

THE PALESTINE PAPERS: SPECIAL EDITION

Boston DSA's Bi-Weekly Newsletter on Palestine

Editor's note: *Hello Dearest Reader. This week in The Palestine Papers we have decided to do something a little differently. As some of you may know, there have been two themes dominating the discourse with respect to Israel's conduct in Gaza—none of which have to do with Israel's conduct in Gaza. They are: (1) alleged incidents of antisemitism occurring on U.S. college campuses, and (2) Hamas' alleged commitment to destroying any negotiated ceasefire and, with it, the State of Israel. However, as some of you may also know, claims such as these are nothing but drop into the litany of lies, field of falsehoods, fondue of fibs, and dumpster of deceit that Israel's hasbara (propaganda) machine has been manufacturing for close to the last century. Nevertheless, Dearest Reader, I wouldn't expect you to simply take my word for it: just ask the experts. This edition, The Palestine Papers is featuring two guests, both of whom are experts in the field of Israel/Palestine and, in particular, the politics of antisemitism and international diplomacy: those experts are, respectively, Jamie Stern-Weiner of Oxford University, and Colter Louwrese of the University of Exeter. Both have written extensively in their fields and are featured in the newest book on Gaza entitled: [Deluge: Gaza and Israel from Crisis to Cataclysm](#) (OR Books: 2024). Boston DSA is quite grateful for their taking the time to write for The Papers and we hope you find the line argumentation as convincing as we do. So, without further ado...*

“MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING”: The AAA, the IHRA, and Anti-Semitism on U.S. college campuses¹

Q: What is the “Antisemitism Awareness Act,” and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition to which it refers?

In 2004, Israel lobby groups led by the American Jewish Committee crafted a propagandistic [“Working Definition of Antisemitism.”](#) This was designed to shield Israel from growing international criticism over its repression of the Palestinians and its rejection of the international consensus for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The definition itself was virtually meaningless: it stipulated that antisemitism is “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward

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Jews.” However, it was accompanied by a list of eleven “examples of antisemitism,” some of which encompassed legitimate criticism of Israel. For instance, according to the text, it is presumptively antisemitic to apply “double standards” to Israel “by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.”

Many authorities, including leading human rights groups, would contest that Israel is a “democratic nation” given its discrimination against and military rule over Palestinians. This just goes to show that it’s radically subjective what constitutes “double standards.” Including such a vague criterion undermined the text’s value as a definition of antisemitism, since the whole point of a definition is to *minimize* the scope for interpretive disagreement. If such broad and politicized examples were included nevertheless, it was because they served the authors’ real objective: to stigmatize and stifle criticism of Israel. After all, according to Israel and its supporters, entities guilty of anti-Israel “double standards” include the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, the European Union, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and—in short—anyone and everyone seeking to hold Israel accountable for its international law violations. The Working Definition of Antisemitism is a vehicle for investing these and other partisan epithets with political, regulatory, and ultimately legal authority.

In 2016, a right-wing American Israel lobby group called the Simon Wiesenthal Center worked with Israel and its allies (e.g., Britain, Germany, and the United States) to foist the Israel lobby’s antisemitism definition on the IHRA—an obscure inter-governmental agency promoting Holocaust research and education. Israel lobbyists wanted IHRA to endorse their text so as to legitimize it and conceal its origins in the world of Israel advocacy. In the end, however, they couldn’t persuade the IHRA to include those propagandistic Israel-related examples in the definition because several IHRA member states were concerned about the implications for free speech. Undeterred, Israel lobbyists misrepresented the “IHRA definition” as including the examples anyway, and nobody noticed because journalists didn’t correct the record.

Since 2016, Israel advocacy groups have attempted to encode the “IHRA definition”—i.e., those propagandistic examples that misconstrue legitimate criticism of Israel as antisemitic—into U.S. legislation. The Antisemitism Awareness Act (AAA) adopted by the House of Representatives on 1 May, 2024, does this by requiring that the U.S. Federal Department of Education consider the IHRA definition when investigating allegations of anti-Jewish discrimination and harassment by universities. The AAA was adopted by 320 to 91; majorities of both Republican and Democratic representatives voted for it, although 70 Democrats—more than one-third—opposed. The Act is now under consideration by the Senate. Its fate there is unclear given the significant outpouring of criticism from libertarians as well as liberals concerned that the Act would have a chilling effect on academic freedom and free speech.



