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From Retaliation to Devastation, Genocide, and Forced Displacement: the Use of Hi-Tech Weaponry against Gaza

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Abstract

Hi-tech weaponry constitutes a strategic deployment of advanced military technologies, including cyber warfare tools, drones, artificial intelligence (AI), and precision-guided missiles, designed to enhance military operations and reshape battlefield dynamics. However, this approach introduces unique challenges and implications that extend beyond traditional military strategies. Drawing on 'terrorist signaling theory,' this article critically examines the strategic implications and ethical considerations surrounding the use of hi-tech retaliation, emphasizing the necessity for comprehensive warfare strategies that integrate technological advancements with humanitarian imperatives. The study demonstrates that Israel's use of hi-tech weaponry during the Gaza War resulted in significant devastation, including severe disruptions to critical infrastructure and the exacerbation of humanitarian crises. The profound psychological and socio-economic impacts of these technologies have had a devastating effect on civilian populations, posing significant challenges to humanitarian response efforts. Israel's bombings and the imposition of a supply blockade have been perceived as forms of collective punishment, intensifying grievances among Gazans. The

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humanitarian impact has been catastrophic, with 85 percent of Gaza's population displaced, healthcare systems in collapse, and children accounting for over one-third of casualties. The study advocates for political solutions to address underlying conflicts and safeguard the rights and dignity of affected populations.

Keywords

2023 Gaza War – advanced military technologies – devastation – forced displacement – genocide – hi-tech retaliation

1 Introduction

The ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has experienced numerous escalations over the years, but the events following October 7, 2023 marked a significant and devastating turning point. Since then, a series of intense confrontations erupted, leading to severe retaliatory actions by Israel against the entire Gaza Strip as well as the West Bank (Abrahams et al. 2019). The aftermath witnessed unprecedented levels of destruction, affecting countless lives and infrastructure, and has brought to light the severe humanitarian crisis engulfing the region.

Following the initial clashes, Israeli forces launched extensive airstrikes in Gaza, causing widespread destruction with thousands of homes destroyed and hundreds of thousands displaced (Al-Mughrabi 2024). The magnitude of these airstrikes resulted in entire neighborhoods being reduced to rubble, leaving countless families homeless. Reports from humanitarian organizations highlighted the dire conditions faced by displaced populations who were forced to seek refuge in overcrowded and inadequate shelters (Wilson and Haq 2024). The loss of homes not only deprived people of their immediate shelter, but also of their personal belongings and memories, adding to the psychological toll of the conflict.

The indiscriminate nature of some of the violence has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis (Ahmed et al. 2024). Airstrikes have not only targeted military installations but also civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals (Asi et al. 2024). The targeting of these essential facilities has had devastating consequences. Schools, which serve as centers for education and community support, were destroyed or rendered inoperative, depriving children of their right to education and a semblance of normalcy amidst the chaos (Abu Alkas et al. 2024). Hospitals, critical for providing medical care to the

injured and sick, were also hit, further straining the already limited medical resources in Gaza (Asi et al. 2024). This has led to a dire situation where medical personnel are overwhelmed, and patients struggle to receive necessary treatment (Abed Alah 2024; Gangat et al. 2022).

The destruction of infrastructure extends beyond homes, schools, and hospitals. Vital utilities such as water and electricity supplies have been disrupted, leaving large portions of the population without access to clean water and reliable power (Fabian 2023; Yerushalmy 2023). This has further compounded the humanitarian crisis, making it difficult for people to maintain basic hygiene and health standards, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks (Abed Alah 2024; Gangat et al. 2022).

The Israeli retaliation in Gaza has raised concerns about genocide (Abdul 2023; Sultany 2024) and annihilation (Galaria 2024) due to its deliberate and systematic nature (Asi et al. 2024). The attacks resulted in civilian casualties, including women and children, and destroyed civilian infrastructure (Khatib et al. 2024). Human rights groups have documented the indiscriminate bombings, which disrupted essential services and caused long-term repercussions on affected communities. The intentional targeting of civilians and infrastructure exacerbates the humanitarian crisis, increasing the risk of disease and malnutrition (Abed Alah 2024; Alhajjar 2014; Daniele 2024).

