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Brutal, Chaotic War – Norms, Conventions and Laws of Conduct Are Being Erased

ALASTAIR CROOKE • APRIL 8, 2024 • 1,900 WORDS • 175 COMMENTS



We stand on the cusp of what might be termed *Chaotic War*. Not the formula used by Israel often in the past to intimidate adversaries; this is different.

Israeli reporter Eddie Cohen said, in the wake of the attack on the Iranian Consulate: “*We are very clear that we want to start a war with Iran and Hezbollah. Do you still not understand?*”

“*Israel wants to drag Iran into a full-scale war in order to be able to strike at Iran’s nuclear facilities*”, though these facilities are beyond American and Israeli reach, buried beneath mountains.

Cohen, and of course, Israel’s military leadership, will know that; but Israel nonetheless is locking itself into a logic that can only lead to defeat. Iran’s nuclear facilities are safe from Israeli assault. The destruction of civilian Iranian infrastructure, which is out in the open, may kill many, but will not, *per se*, collapse the Iranian state.

Trita Parsi [places](#) Israel’s objective in attacking the Iranian Consulate in Damascus in a different context:

“An important aspect of Israel’s conduct – and Biden’s acquiescence to it – is that Israel is engaged in a deliberate and systematic effort to destroy existing laws and norms around warfare.

Even during wartime, embassies are off-limits [yet] Israel just bombed an Iranian diplomatic compound in Damascus.

Bombing hospitals is a war crime, [yet] Israel has bombed EVERY hospital in Gaza. It has even assassinated doctors and patients inside hospitals.

The ICJ obligated Israel to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Israel actively prevents aid from coming in.

Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited under international humanitarian law. Israel has deliberately created a famine in Gaza.

Indiscriminate bombings are illegal under international humanitarian law. Biden himself admits that Israel is bombing Gaza indiscriminately”.

The list goes on and on ... However, Israel’s breach of Vienna Convention immunity accorded to diplomatic premises – plus the stature of those killed – is highly significant. It is a major signal: Israel wants war – but with U.S. support, of course.

Israel’s aim, firstly, is to destroy the norms, conventions and laws of warfare; to create geo-political anarchy in which anything goes, and by which, with the White House frustrated, yet acquiescing to each norm of conduct obtrusively trodden underfoot, allows Netanyahu to grip the U.S. bridle and lead the White House horse to water – towards his regional End of Times ‘Great Victory’; a necessarily brutal war – *beyond existing red lines and devoid of limits*.

As symbolically significant as the Damascus attack is that the U.S., France and Britain – after a brief ‘hat tip’ to the Vienna Convention – refused to condemn the levelling of the Iranian Consulate, thus placing the shadow of doubt over the Vienna Convention’s immunity for diplomatic premises.

Implicitly, this refusal to condemn will be widely understood as a soft condoning of Israel’s first tentative step towards war with Hizbullah and Iran.

This Israeli chaotic ‘Biblical’ nihilism, however, bears no relationship in purely *rational terms* to Netanyahu’s aspiration for a ‘Great Victory’. The reality is that Israel has lost its deterrence. It won’t return; the deep anger across the Islamic world generated by Israel through its massacres in Gaza during the last six months precludes it.

Yet, there is a second, adjunct reason why Israel is set on deliberately flouting humanitarian law and norms: Israeli journalist, Yuval Abraham [reports](#) in *+972 Magazine* in great depth how Israel has developed a AI machine (called ‘Lavender’) to generate kill lists in Gaza – with almost no human verification; only a “rubber stamp” check of about “20 seconds” to make sure the AI target is male (as no females are known to belong to the Resistance’s military).

The blatant extra-legality behind the Gaza ‘kill list’ methodology, as reported by Abraham’s various sources, can only be immunised and sheltered through normalising them as but one amongst a general pattern of illegalities – and in effect, claiming sovereign exceptionalism:

“[T]he Israeli army systematically attacks the targeted individual whilst in their homes – usually at night whilst the whole family is present – rather than during the course of military activity ... Additional automated systems, including one, [callously] called “Where’s Daddy?” were used – specifically to track targets when they had entered their family’s residences... However, when a home was struck, usually at night, the individual target was sometimes not inside at all”.

“The result is that thousands of Palestinians — most of them women and children or people who were not involved in the fighting — were wiped out by Israeli airstrikes, especially during the first weeks of the war, because of the AI program’s decisions”.

““We were not interested in killing [Hamas] operatives when they were in a military building ... or engaged in a military activity,” A., an intelligence officer, told +972 and Local Call. “On the contrary, the IDF bombed them in homes without hesitation — as a first option. It’s much easier to bomb a family’s home. The system is built to look for them in these situations”.

“In addition ... when it came to targeting alleged junior militants marked by Lavender, the army preferred to only use unguided missiles, commonly known as “dumb” bombs (in contrast to “smart” precision bombs) which can destroy entire buildings on top of their occupants and cause significant casualties. “You don’t want to waste expensive bombs on unimportant people — it’s very expensive for the country and there’s a shortage [of those bombs]”.