Harvard Students gather at a rally on October 14, 2023. Credit: Photograph: Joseph Prezioso/AFP via Getty Images. Republished in The Guardian ([11.28.23](#))

Q: Did the Act's supporters make any compelling arguments for legislating the IHRA definition?

In [Congressional deliberations](#), the main argument for legislating the IHRA definition was that U.S. campuses are experiencing a “deeply disturbing trend” (Rep. McClintock), “absolute explosion” (Rep. Kustoff), and “tidal wave” (Rep. Gottheimer) of “anti-Semitic attacks and violence” (Rep. Kustoff). “Campus life has become a daily trial of intimidation and harassment for American’s Jewish students” (Rep. Foxx) as “ill-informed mobs” (Rep. Mann) of “pro-Hamas” (Rep. Carter) protestors unleash “unbridled hatred for Jews” (Rep. Smith).

The first problem with this argument is that it is completely irrelevant to the question at hand. If antisemitism on U.S. campuses is rampant, it doesn’t follow that Congress should endorse the IHRA definition. To reach that conclusion, you also need good reason to think: (1) that legislating the IHRA definition will help reduce antisemitism, (2) that the IHRA definition’s harms do not outweigh its benefits, and (3) that the IHRA definition is better than the alternative policy options available (including the multiple alternative definitions of antisemitism).

AAA proponents in Congress delivered none of these. In fact, no evidence has *ever* been presented to show that adopting *any* definition (let alone this one) contributes to the fight against antisemitism. Quite the contrary: if the Department of Education has been using the IHRA definition since 2019, when President Donald Trump issued [an Executive Order](#) requiring this; and if, as AAA proponents claim, campus antisemitism has subsequently soared; then doesn't this suggest—if anything—that the IHRA definition *doesn't* work?

The second problem with this argument is that the premise is false. U.S. campuses are not engulfed by antisemitism and there has been no “explosion” of “anti-Semitic attacks and violence”; the evidence indicates that student criticism of Israel not driven by anti-Jewish prejudice and that student demonstrations have been “overwhelming[ly] ... peaceful.” Where violence has occurred—as at [UCLA](#)—it has almost always been committed by police and/or counter-demonstrators *against* Palestine solidarity protestors.

AAA proponents in Congress cited barely a handful of concrete manifestations of the alleged antisemitism crisis on US campuses. Most incidents they did mention don't withstand scrutiny. For example, Rep. Foxx claimed that a “Jewish Yale student was stabbed in the eye,” an allegation already [debunked by video footage](#). Rep. Gottheimer recalled comments “comparing Zionists to Nazis” and calling for “intifada revolution,” neither of which are antisemitic. And whereas Rep. McClintock alleged that “visibly Jewish students” at Cooper Union “were forced to shelter inside a library” by marauding “pro-Palestinian protesters,” the reality was more prosaic. Student demonstrators marched through university premises, including outside the library, chanting political slogans and banging on doors and windows. A [small fraction](#) of students inside the library at the time happened to be Jewish; the “NYPD stressed” that students “were not barricaded” in the library, that “there [were] no direct threats, there was no damage, there was no danger” to any students in that school.” Student protestors themselves [emphasized](#) that “many members of the protest were Jewish,” that “[m]any different students of all backgrounds were in the library that the time,” that the protest “was not targeting any individual students or faculty, but the institution itself,” and that “we DO NOT under any circumstance condone antisemitism.” Nuremberg this was not.

More to the point, no representative cited even a single alleged incident of antisemitism which required use of the IHRA definition to identify or address. University administrators clearly do not need the IHRA definition to understand that it is unacceptable to stab Jewish students in their eyes (set aside that this didn't happen); nor do they need the IHRA definition to recognize that “[c]alling for death to Jews” (Rep. Lawler) is antisemitic. In short, where AAA supporters cited alleged incidents of genuine antisemitism, the IHRA definition was not needed to identify it; where AAA supporters cited alleged incidents where the IHRA definition could have played a role, there was no antisemitism.

“THE MOST MORAL ARMY IN THE WORLD”: Human Rights Investigations of Israeli Air Strikes on Palestinian Civilians (October 7, 2023 – May 17, 2024)

At this point, the following sequence should be familiar to anyone who has debated Israel’s human rights violations over the past seven months:

Person 1: I don’t understand how you can justify what Israel is doing in the Gaza Strip.