Moreover, the conflict triggered a massive wave of forced displacement (OCHA 2024). Thousands of Palestinians fled their homes in search of safety, contributing to an already significant refugee crisis (Koettl et al. 2023). This displacement not only exacerbated the humanitarian situation, but also highlighted the long-term impacts on the social and economic fabric of Gaza (Buheji and Hasan 2024). Families were torn apart, livelihoods were destroyed, and access to basic necessities like food, water, and medical care became increasingly scarce (Abed Alah 2024; Gangat et al. 2022). In addition to the immediate physical and humanitarian impacts, the retaliation has further deepened the psychological trauma experienced by the people of Gaza (Alhajjar 2014). The constant threat of violence and the loss of loved ones have left lasting scars on the community, compounding the challenges of recovery and reconciliation.

A critical aspect of understanding the scale and impact of the conflict lies in examining the weapons and military technologies employed by Israel during these retaliatory operations (Slesinger 2022). Israel's military arsenal includes a range of advanced weaponry designed for precision and impact (Vohra 2023). Israel has been accused of testing new and potentially harmful weapons in Gaza, with claims that the region is being used as a testing ground for such weaponry (Fouché 2009). The use of weapons and military actions in Gaza has indeed raised significant concerns regarding international humanitarian

law. Israeli military operations in Gaza have been scrutinized for their impact on civilians, including attacks on hospitals, clinics, and residential areas, as well as the indiscriminate use of weapons (Afdha Lardo 2020; Alashqar 2023; Daniele 2024).

Research on the conflict between Israel and Gaza from 2007 to 2024 suggests that retaliatory actions by Israel do not lead to deterrence, but rather result in short-lived episodes of violence with no long-term effects on de-escalation (Abrahams et al. 2019). Since 2006, Gaza has faced multiple conflicts, each escalating in intensity and devastation. The 2008–2009 war (Operation Cast Lead) caused mass casualties and widespread destruction under Israel's blockade (Alashqar 2023). In 2012, Operation Pillar of Defense brought intense airstrikes, worsening humanitarian conditions. The 2014 war (Operation Protective Edge) was one of the deadliest, displacing hundreds of thousands and crippling infrastructure (Ibid). In 2021, Operation Guardian of the Walls inflicted further damage, deepening the crisis. Each conflict has compounded Gaza's suffering, leading to long-term instability, economic decline, and severe humanitarian consequences (Abrahams et al. 2019).

2 Statement of the Problem

The Israeli war on Gaza in 2023 demonstrates the complex relationship between technology and military innovation (El-Shewy, et al. 2024). Israeli technological agency and military innovation have all played roles in shaping geopolitical events, as seen in the 2023 Gaza War. The Israeli military's hi-tech innovation and security production contribute considerably to the conflict's dynamics adding fuel to Gaza fire (Ibid).

This study integrates 'terrorist signaling theory' with state terrorism research to elucidate the strategies driving state terrorism. It posits that extremist states deploy hi-tech weaponry to achieve objectives such as retaliation, devastation, and annihilation. This represents a novel contribution to terrorism studies by examining the implications of recent advancements in hi-tech sciences. By analyzing the employment of these technologies, the study enhances our understanding of the mechanisms and strategies utilized by states to exert terror, thereby addressing substantial gaps in current research on the subject.

The investigation contends that modern warfare is increasingly shaped by advances in military technology, including autonomous weapons systems and artificial intelligence (AI). Utilizing hi-tech weapons in state terror strikes is largely pointless and ineffective as a form of vengeance for the destruction, genocide, and forced relocation of Gazans. In other words, Israel cannot

influence Gazan behavior or win with hi-tech weapons than it can with conventional ones like bombs or guns. Conversely, Israel, which had hitherto tried the employment of numerous conventional weaponry types, would reevaluate the feasibility of a hi-tech offensive in light of increasing production costs, difficult access to them, and the increasing possibility of catastrophic side effects of these attacks. The increased accessibility of these weapons necessitates a reevaluation of the risks connected with cutting-edge weaponry, since a catastrophic hi-tech attack may result in tens of thousands of victims.

This investigation proceeds with examining the use of hi-tech weaponry in battles and the context of the Gaza crisis of 2023. It examines state terrorism tactics such as retaliation for devastation, genocide, and displacement in relation to the larger conflict. The study provides a comprehensive typology of strategic goals driving state terrorism, particularly in the use of advanced weaponry. By integrating terrorist signaling theory with state terrorism research, it offers a new paradigm for understanding the relationship between state-driven geopolitical conflict and technical breakthroughs, contributing significantly to terrorism studies by filling research gaps and offering new perspectives on state tactics and mechanisms.