“... The army also decided during the first weeks of the war that, for every junior Hamas operative that Lavender marked, it was permissible to kill up to 15 or 20 civilians ... in the event that the target was a senior Hamas official with the rank of battalion or brigade commander — the army on several occasions authorized the killing of more than 100 civilians in the assassination of a single commander”.

“Lavender — which was developed to create human targets in the current war — has marked some 37,000 Palestinians as suspected “ Hamas militants ”, most of them junior, for assassination (the IDF Spokesperson denied the existence of such a kill list in a statement to +972 and Local Call)”.

So, there it is — no wonder Israel might seek to camouflage the details within a normalised general array of transgressions against humanitarian law: *“They wanted to allow us to attack [the junior operatives] automatically. That’s the Holy Grail. Once you go automatic, target generation goes crazy”.*

It is not difficult to speculate what the ICJ might determine ...

Does anyone imagine that this flawed Lavender AI machine would not be asked to churn out its kill lists, were Israel to decide to surge into Lebanon? (Another reason for normalising the procedures first in Gaza).

The key point made in the +972 *Magazine* report (with multiple sourcing) is that the IDF were not focussed on pin-point elimination of Hamas’ Qassam Brigades (as claimed):

“It was very surprising for me that we were asked to bomb a house to kill a ground soldier, whose importance in the fighting was so low”, said one source about the use of AI to mark alleged low-ranking militants:

*“I nicknamed those targets ‘garbage targets.’ Still, I found them more ethical than the targets that we **bombed just for ‘deterrence’** — high-rises that are evacuated and toppled just to cause destruction”.*

This report makes clear nonsense of Israel's claims to have dismantled 19 out of 24 Hamas Battalions: One source, critical of Lavender's inaccuracy, points out the obvious flaw: "It's a vague boundary"; How to tell a Hamas fighter from any other Gazan civilian male?

"At its peak, the system managed to generate 37,000 people as potential human targets", said B. "But the numbers changed all the time, because it depends on where you set the bar of what a Hamas operative is. There were times when a Hamas operative was defined more broadly, and then the machine started bringing us all kinds of civil defence personnel, police officers, on whom it would be a shame to waste bombs".

Just last week, War Cabinet member and Minister Ron Dermer, was delegated to travel to Washington to plead that the IDF success in dismantling 19 Hamas battalions justified an incursion into Rafah to dismantle the 4 to 5 battalions that Israel claims still remain in Rafah.

What is clear is that AI was a key Israeli tool to its Gaza 'Victory'. Israel was going to sell a 'smoke and mirrors story' based on 'Lavender'.

By contrast, Palestinians, who are aware of their quantitative inferiority, have a very different outlook: they switched to a new way of thinking that gives the simple act of resisting a civilisational meaning – a path to metaphysical victory (and quite possibly a kind of military victory), if not in their lifetimes, then for the Palestinian People, thereafter. This constitutes the asymmetrical nature of the conflict that Israel has never managed to understand.

Israel wants to be *feared*, believing this will restore its deterrence. Amira Hass [writes](#) that regardless of any revulsion for this government and its members: *"The vast majority [of Israelis] still believe that war is the solution"*. And Mairav Zonszein writing in *Foreign Policy*, [notes](#) that *"The Problem Isn't Just Netanyahu, It's Israeli Society"*:

"The focus on Netanyahu is a convenient distraction from the fact that the war in Gaza is not Netanyahu's war, it is Israel's war—and the problem isn't only Netanyahu; it's the Israeli electorate ... A large majority—88 percent—of Jewish Israelis polled in January believe the astounding number of Palestinian deaths, which had surpassed 25,000 at the time, is justified. A large majority of the Jewish public also thinks that the [IDF] is using adequate or even too little force in Gaza ... Putting all the blame on the prime minister misses the point. It disregards the fact that Israelis have long advanced, enabled, or come to terms with their country's system of military occupation and dehumanization of Palestinians".

Yet neither Israel, nor the U.S., has a comprehensive strategy for this mooted war. Israel's approach is all tactical – claiming to have degraded Hamas; turning Gaza into a humanitarian hellscape and setting the scene for the "decisive plan" devised by Bezalel Smotrich for the Palestinians. Amira Hass again:

"Either agree to an inferior status, emigrate and be uprooted ostensibly voluntarily, or face defeat and death in a war. This is the plan now being carried out in Gaza

and the West Bank – with most Israelis serving as active and enthusiastic accomplices, or passively acquiescing in its realisation ”.

The U.S. ‘vision’ is also tactical (and far removed from reality) – Imagining the transformation of Gaza into a **‘Vichy collaborator’ statelet**; imagining that political pressure by the French in Lebanon will force Hizbullah’s retreat from its ancestral lands in south Lebanon; and imagining that the Biden White House is able to achieve *politically* through pressure what Israel cannot do *militarily*.

The paradox is that, with Israel and the U.S. being dependent on an ‘image’ that has been confused with reality, this too works to Iran’s and the Resistance Front’s advantage. (As the old adage goes, ‘do not disturb an adversary who is making mistakes’).

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