (Gregory, 2024). Second, Israel weaponizes the use of the term antisemitism as an appellation when it limits it to mean anything opposed to Zionism. This is problematic because Zionism is a political ideology that fans Western-sponsored imperialism in the Middle East. It is a political ideology that inspired the creation of the state of Israel and became even more radical and colonialist as European migration increased after the Second World War (Thomas, 2023). It is now conflated with Judaism, a religious ideology whose adherents reject Zionism, or the view that anti-Zionism is antisemitism (Agnew, 2024). In fact, Agnew argues that the conflation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism in contemporary Israel has become a role-model “for ethno-nationalists worldwide”.

Finally, Netanyahu’s view is oblivious to the existing facts of years of Israeli besiegement, financial and food restrictions, and military assaults that have dehumanized the residents of Gaza (Kersten, 2024). The Israel/Washington view of genocide in Gaza is clearly determined by a different set of values that does not align with the Rome Statute. These bifurcated values are incompatible with international humanitarian law, which criminalizes the collective punishment of civilians during war. Israel and its western backers duplicitously refer to a ‘rule based international order’ which they construct in their hegemonic and self-interested interests, more so, their long-term interests in the oil-rich Middle East. Yager (2024) argues that there is a clear double standard in the United States’ application of international law on warfare in Israel’s Gaza War, as the country has violated its own laws, forbidding the supply of arms to governments who use them against civilians.

The term genocide, as generally understood by the world, is problematic for Israel and its powerful allies in the West, as its moral and legal implications delegitimize the overarching imperialist designs of these powers in the Middle East. In the current semantic warfare over the usage and denotation of the term genocide, the current Israeli/American view in the context of Gaza is that it must be applied at the say-so of Israel, the USA, and some powerful European countries, such as the UK and Germany. The limitations regarding the application of the term genocide and its legal and political meanings when applied to Israel in the Middle East do not square

with the US policy goals in the region. For example, Biden famously expressed that “Were there not an Israel, the United States of America would have to invent an Israel to protect her interest in the region” (Hoffman, 2024). These words, uttered when he was a 43-year-old senator, aptly captured the essence of longstanding US Middle East policy. The words are now played out as genocidal speeches in Gaza, which were considered by the ICJ in its determination that there was plausible genocide during Israel’s Gaza War. The UN’s special rapporteur, Francesca Albanese confirmed that Israel has destroyed Gaza and further, its “executive and military leadership and soldiers have intentionally *jus in bello* principles, subverting their protective functions, in an attempt to legitimize genocidal violence against the Palestinian people” (Human Rights Council, 2024).

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the construction and framing of the genocidal rhetoric of Israel’s political elite and pro-Israeli politicians in the West. It analysed language usage by prominent Israeli leaders and politicians in the West that amounts to genocide speech during Israel’s war on Gaza and the implications for the understanding of the crime of genocide as anticipated in the Rome Statute. The language used by combatants and their backers reveals troubling dehumanization or demonization of the people of Gaza. However, the study revealed that most of the vitriolic hate speech and dehumanizing verbiage largely came from the Israelis, followed by their staunchest backers – the Americans. The seismic effect of the genocidal speeches when read with the diplomatic cover provided by the West, especially the United States of America, at forums such as the United Nations Security Council, is that the concept of the term genocide, its legal meaning, and application in international law has been severely, if not irreparably, damaged. The framework of international law itself, and the institutions that have enforced it since 1948, have been seriously undermined so that it will take a long time to return them to the high esteem with which they were originally held. In the long-term, abiding by global peace cannot be assured.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: The article interrogates Western complicity in Israel’s war on Gaza, the lexicological disjunction in the understanding of the term genocide and its effects on the conceptualization of international humanitarian law with specific reference to its application in the current polarized international political context. The author closely analysed the Gaza War rhetoric, the framing mechanisms thereof and the implications of such rhetoric on the civilian victims of war and the application of international law as an instrument of remedying conflict whenever it arises. The multi-disciplinarity of the research is informed by the inter-disciplinary nature of the subject matter and the different interpretive methodologies employed, which include close analysis, discourse analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis and critical evaluation of data.

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