Person 2: Israel is carrying out a *military* operation that *happens to have* civilian casualties. It is completely different than what Hamas did on Oct. 7. On October 7th, Hamas *intended* to kill these civilians—*that is an act of terrorism*.

Person 1: [Spontaneous combustion].

I think there is something a bit disingenuous about the “incidental loss of life” position, here—something that obscures the morality of the situation. To more accurately distill what I think is going on here, consider the following analogy: suppose I wanted to murder my ex. (*‘Who among you hathn’t?’*) More importantly, however, suppose (1) I had good reason for killing her because she was a high-level commando in the terrorist organization ISIS; and (2) that I had received good and credible intelligence that she was going to be in the 16th row of a movie theatre watching the film, *Barbie*. Now, according to Person 2, if I went into the movie theatre and began shooting indiscriminately into the 16th row to kill my ex, and just so happened to clip 24 people in the process—but *also* managed to kill ex-ISIS—this action would be justified because (a) the “intended” target was killed, even though (b) I did not *intend* to kill those other 24 people.

However, I think that we—you and I, that is—could agree that this position is, at minimum, a grave miscarriage of justice and, at medium, a sociopath’s take on morality: for instance, imagine you were on the jury—or worse: one of your friends, family members, or compatriots was sitting in one of those unlucky 24 seats. The Defense issues its defense: “Your Honor, I didn’t mean to kill those other 24 people.” (*Tears in the jury*). The Prosecution issues its prosecution: “This is reckless homicide and the moral equivalent of intentional killing *because indiscriminately shooting into the 16th row carries with it the predictable consequence of incidental civilian death.*”

The Court then goes into deliberation. The deliberation ceases. The Courtroom refills and buzzes with anticipation. The Judge approaches the podium—everyone rises. He takes a deep breath and then gently delivers the verdict: “We all make mistakes: *Case dismissed.*”

Now, if this happened to you, I reckon you wouldn’t think that this was the fairest possible rendering of that case. However, this analogy isn’t entirely accurate because in *most* instances, Israel has gone well beyond “indiscriminate attacks.” Indiscriminate is merely the default.

The below table² compiles investigations by human rights organizations (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch) of fourteen separate Israeli air strikes within Gaza, which together killed at least 430 Palestinians. In *every* case investigated, the human rights organizations found **no evidence of a legitimate military target, concluding that the attacks were at best, indiscriminate, and at worst, direct attacks on civilians.**

So, to Person 2: if there is not even an ex-ISIS to be found, what does that say about the truth of exonerating and defending Israel’s conduct in the Gaza Strip?

² This table was created by Colter Louwerse.

Description of Attack/Casualties	Legal Assessment
Amnesty International	
<p>At around 8:20pm on 7 October, Israeli forces struck a three-storey residential building in the al-Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City, where three generations of the al-Dos family were staying. Fifteen family members were killed in the attack, seven of them children.³</p>	<p>Amnesty International’s research has found no evidence of military targets in the area at the time of the attack. If Israeli forces attacked this residential building knowing that there were only civilians present at the time of the attack, this would be a direct attack on a civilian object or on civilians, which are prohibited and constitute war crimes.</p>
<p>On 8 October, an Israeli air strike struck the Nuseirat refugee camp in the centre of the Gaza Strip, killing Mohammed and Shuruq al-Naqla, and two of their children, Omar, three, and Yousef, five, and injuring their two-year-old daughter Mariam and their three-year-old nephew Abdel Karim. Around 20 other people were also injured in the strike.⁴</p>	<p>[I]f, as appears, this was a direct attack on a civilian object, this would constitute a war crime.</p>
<p>At around 10:30am on 9 October, Israeli air strikes hit a market in Jabalia refugee camp, located a few kilometres north of Gaza City, killing at least 69 people. The market street is known to be one of the busiest commercial areas in northern Gaza.⁵</p>	<p>According to the Israeli military, they were targeting “a mosque in which Hamas members had been present” when they struck Jabalia market, but they have provided no evidence to substantiate their claim. ... Satellite imagery analysed by Amnesty International showed no mosque in the immediate vicinity of the market street.</p> <p>Based on witness testimony, satellite imagery, and verified videos, the attack, which resulted in high civilian casualties was indiscriminate and must be investigated as a war crime.</p>
<p>On 10 October an Israeli air strike hit a six-storey building in Sheikh Radwan, a district of Gaza City, at 4:30pm. The strike</p>	<p>Amnesty International’s research found that a Hamas member had been residing on one of the floors of the building, but he was not there at the time of the air strike. Membership in a</p>

