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THE TOP 7 LIES ABOUT ISRAEL AND IDF OPERATIONS IN GAZA & THE TRUTH THEY OBSCURE

*A report by the Urban Warfare Institute
and The International Legal Forum*



Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Lie 1: Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.	2
Lie 2: Israel intentionally targets civilians in Gaza.	3
Lie 3: The civilian-to-combatant ratio in Gaza proves Israel is committing war crimes.	4
Lie 4: Israel is starving Gaza's population.	6
Lie 5: Israel indiscriminately attacks hospitals and schools.	7
Lie 6: Israel is illegally occupying Gaza.	8
Lie 7: Israel violates Hamas prisoners' rights under the Geneva Conventions.	9
Conclusion	10

Introduction

On the morning of Saturday, 7th October 2023, the State of Israel was shaken to the core, when Hamas waged an unprecedented and barbaric attack.

Children, babies, women, the elderly, and entire families were massacred in the most unimaginably evil ways. At least 1,200 people were murdered on October 7th, the largest mass slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, with over 250 taken hostage. Today, 59 still remain captive in Gaza, forced to endure the most horrific conditions.

Following the attacks and invasion by Hamas, Israel launched a large-scale military campaign in Gaza. The scope and intensity of the response was unprecedented, but so too was the attack by Hamas that prompted it.

Since October 7th, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have conducted themselves with an adherence to international law and laws of armed conflict, that has been unparalleled in the history of modern warfare.

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However, in an era of weaponized disinformation, few militaries have been more vilified — or more wrongly accused — than the IDF. Israel's war against Hamas, both just and necessary, has been distorted beyond recognition by activists, media outlets, and international institutions.

It is time to confront the truth head-on.

Here are the seven most pervasive lies — and the reality they seek to obscure.

Lie 1: Israel is committing genocide in Gaza

Genocide is the most serious crime under international law, defined by the 1948 Genocide Convention as acts committed with "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." Crucially, genocide requires specific intent — not simply that civilian deaths occur during war, but that they are intended as part of a broader plan to exterminate a people. This specific intent — known in legal terms as *dolus specialis* — sets a uniquely high bar that distinguishes genocide from even the most destructive military actions.

Israel's conduct is the very opposite of genocide: it is a defensive war waged under the binding requirements of international law.

The acts that could constitute genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention include killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm; deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births; and forcibly transferring children to another group. Crucially, however, these acts only amount to genocide when committed with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as such.

None of Israel's actions meet this threshold. Israel targets Hamas — an armed terrorist entity that initiated the war with mass atrocities on October 7, not civilians. The IDF issues evacuation warnings, facilitates humanitarian aid, and restricts military operations to lawful targets. There is no Israeli policy, order, or pattern of action that suggests an attempt to destroy the Palestinian people.

Even the International Court of Justice (ICJ), despite accepting a politically driven genocide claim for preliminary hearings, has not ruled that Israel is committing genocide — nor has any credible international body. Israel's conduct is the very opposite of genocide: it is a defensive war waged under the binding requirements of international law.

Lie 2: Israel intentionally targets civilians in Gaza

Under international humanitarian law, the presence of civilian casualties in war — while tragic — does not equate to a war crime unless civilians are directly and intentionally targeted.

The IDF is one of the only militaries in history to systematically exceed the legal obligations to protect civilians. Israel's methods include:

- Advance warnings through leaflets, SMS texts, phone calls, providing their military maps to civilians, and even “roof-knock” warning munitions before strikes.
- Establishing humanitarian evacuation corridors.
- Constant aerial surveillance to abort missions if civilians are detected near targets.
- Use of precision-guided munitions to minimize explosive radius.
- Use of “call out” tactics to surround areas or buildings, call all personnel out, and then using facial recognition to identify Hamas militants within the crowds.
- Frequent cancellation of planned attacks when civilian presence is deemed too high — even at significant operational cost. In fact, Israel routinely refrains from striking legitimate military targets because of the potential for civilian casualties.

As documented in multiple cases during the current conflict, Israeli forces have walked away from critical high-value targets — senior Hamas commanders — simply because women and children were nearby. No army in the world holds fire to the degree Israel does in the face of an enemy that embeds itself inside a civilian population.