3 Hi-Tech Weaponry

The constant advancement of military technologies, from microelectronics to nuclear submarines, reflects humanity's desire to dominate resources, survive, and defend itself through the use of state-of-the-art weaponry. Modern warfare now heavily relies on hi-tech weaponry, with developments ranging from the militarization of space to the creation of security firearms with built-in Wi-Fi (Bissett 2003). The historical developments and international power dynamics have been profoundly influenced by advancements in military technology (Turchin et al. 2021). Weapons innovation continues to be driven by the arms race, creating complex and unpredictable changes that influence geopolitical dynamics and global stability (Kuo 2022).

The evolution of hi-tech weaponry has profoundly shaped modern military strategies and geopolitical dynamics. Beginning with early innovations like gunpowder and cannons, weapon technology advanced significantly during the World Wars with the development of tanks, aircraft, and nuclear weapons (Sumantri and Kumalasari 2023). The Cold War era saw an arms race with innovations in missile technology, precision-guided munitions, and stealth capabilities (Chin 2019). In the post-Cold War period, drones and network-centric warfare emerged (Mendes and Junqueira 2020), while recent

advancements include AI, robotics, cyber warfare, and hypersonic weapons (Johnson 2021). These technological advancements continually transform warfare, introducing new strategic considerations and ethical dilemmas, making the impact of hi-tech weaponry on global security a crucial area of study.

The excessive employment of advanced weapons by Israel against Gaza has multiple causes. First, the development and use of cutting-edge weapons is a direct result of Israel's massive military and security innovation, which is closely linked to its settler-colonialism and colonization of Palestinian areas (Dana 2020). Furthermore, because of the constant threats it faces, which demand creativity and technological improvement, Israel has been more successful than other nations in creating indigenous military-technology advancements (Bitzinger 2018). Additionally, the Israeli defense sector has had a major impact on local businesses, promoting a technologically advanced culture that is often directed toward military uses, leading to the misuse of hi-tech weapons against Gaza (Dana 2020).

4 Conceptualizing Hi-Tech Retaliation

Hi-tech retaliation refers to the deployment of cutting-edge military technologies, cyber warfare, unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), AI, and precision-guided missiles to counter perceived threats or acts of aggression (Balmuș et al. 2022; Wong and Sambaluk 2016; Zineddine 2011). This type of retaliation leverages recent technological developments to enhance the precision, impact, and efficacy of military actions.

The use of advanced technologies has transformed the battlefield, prompting military leaders to develop new tactics to counter intelligent weapons. Additionally, integrating hi-tech computers, nanotechnologies, and smart suits improves information gathering, communication, and combat effectiveness, giving armed forces a competitive edge (Dada et al. 2022). Moreover, the rise of cyber warfare, alongside traditional attacks, creates a complex battlespace requiring decision-makers to integrate platforms across cyberspace, space, and other domains, underscoring the need for a comprehensive approach to modern warfare strategies (Zineddine 2011).

Hi-tech weaponry, including precision-guided munitions, cyber-attacks, and autonomous drones, has caused significant damage beyond physical destruction in Gaza. These advanced technologies have completely destroyed critical infrastructure, paralyzed communication networks, and compromised essential services such as water, electricity, and food. In addition to being distinct in several respects from conventional terrorism, hi-tech weapons have features

that distinguish them from other types of weaponry. Hi-tech weapons, such as cyber tools, autonomous drones, and precision-guided munitions, operate with a level of sophistication and precision that conventional weapons cannot match (Zampronha and Albuquerque 2024). Unlike traditional explosives or firearms, these advanced technologies can be deployed remotely, reducing the risk to operators and enabling strikes from great distances (Gilli and Gilli 2016).

Cyber weapons can infiltrate and disrupt critical infrastructure without any physical presence, causing widespread chaos and long-term damage to financial systems, energy grids, and communication networks (Zineddine 2011). Autonomous drones can conduct surveillance and targeted strikes with high accuracy, minimizing collateral damage but also raising ethical concerns about the lack of human oversight (McFarland 2022).

Additionally, the development and deployment of hi-tech weapons often involve complex algorithms, artificial intelligence, and advanced engineering, which require significant investment and expertise (Wallach and Thomas 2016). This technological edge provides a strategic advantage but also creates an arms race in cyber capabilities and autonomous systems (McFarland 2022).