³ “Damning evidence of war crimes as Israeli attacks wipe out entire families in Gaza,” *Amnesty International*, October 20, 2023.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

<p>completely destroyed the building and killed at least 40 civilians.⁶</p>	<p>political group does not itself make an individual a military target.</p> <p>...</p> <p>[All feasible] precautions were not taken ahead of the air strike in Sheikh Radwan. The building was known to be full of civilian residents, including many children, and the danger to them could have been anticipated. This is an indiscriminate attack which killed and injured civilians and must be investigated as a war crime.</p>
<p>On 10 October at approximately 8.30pm, an Israeli air strike killed 21 members of the al-Najjar family when the family home in Deir al-Balah was bombed. Three neighbours were also killed.</p> <p>On 22 October at approximately 12pm, three houses belonging to three Abu Mu'eileq brothers and their families were hit by an Israeli air strike north of Deir al-Balah. In total, 18 members of the Mu'eileq family were killed - 12 children and six women - as well as their neighbour Rajab Ghazi Mezyed.⁷</p>	<p>Amnesty International did not find any indication that there were any military objectives at the site of the two strikes or that the people in the buildings were military targets, and did not receive evidence to the contrary from Israel, raising concerns that these strikes were direct attacks on civilians or on civilian objects. Amnesty International searched media articles for information on these attacks, and did not find any relevant statement from the Israeli authorities or other claim that there were military objectives present. Even if there had been a legitimate military objective in the vicinity of any of the buildings that were hit, these strikes failed to distinguish between military objectives and civilian objects.</p>
<p>On 12 December 2023 at 3.02am, an Israeli strike directly hit two houses belonging to the Harb family in Al-Zuhour neighbourhood in Rafah, killing 25 civilians, including 10 children, nine men and six women, one of whom was eight months pregnant. ... The strike completely destroyed the two houses and severely damaged three adjacent homes where some of the fatalities occurred.⁸</p>	<p>Witness testimony and photographic evidence collected from the scene indicate the houses were struck more than once, resulting in at least two craters. Israel has offered no explanation for the incident.</p> <p>Amnesty International visited the site of the strike on two occasions and reviewed the list of those killed and wounded in the attack. The organization did not find any evidence that</p>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Israel/OPT: US-made munitions killed 43 civilians in two documented Israeli air strikes in Gaza—new investigation," *Amnesty International*, December 5, 2023.

⁸ "Israel/OPT: New evidence of unlawful Israeli attacks in Gaza causing mass civilian casualties amid real risk of genocide," *Amnesty International*, February 12, 2024.

	<p>there were any military objectives in the area or that any of those present in the buildings at the time of the attack were legitimate military targets, raising serious concerns that the strike on the Harb family homes was a direct attack on civilians and civilian objects, which must be investigated as a war crime.</p>
<p>On 14 December at around 11.45am, an Israeli strike hit and completely destroyed a three-storey house in the Brazil neighbourhood of Rafah belonging to Abdallah Shehada. The 69-year-old retired surgeon and former director of Abu Yousef Al-Najjar Hospital was killed alongside at least 29 other civilians, including 11 children, seven men and 11 women.⁹</p>	<p>Amnesty International's research did not find any indication that a military target was present inside or in the vicinity of the house or that it was a military objective, raising serious concerns that this attack – which Israel has yet to provide any information about – is also a direct attack on civilians and civilian objects.</p>
<p>On 19 December 2023 at about 1.30am, an Israeli strike hit the two-storey house of Omar Zu'rub in western Rafah, killing 22 civilians, including 11 children, seven men and four women. The oldest victim of the attack, Omar Zu'rub, was 75 while the youngest, his grandniece Al-Amira Aisha, was less than three weeks old, yet to be registered in the civil registry. The house was completely destroyed and at least three adjacent houses were severely damaged.¹⁰</p>	<p>Amnesty International's research did not find evidence that any of those staying in the house that was directly hit were affiliated with an armed group. The organization's research also did not find any indication that there were military objectives in or near the houses, raising serious concerns that the strike, which Israel is yet to explain, was a direct attack on civilians and civilian objects and must be investigated as a war crime.</p>
<p>On 9 January 2024, just before 11pm, an Israeli strike hit the two top floors of the Nofal family five-storey building located in Tal Al-Sultan, a neighbourhood to which the Israeli military had repeatedly ordered displaced residents to flee.</p> <p>The attack killed 18 civilians, including 10 children, four men, and four women. At least eight others were wounded.¹¹</p>	<p>As with the other attacks, Israeli authorities have not given a reason for this strike. Amnesty International's research, including a review of a list of the names of all those staying on the targeted floors, and those killed and wounded in the attack, did not find any indication that any of those staying in the building were legitimate military targets, rendering it a likely direct attack on civilians and civilian objects, or possibly an indiscriminate attack resulting from failing to take all feasible precautions to avoid killing or injuring civilians, including by ensuring that</p>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