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Lie 3: The civilian-to-combatant ratio in Gaza proves Israel is committing war crimes

One of the most dangerous and misleading claims is that civilian casualty figures alone prove Israel is committing war crimes. This is a fundamental distortion of international humanitarian law (IHL). Under the law of armed conflict, the legality of an attack is not judged by its outcome — such as the number of civilians killed — but by what commanders knew or reasonably could have known at the time of the attack. The legal test is proportionality: whether the expected incidental harm to civilians was excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

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War crimes are not assessed by after-the-fact body counts. They are judged by intent, the information available at the time, and whether all feasible precautions were taken to minimize civilian harm. Armchair statistics about civilian deaths, especially in an urban warzone, tell us nothing about the real-time decisions, legal standards, and battlefield conditions that define lawful conduct.

Moreover, the civilian casualty figures cited in the media are deeply unreliable. The so-called “Gaza Health Ministry,” run by Hamas, has a long track record of publishing inflated and unverifiable numbers. Independent reviews have shown that its counts include combatants among civilian tallies, double-count deaths, and list names that cannot be independently confirmed. In many cases, their reports have even included civilians killed by Hamas’s own misfired rockets. These are not neutral casualty assessments — they are information warfare, used by a terrorist organization engaged in a global campaign to delegitimize Israel.

Even if it were somehow possible to determine the exact ratio of civilians to combatants killed — which it is not in the midst of a dynamic urban war — the claim would still be legally and morally meaningless. Hamas fighters deliberately operate without uniforms or insignia and embed themselves within civilian areas. They store weapons in schools, launch attacks from hospitals, and use ambulances to transport fighters. Many fighters are indistinguishable from civilians, including minors recruited or coerced into service. It is legally incorrect to treat all women or anyone under 18 as civilians. Hamas trains and deploys child soldiers, blurring lines even further.

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As I have shown in my research, even if we compared the entirety of Gaza to a single urban battle — such as the Battle of Mosul (2016–2017), where U.S. and Iraqi forces fought ISIS in a densely populated city — Gaza’s civilian casualty ratio would be comparable or even lower. But this entire framework is wrong. Civilian-to-combatant ratios without context are not how wars, military operations, or individual strikes are judged — legally, morally, or ethically. What matters under the law is whether a commander took all feasible precautions, targeted a legitimate military objective, and ensured the expected civilian harm was not excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage.

To demonstrate the absurdity of this casualty-based framework, consider the Korean War (1950–1953), during which an estimated 2 million civilians died. Over a 37-month conflict, this averages more than 54,000 civilian deaths per month. Using those figures — without context, cause, or operational detail — to make moral or legal judgments about the conduct of that war would be nonsensical. And yet, that is exactly the logic being applied to Israel.

This is not, and cannot be, how war is judged. If raw casualty ratios were the sole metric of legality, no democracy could ever defend itself against an enemy that fights from within a civilian population. That is not justice — it is surrender by legal distortion.

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Lie 4: Israel is starving Gaza's population

The accusation that Israel uses starvation as a weapon is flatly contradicted by facts on the ground — and by the sheer scale of humanitarian aid Israel facilitates even during wartime.

Since October 7, according to COGAT (the Israeli government body coordinating humanitarian operations), almost 100,000 trucks have entered Gaza carrying 1.75 million tons of aid, including humanitarian supplies, medicine and food, at a volume that in some periods has exceeded pre-war levels. In addition, Israel has also facilitated the supply of water and fuel, and even enabled the construction of numerous field hospitals.

The real cause of humanitarian suffering in Gaza is Hamas, which systematically hijacks and weaponizes aid for its fighters, attacks crossing points, and manipulates civilians as human shields.

Israel's commitment to facilitating aid, even while its soldiers are under fire, is unparalleled in the history of warfare.



Trucks entering Rafah Crossing, carrying humanitarian aid, including food, medical supplies and water.

Source: Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)

Lie 5: Israel indiscriminately attacks hospitals and schools

International law protects hospitals, schools, and religious sites — but that protection is not absolute. If these facilities are used for military purposes — such as storing weapons, housing fighters, or command operations — they lose protected status.