Moreover, the psychological impact of hi-tech weaponry can be profound (Bøg et al. 2018). The unpredictability and invisibility of cyber-attacks or the silent, precise strikes of drones can instill fear and uncertainty far beyond the immediate area of conflict (Coyne and Hall 2018). This aspect of hi-tech weapons creates a pervasive sense of vulnerability, as targets may feel defenseless against unseen and sophisticated threats (Yaacoub et al. 2022). Many families have been displaced multiple times, fleeing from one area to another in search of safety, only to find themselves under attack again. Reports indicate that some civilians sought refuge in designated safe zones or shelters, only to be bombed in those locations as well (Al-Mughrabi 2024; Kekatos 2023). This repeated displacement has deepened the psychological trauma experienced by Gazans, as they are left with no sense of security or stability. The constant fear of bombardment, coupled with the loss of homes, loved ones, and community networks, has created a pervasive sense of vulnerability and despair among the population (Abed Alah 2024).

5 Hi-Tech Weapons Used by Israel in Gaza Retaliations

Israel's use of hi-tech weapons in Gaza retaliations has revolutionized modern warfare. Utilizing advanced technologies like drones, precision-guided munitions, and cyber warfare tools, Israel's strategies focus on targeted operations. These weapons enhance strike efficiency and accuracy, but also result

in significant destruction and severe humanitarian consequences in Gaza. Section 5.1 lists the hi-tech weapons used by Israel and their profound impacts on the region.

5.1 *Description of Israeli Hi-Tech Weapons Used in Gaza Retaliations*

- Drones (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)): Israel employs UAVs like the Hermes 450 and Heron for intelligence gathering, surveillance, and reconnaissance. These drones provide real-time data and situational awareness. Armed drones such as the Hermes 900 carry precision-guided munitions for targeted strikes, minimizing risk to personnel and collateral damage. They enable persistent surveillance and rapid response in Gaza.
- Precision-Guided Munitions (PGMs): PGMs, including smart bombs and missiles like the Hellfire and JDAM, use laser guidance, GPS, and advanced targeting systems for accurate strikes, reducing collateral damage. Hellfire missiles, launched from drones or helicopters, are designed for precise engagement. JDAMs convert traditional bombs into precision-guided munitions, allowing strikes with pinpoint accuracy, enhancing operational efficiency.
- Iron Dome Defense System: The Iron Dome intercepts and destroys short-range rockets and artillery shells from Gaza using advanced radar and tracking technology. It launches interceptor missiles to neutralize threats mid-air, with a success rate of over 90 percent. The system significantly reduces casualties and damage by protecting civilian areas and infrastructure, providing crucial security for Israel.
- Cyber Warfare: Israel employs offensive and defensive cyber operations. Offensive capabilities include hacking enemy communication networks, disabling command systems, and launching cyber-attacks. Defensive measures focus on protecting critical infrastructure, military networks, and sensitive data through advanced encryption and intrusion detection. This dual approach maintains technological edge and disrupts enemy operations.
- Robotics and Autonomous Systems: The IDF uses EOD robots to disarm IEDs and unexploded ordnance safely, reducing risk to personnel. Autonomous patrol vehicles (UGVs) conduct border surveillance and security missions, providing real-time monitoring without endangering soldiers. Equipped with advanced sensors and navigation, these robotic systems enhance efficiency and safety in performing critical tasks in hazardous environments.
- Electronic Warfare (EW): EW systems disrupt enemy communications and radar through jamming and deception. Signal jamming interferes with adversary communication channels, preventing coordination. Deception

techniques create false signals and decoys, misleading enemy forces. These capabilities provide tactical advantage, protect operations, and degrade enemy situational awareness, ensuring operational superiority in the electromagnetic spectrum.

– Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning: AI and machine learning enhance data analysis, targeting, and decision-making. AI-powered surveillance systems analyze data from sensors, identifying threats accurately. Autonomous targeting systems use machine learning for precise and efficient strikes. These technologies enable rapid information processing, predicting enemy movements, and effective responses, representing a significant leap in operational capability.
– Advanced Infantry Equipment: The IDF equips soldiers with smart suits, wearable technology, and advanced protective gear. Smart suits integrate communication systems, health monitoring devices, and situational awareness tools. Advanced body armor and helmets offer enhanced protection while being lightweight. Wearable technology monitors vital signs, maintaining soldier health and performance, enhancing combat effectiveness and resilience.

6 The Declared Logics of Israeli Hi-Tech Retaliation in Gaza

Israeli officials present the ongoing conflict in Gaza as a military operation that is both essential and feasible, with well-defined strategic goals. The two main objectives of the war are the release of the Israeli hostages held by Hamas and the destruction of Hamas's military and administrative facilities. These goals are rooted in the larger framework of maintaining Israeli civilian safety, undermining Hamas's operational capacity, and ensuring national security.

