**[A fitting metaphor for Gaza](https://www.dawn.com/news/1787145/a-fitting-metaphor-for-gaza)**

[Jawed Naqvi](https://www.dawn.com/authors/280/jawed-naqvi) Published November 7, 2023 Updated a day ago

MADELEINE Albright once appeared for an interview for CBS 60 Minutes with Lesley Stahl. She was asked about the tragic effect of US sanctions on Iraqi children. “We have heard that half a million children have died. I mean, that is more children than died in Hiroshima,” asked Stahl, “And, you know, is the price worth it?”

Albright’s answer has inspired the current US response to Israel’s wilful slaughter of Palestinian children in Gaza. “I think that is a very hard choice,” Albright replied, “but the price, we think, the price is worth it.” The Biden-Blinken duo would agree. Stopping the daily bloodshed of innocents would help Hamas. That’s the message the secretary of state and his boss have given to anyone urging them to intervene. In other words, the price is worth it.

The world may be revolted by the horrific images coming out of Gaza, but Israel’s crimes are being packaged, not for the first time, as an acceptable response to a Palestinian provocation. That there’s another purpose behind the killing spree is less discussed.

The US is aware of the plan unfolding under the cover of the outrage perpetrated by Hamas last month. But Benjamin Netanyahu has found an opportunity, a godsend, in the Oct 7 tragedy, to carry forward his pending de-linking of Gaza from the West Bank. Israel’s Jewish critics believe it took shape in the 2014 flare-up, over nine years ago, when Hamas had not massacred civilians but was observing a ceasefire both sides had agreed to.

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Ever since the US and Israel accepted the 1993 Oslo Accords, which declare the West Bank and Gaza Strip to be an inseparable territorial unity, the vivisection has been pursued vigorously, with steady US support. A look at the map explains the quest, says Noam Chomsky.

Gaza provides Palestine its only access to the outside world. If it is shut down, any future autonomy that Israel might deign to grant to Palestinians in the West Bank would leave them effectively imprisoned between a hostile Israel and an unfriendly Jordan. The suffocating prospects of a de facto imprisonment would be even more severe with the likely expulsion of Palestinians from the Jordan Valley and construction of Israeli settlements there.

Presaging the plot, Gaza has been turned into a concentration camp by Israel’s genocidal methods. A [2014 report](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/final_report_-_gaza_health_sector_june-july_2014_-_mads_gilbert_2.pdf) submitted by Mads Gilbert, a fabled Norwegian doctor working on the Gaza Strip, described the situation there as not different from a concentration camp, perhaps worse.

“At least 57 per cent of Gaza households are food-insecure and about 80pc are now aid recipients,” Gilbert’s report said. “Food insecurity and rising poverty also mean that most residents cannot meet their daily caloric requirements, while over 90pc of the water in Gaza has been deemed unfit for human consumption.”

An unintended highlight of the deepening Palestinian trauma is that it has exposed the truth of President Biden’s hallucinatory pitting of democracies against dictatorships. He used the equation to describe Russia and China in the context of Ukraine and Taiwan. And, he has summoned it to pummel Iran as a dictatorship and hail Israel as its democratic challenger.

A cursory look at Biden’s so-called democratic alliance reveals a singularly bizarre truth though. Biden spewed vitriol at the crown prince of Saudi Arabia during the presidential primaries he narrowly won, calling Mohammed bin Salman a diabolic killer of Jamal Khashoggi.

With the Saudi royal on one hand today and the Egyptian military coup leader Gen Sisi holding his other hand, Biden somehow hopes to usher democracy goodness knows where in the Middle East. Basically, the president is poaching Donald Trump’s friends, not excluding Netanyahu, for their possible bit role in the 2024 presidential challenge.

Another myth shattered by the slaughter in Gaza is the spurious construct of Shia-Sunni rivalry cultivated over the years to undermine Iran’s unflinching support for Palestine. There’s a phrase in a Spielberg film used by the Russian spy for the American lawyer who stoutly defends his case: ‘Stoikiy muzhik’, standing man. When the Western media discusses the fear of the Gaza war expanding in the region, who are they referring to? There’s Iran, of course, the perpetual man standing, and possibly an abbreviated Syria and a complicated Turkiye.

As for the Arab rulers, they fear Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood more than they ever mistrusted Israel. The scary part for President Biden’s friends is that both the religiously regressive and politically strident entities ply the Arab streets and were overwhelmingly elected by their Arab constituents. Both, however, saw their election stolen from them.

It’s been airbrushed from public memory that Israel and Iran, seen as implacable adversaries today, were inseparable siblings before the advent of Ayatollah Khomeini. Tehran was a major host for Israeli intelligence, directed largely at leftist Arab neighbours and the Soviet Union, which bordered Iran. The somersault in ties after the Iranian Revolution is not inexplicable either and, despite Western claims, doesn’t seem too deeply rooted in religion or religious sectarianism.

A mostly imagined Shia-Sunni incompatibility was likely a ploy to isolate Khomeini’s Iran from its Sunni Arab neighbours. The miscued myth exploded when stories emerged subsequently of Palestine’s sympathisers nurturing subterranean bonds with Shia clerics in Tehran.

If Shia Iran were really resentful of Jews or if it harboured antisemitic ideas, as is widely advertised in Western cacophony, we should perhaps probe the mandatory seat that Iran keeps in its majlis for an outspoken Jewish deputy, as it does for Iran’s Christian and Zoroastrian minorities. How could people who lived in peace and mingled culturally in Spain and Palestine lunge at each other’s throats?

A likelier fact is that post-Shah Iran threatened the pro-West leanings of Arab potentates rather than their Sunni identity, as indeed Cuba and Venezuela, groomed by Chávez, do in their backyards, as a collective variant of stoikiy muzhik.

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