

[Opinion](#)

[Guest Voices](#)



Members of the Al-Kahlout family mourn over the bodies of their relatives killed during an Israeli army strike before their burial at the Baptist hospital in Gaza City, Monday, March 24, 2025. (AP/Jehad Alshrafi)



Thomas Reese

[View Author Profile](#)

Follow on Twitter at [@thomasreeseSJ](#)

Religion News Service

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

April 1, 2025

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

The war between Israel and Hamas is so devastating for both Palestinians and Israelis that the only human response is tears.

The Hamas terrorist attack against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, was barbaric. Over 1,000 people were killed in Israel, mostly civilians including children. About 250 were taken hostage by Hamas.

It is true Palestinians have suffered under Israeli repression, but the attack was unjustified, morally indefensible and ultimately counterproductive. Israel had a right to respond and demand the return of the hostages, but there are moral and legal limits to what is a legitimate response.

Some would disagree and demand "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:23–27). But with over 50,000 Palestinians now killed in the war, Israel has far exceeded the lex talionis, or the biblical and legal principle of exact retaliation. Approximately 50 Palestinians are now dead for each person killed in Israel on Oct. 7.

The purpose of the lex talionis was to limit vengeance — not promote it. And if the world strictly followed the lex talionis it would be a much less bloody place.

Israel argues it is going after Hamas terrorists who are hiding among the population. In reporting casualties, the Hamas-led Gaza Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants but said women and children make up [more than half of the dead](#). To kill tens of thousands of civilians to take out a limited number of Hamas terrorists and leaders is way beyond what is acceptable collateral damage.

Destroying most of Gaza in order to root out Hamas is no more acceptable than blowing up a Chicago neighborhood to get rid of a gang.

In addition, cutting off food, water and medicine to Gaza is inhumane and an illegitimate military tactic. Some have called it genocide or ethnic cleansing.

No matter what lawyers and authorities call it, it is horrendous to see sick and hungry women and children living in ruins and tents after their homes have been bombed and destroyed. They are constantly uprooted and forced to flee as Israel marks their locations as targets for attack.

And after all this death and destruction, Israel admits it has not destroyed Hamas nor has it gotten all the hostages back. If the war continues, tens of thousands more will die.

Will we have to reach 100,000 dead before the killing stops? I doubt either side would stop even then.

Advertisement

The extremists in Palestine want the destruction of Israel, and they will use any means to accomplish their goal. They don't care how many of their own people die in the process. They thought provoking a response from Israel would help their cause.

The extremists in Israel are calling for an invasion and occupation of Gaza, and ultimately the removal of all Palestinians from Gaza. This by definition is ethnic cleansing.

Where would the Palestinians go? None of Israel's neighbors want them. They already have more Palestinian refugees than they can handle. The United States and Europe do not want them. Perhaps [President Donald Trump is planning](#) to send them to Greenland.

Meanwhile, Israeli settlers have already occupied so much land in the West Bank that it is no longer a politically or economically viable homeland for Palestinians. This incremental occupation of the West Bank has gone on for decades and has sped up during the war as settlers have harassed Palestinians and established more settlements.

Whereas Israel gives lip service to going after settlers who break the law, a [Palestinian teenager who throws a rock](#) is put in jail.

The settlers want to do in Gaza what they did in the West Bank: Take over the best land and make life for Palestinians untenable.

Ultimately, if they cannot get the Palestinians to leave, they could push them into the equivalent of reservations like we did with Native Americans here. These reservations or concentration camps would be totally dependent on the Israeli military for food and supplies.

No one is winning the war. Palestinians are losing; they are dying from bombs and the elements.

Israel is also losing. Every dead Palestinian has created more hatred toward Israel. Even if Hamas is destroyed, the children of the dead will grow up to support an even more extreme organization dedicated to the destruction of Israel. Eventually, the war will bankrupt the nation.

In 23 years, Israel will celebrate the 100th anniversary of its creation. Smart money would bet it will still be at war.

If things continue as they are, Israel will never know peace. Palestinians will never have a homeland.

The only way out of this hell is a just political solution, but neither side is interested.

Trump's dream of Gaza as a playground and vacation spot is both beautiful and insane, granted the facts on the ground.

With Jesus, we must weep for Jerusalem (Luke 19, Matthew 23), and we must also pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122).

But as Pope Paul VI said, "If you want peace, work for justice." Without justice for Palestinians and security for Israel, there will be no peace.