	<p>anyone who was targeted was a fighter, not a civilian.</p>
<p>Human Rights Watch</p>	
<p>An Israeli airstrike on a six-story apartment building sheltering hundreds of people in central Gaza on October 31, 2023, is an apparent war crime, Human Rights Watch said today. The attack, which killed at least 106 civilians, including 54 children, is among the deadliest single incidents for civilians since the Israeli government’s bombardment and ground incursion into Gaza following the Hamas-led attacks on Israel on October 7.</p> <p>...</p> <p>The total number of dead is most likely higher. <i>Airwars</i>, a nongovernmental organization that investigates civilian harm in conflict zones, identified in open-source materials 112 names of people killed, including 96 identified by both organizations, as well as 19 other people not by name but through their relationship to other victims in their family.</p> <p>...</p> <p>It is possible that other bodies remain under the rubble.¹²</p>	<p>Human Rights Watch found no evidence of a military target in the vicinity of the building at the time of the Israeli attack, making the strike unlawfully indiscriminate under the laws of war. Israeli authorities have provided no justification for the attack.</p> <p>...</p> <p>The absence of a military objective would render the attack on the Engineers’ Building unlawfully deliberate or indiscriminate, Human Rights Watch said. The fact that the building was hit four times strongly suggests that the munitions were intended to hit the building and that the strike was not the result of a malfunction or misdirection.</p> <p>...</p> <p>The Israeli authorities have not publicly provided any information about the attack, including the intended target and any precautions to minimize harm to civilians. They have also not responded to a March 13 Human Rights Watch letter summarizing the findings and requesting specific information.</p>

“A RED LINE”: Where is Hamas’ Partner for Peace?¹⁸

To justify the “unimaginable [horrors](#)” Israel is inflicting upon Gaza, many mainstream observers have argued that the genocide would end if Hamas released Israeli hostages and agreed to a ceasefire. “There would be a ceasefire tomorrow,” [asserted](#) President Joe Biden, “if Hamas would release the hostages.” “Israel had made several major concessions” in U.S mediated ceasefire negotiations, the *New York Times* [reported](#), but Hamas “has not embraced the Israeli compromises, frustrating American attempts to stop ... the war.” However, such attempts to cast Hamas as destroying good faith efforts to establish a ceasefire obscure a critical, if inconvenient, fact: at no point since October 7th has the Israeli leadership offered to reciprocate a return of hostages with an end to the carnage in

¹² “Gaza: Israeli Strike Killing 106 Civilians an Apparent War Crime,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 4, 2024.

¹³ **Colter Louwerse** is an academic researcher focused on the diplomatic history of the Palestine Question and a recent PhD graduate from the University of Exeter.

Gaza. Quite the contrary: the available record shows that Israel has sought not merely to obstruct, but also to destroy, opportunities for a lasting truce.

With most of the Gaza Strip reduced to a “howling [wasteland](#),” over 35,000 Palestinians lives snuffed out, and IDF troops [itching](#) to “destroy Rafah” (the final refuge where over a million of Gaza’s most destitute reside) it would appear that a chasm separates the Israeli and Palestinian conception of a ceasefire. Along with most of the international community, Hamas demands a *permanent* truce entailing a hostage exchange, removal of Israeli troops from Gaza, return of displaced Palestinians to their homes, and an end to the illegal siege on the Strip. In stark contrast, Israel offers a *temporary* ceasefire to allow the return of Israeli hostages, after which the IDF will be free to renew its onslaught with abandon. As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [put](#) it: “We will enter Rafah and we will eliminate the Hamas battalions there – *with or without a deal*.”