Hamas has repeatedly, and systematically, turned Gaza's hospitals into fortified military compounds and terrorist staging grounds, a grave violation of international humanitarian law.

At Al-Shifa Hospital, the IDF released evidence of a Hamas command center and underground tunnel network. At Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, Israeli forces uncovered weapons, hostage-holding rooms, and operational centers. Similar violations were documented at Indonesian Hospital, Rantisi Hospital, and others.

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Schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have been used as rocket launching sites and weapons depots. In every instance, the IDF sought to verify intelligence, issue warnings, and minimize harm to civilians and medical personnel.

The outrage should not be directed at Israel for targeting legitimate military threats — but at Hamas, for systematically destroying the distinction between civilian and military space.

Lie 6: Israel is illegally occupying Gaza

The assertion that Israel occupies Gaza is a misrepresentation of the current geopolitical reality. In 2005, Israel unilaterally disengaged from the Gaza Strip, evacuating all Israeli civilians and military personnel, and dismantling its settlements. Since then, Hamas has maintained de facto control over Gaza, exercising both political and military authority.

While Israel enforces a legitimate border control before October 7th and then a security cordon around Gaza after October 7th to prevent weapons smuggling and materials that could be used for terrorist activities or military operations, this measure is a lawful exercise of its right to self-defense, not an act of occupation. The blockade is implemented in coordination with Egypt and is subject to international scrutiny to ensure humanitarian needs are met.

The characterization of Israel as an occupying power in Gaza is inconsistent with the facts on the ground and the legal definitions under international law

Claims of occupation often overlook the fact that Hamas, recognized as a terrorist organization by many countries, governs Gaza and is responsible for the well-being of its residents. Israel's military operations in Gaza are responses to ongoing security threats, including rocket attacks and tunnel infiltrations, and are conducted with the aim of neutralizing these threats while minimizing harm to civilians.

In summary, the characterization of Israel as an occupying power in Gaza is inconsistent with the facts on the ground and the legal definitions under international law.

Lie 7: Israel violates Hamas prisoners' rights under the Geneva Conventions

The 3rd Geneva Convention defines Prisoners of War (POWs) as combatants who meet four key conditions: being part of a recognized armed force, carrying arms openly, wearing a fixed distinctive sign recognizable at a distance, and conducting operations in accordance with the laws of war.

Hamas meet none of these standards. They hide among civilians, wear no uniforms, and routinely commit war crimes by targeting Israeli civilians, while shielding behind Palestinian ones, and embedding their combat operations within hospitals, schools, Mosques and residential areas.

While Hamas fighters are not entitled to POW protections under the 3rd Geneva Convention, they are still protected under Common Article 3, which Israel upholds by treating detainees humanely.

Hamas, by contrast, continues to violate every basic principle of humanitarian law, including holding Israeli civilians and soldiers hostage under brutal conditions.

Conclusion

Israel today is not only fighting a terrorist regime that has weaponized civilians — it is fighting a second war: a war against lies.

From false claims of genocide, to manipulated casualty statistics, and the cynical misuse of humanitarian law, nearly every accusation leveled against Israel and the IDF distorts reality, ignores law, and inverts morality.

In Gaza, Israel faces a battlefield unlike any other in modern history: a dense, fortified, civilian-dominated urban environment deliberately and methodically turned into a human shield by Hamas. Yet despite these impossible conditions, Israel has conducted its campaign with a level of restraint, precision, and adherence to law that is virtually unmatched in modern warfare. It has taken more precautions to protect civilians than the law requires — often at great operational risk to its own forces.

But facts alone are not enough. They must be defended — clearly, forcefully, and repeatedly — against the tide of weaponized disinformation. The IDF's conduct is not a violation of international law; it is a defense of it. It is not a stain on the laws of war; it is a case study in how democratic nations must fight even when facing enemies who recognize no law, no morality, and no distinction between civilians and soldiers.

In a just world, Israel's efforts would be recognized for what they are: the very definition of lawful and moral warfare. In the world we live in, however, defending these truths is not optional — it is essential.

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The International Legal Forum is an Israel-based NGO and global coalition of lawyers, who have been at the forefront of combating terror, antisemitism and the delegitimization of Israel in the international legal arena.

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