Hi-tech weapons are well-suited for states that employ strategies of provocation, outbidding, and spoiling (Mahoney 2024). Provocation is a strategic tactic used by states to incite harsh reprisals from adversaries, local supporters, or regional actors (Carter 2016). In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it has been directed at Hamas and regional actors like Iran and Lebanon. The use of hi-tech weaponry enhances the effectiveness of provocation strategies, but it can provoke widespread outrage and mobilization among regional actors. In Lebanon, Israeli operations in Gaza have led to increased hostilities, with Hezbollah launching retaliatory attacks in solidarity with Hamas. Iran has used these incidents to bolster its regional influence and advance its geopolitical agenda. Provocation can also draw Western governments into the conflict, appealing to counterterrorism priorities. However, it carries significant risks,

including civilian casualties, humanitarian crises, and eroded trust in diplomatic processes.

Outbidding occurs when an extremist group carries out terrorist attacks to convince potential supporters that it is more committed to a cause than a competing opponent group (Berlin and Rangazas 2023). Finally, spoiling takes place when an extremist state uses state terrorism to derail peace negotiations between a government and a competing oppositional organization (Findley and Young 2015). At first glance, hi-tech weapons might appear to have some utility for Israel pursuing this strategy, as it denies the Palestinians an independent state.

The Israeli strategies of retaliation possess varying degrees of utility when considering the use of hi-tech weapons. While there are many examples of states using hi-tech weapons to retaliate against rivals or enemies, Israel could opt for conventional weapons to achieve its goals. The rest of the article will discuss the strategies of retaliation for devastation, genocide, and forced displacement.

7 Gaza Devastation and Destruction

During the 2023 War on Gaza, 297,000 buildings and 87,000 housing units were destroyed, disrupting daily life and jeopardizing the stability of the community. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), hospitals in southern Gaza are at a "breaking point," with those in northern Gaza completely destroyed and non-operational (Kekatos 2023). The closure of more than 25 hospitals has impacted vital services. With three churches, 604 mosques, 110 schools, and 321 educational buildings demolished, the catastrophe has also affected religious and educational institutions. The significant damage to government infrastructure, which includes 194 administrative buildings, presents difficulties for public service delivery and governance. Furthermore, the destruction of 131 ambulances – essential for emergency medical response – has restricted the capacity to provide urgent care to those in need. Access to ambulances, electricity, and clean drinking water is severely limited, forcing the transfer of injured patients to medical facilities via donkey carts (Al-Mughrabi 2023).

These figures provide a stunning picture of the human cost and destruction of infrastructure caused by continuous conflict. In order to repair lives torn apart by violence and restore vital services, rebuilding these broken towns will take significant financial resources, dedication, and international cooperation.

TABLE 1 Extent of infrastructure destruction in Gaza Strip

Category	Quantity
Partially Damaged Housing Units	297,000
Destroyed Buildings	25,010
Hospitals Out of Service	33
Destroyed Housing Units	87,000
Hospitals Damaged Due to Missile Strike	25
Destroyed Churches	3
Destroyed Mosques	604
Government Headquarters Destroyed	194
Destroyed Schools & Universities	110
Partially Destroyed Schools & Universities	321
Destroyed Ambulances	131

SOURCE: PALESTINIAN CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS (2024)

8 Genocide

According to Moses (2010), genocide is intended to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of political and social institutions, culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, as well as the destruction of personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of individuals belonging to such groups.

Over 36,000 Palestinians have died, with children making up more than one-third of the dead (Sawafta 2023). Seventy thousand civilians have also been injured, and approximately seven thousand Palestinians are missing and presumed dead (UNICEF 2023). In just 180 days, this terrible conflict has escalated and continues to rage. Gaza has been called a "child graveyard" by the United Nations (Sawafta 2023; UNICEF 2023).

According to a report published in mid-May by the University Network for Human Rights and the Network for Human Rights, "Israel has committed genocidal acts, namely killing, seriously harming, and inflicting conditions of life calculated, and intended to, bring about the physical destruction of

Palestinians in Gaza" (Bouranova 2024: paragraph 3). Since October 7, 2023, Israeli aggression in Palestine has resulted in 37,955 martyrs and 90,523 injured individuals as of the latest update on June 18, 2024 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2024).