Whenever Hamas has threatened to forestall this cataclysm by offering a truce acceptable in the eyes of the international community, Israel has responded with a violence specifically calculated to destroy the Palestinian peace offer. Consider only the most recent instances. In early April, as Palestinian negotiators indicated their willingness to negotiate a short-term ceasefire, Israel assassinated the sons of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, along with their children. “The killing of Ismail Haniyeh’s children and grandchildren were proactive acts of aggression”, [noted](#) a prominent Israeli commentator, “designed to thwart any chance of a hostage deal and a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip.” Yet Hamas refused to deflect from diplomacy. Three weeks later Hamas negotiators unambiguously endorsed a Egyptian and Qatari ceasefire [proposal](#). Comprised of three consecutive phases, each lasting 42 days, the proposal mapped the following path towards a sustainable peace: *First*, a temporary ceasefire, enabling withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian population centres, the provision of humanitarian aid, and a comprehensive exchange of captives; *Second*, a “sustainable calm” and the total withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Strip; *Third*, an exchange of dead bodies, the reconstruction of Gaza, and “a complete end” to the Israeli siege. American mediators were [enthused](#) that the Hamas peace offer was “serious” and actionable. “There is a pathway to a deal”, [acknowledged](#) U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan. Any remaining gaps in Israeli-Hamas negotiating positions “can absolutely be closed,” [asserted](#) White House national security spokesman John Kirby.

How did Israel respond to this far-reaching Hamas peace offer? The same day Hamas agreed to the ceasefire, the IDF sharply escalated its bombardment of Rafah, slaughtering [at least](#) 27 Palestinians, “among them eight [children](#) including babies.” Netanyahu’s war cabinet “[unanimously](#)” rejected the Qatari-Egyptian ceasefire proposal, instead ordering a military operation in Rafah as the first step towards “[total victory](#).” Storming the Palestinian side of the Rafah border, the IDF [shuttered](#) the crossing, choking off the main artery of humanitarian aid entering the Strip. Israeli evacuation orders now present hundreds of thousands of starving Palestinians with an impossible choice: flee Rafah and slowly waste away among the rubble “[without](#) water and sewage infrastructure”; or stay put and risk a gruesome death by artillery, drone strikes, or rifle fire. Despite the Biden Administration having previously drawn a “red [line](#)” at an Israeli invasion of Rafah, US officials predictably reacted with a faint [brush](#)—though not, [slap](#)—on the wrist.

Israel’s apologists might protest that Israel did not outright reject a truce with Hamas, but [sent](#) a negotiating team to Cairo to [discuss](#) the Qatari-Egyptian proposal and to seek amendments. Yet this low-level team was tasked with *sabotaging*, not solidifying, the Hamas ceasefire offer. “The Israeli

delegation’s job,” [reported](#) *Ha’aretz*, Israel’s leading newspaper, was to “provide Netanyahu with an excuse not to accept the deal.” Amidst faltering negotiations, CIA director and lead U.S mediator William Burns’ [insisted](#) that there was “still ... opportunity for a deal with Hamas.” The Israeli team, however, decried the Egyptian-Qatari proposal as “[unacceptable](#)” and adamantly refused to concede the principle of a permanent truce, causing the talks to collapse. Meanwhile, the IDF ramped up its attacks on Rafah and amassed troops around the city in anticipation of a “full-scale [incursion](#),” which human rights observers warned would inevitably wreak a “humanitarian [disaster](#)” (UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres) and a “[tragedy](#) beyond words [that] no humanitarian plan can counter” (UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths).

The grotesque sequence I just described—Palestinians ceasefire offer, outright rejectionism, followed by brutal Israeli military violence—is hardly new. During the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Israeli officials repeatedly threatened U.S mediators that, should the terms of a ceasefire preclude the complete removal of the PLO from Lebanon, the IDF would react by invading Beirut to “finish off” the Palestinians leadership (then too, Western officials warned of an inevitable civilian “massacre”). Likewise, in the decades preceding October 7, 2023, Israeli leaders repeatedly authorized military operations against Gaza to ward off the threat, not of Palestinian terror, but of Palestinian peace offers. Derailing Hamas’ “careful” adherence to ceasefire agreements and moderate overtures, Israeli [operations](#) in 2006, 2008, 2012, and 2014 wrought death and devastation upon thousands of unarmed Palestinian civilians.

All told, there could indeed be “a ceasefire tomorrow,” along with the return of the hostages and a path to “sustainable calm”: in fact, Hamas has offered precisely this. But Israel isn’t interested and, if history is any guide, it never has been.

Comments, questions, concerns? Interested in helping out with The Palestine Papers? Email us at Palestine@bostondsa.org.