Giroux (2024) has argued that

> The relentless killing of children by Israeli Defence Forces and its elimination of the most basic needs of the Palestinian people in Gaza is far from an abstraction or a sound bite that can be buried in the language of equivalence, or for that matter, the cravenly appeal to balance. The killing of innocent children has continued in shockingly accelerated numbers with Israel's policy of collective punishment … The morally reprehensible killing of children in Gaza is part of a larger problem that haunts the modern period: the merging of colonialism and neoliberal capitalism (pp. 120, 123).

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas has escalated, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. More than 85 percent of Gaza's population has been displaced (Abu Salmiya 2024). According to Reuters, "The Israeli offensive against the southern city of Rafah since early May has uprooted around 1 million displaced people, many of whom had already fled violence several times before" (Reuters 2024: paragraph 3). Many of these individuals have been forced into empty tracts of land or partially bombed buildings, lacking access to water and hygiene facilities.

The forced displacement of Gazans amid the Gaza War has exacerbated humanitarian conditions, impacting numerous civilians. Displaced Palestinians in Gaza confront severe challenges, including overcrowded shelters, limited access to essential services, psychological trauma, and food insecurity. The destruction of transportation and infrastructure has further complicated healthcare delivery, heightening the risk of infectious diseases in densely populated areas with restricted access to clean water. Cases of acute hepatitis and diarrhea have surged, while malnutrition rates have escalated, affecting approximately one in three children in northern Gaza (UNRWA 2024).

Moreover, the enduring consequences of displacement extend to Gaza's societal and economic framework, with ongoing conflict and economic limitations impeding reconstruction efforts. Essential advocacy efforts are vital to uphold the rights of displaced individuals and safeguard civilian populations. International organizations are actively advocating for political resolutions aimed at addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, thereby ensuring the protection and dignity of those displaced.

9 Conclusion

The 2023 Gaza War between Israel and Hamas provides a compelling case study for applying 'terrorist signaling theory,' particularly in analyzing how both actors engaged in strategic messaging through military actions. Hamas's large-scale attack on October 7, 2023 was not merely an act of war, but also a calculated signal aimed at multiple audiences. First, it demonstrated operational capability and resilience to Israel, challenging assumptions about Hamas's military limitations (Asi et al. 2024). Second, it sought to rally domestic and regional support by portraying itself as the defender of Palestinian resistance (Sultany 2024). Third, it sent a message to the international community, particularly allies and adversaries of Israel, about the volatility of the status quo and the urgency of addressing Palestinian grievances (Giroux 2024).

Israel's response, including its heavy bombardment of Gaza, mass displacement of civilians, and targeted assassinations of Hamas leaders, can also be understood as a form of signaling. By deploying overwhelming force, Israel aimed to deter future attacks, signal its military dominance, and reinforce its security doctrine of disproportionate retaliation (Vohra 2023). However, the civilian toll and humanitarian crisis that followed also conveyed unintended messages, including strengthening global narratives of Israeli aggression and shifting international political discourse around the conflict (Khatib et al. 2024). For instance, the destruction of critical infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, and the displacement of over 85 percent of Gaza's population (Abu Salmiya 2024) have drawn widespread condemnation and raised allegations of war crimes (Ahmed et al. 2024).

The war exemplifies how asymmetric conflicts often escalate due to misinterpretations of signals. Hamas may have expected its initial attack to serve as a deterrent or a bargaining tool, while Israel's response – intended to restore deterrence – fueled further resistance (Abrahams et al. 2019). This cycle of signaling and counter-signaling creates a feedback loop where both actors continuously attempt to demonstrate strength, often at the cost of civilian lives and long-term stability. For example, Israel's use of 2,000-pound bombs in densely populated areas (Koettl et al. 2023) and its blockade of essential supplies like food, water, and fuel (Yerushalmy 2023) have been interpreted as signals of collective punishment, further entrenching Palestinian grievances and international criticism.

The conflict also highlights how regional and international actors interpret and respond to these signals. Iran, a key supporter of Hamas, has used the war to signal its commitment to the Palestinian cause and bolster its regional influence (Dana 2020). Meanwhile, Western governments, particularly the United

States, have been drawn into the conflict, balancing their support for Israel's right to self-defense with growing concerns over humanitarian violations (Bouranova 2024). The war has thus become a focal point for broader geopolitical struggles, with signaling strategies shaping alliances, diplomatic efforts, and global public opinion.

The humanitarian and psychological impact of these signaling strategies cannot be overstated. The destruction of Gaza's healthcare system, with only 17 out of 36 hospitals partially operational (Kekatos 2023), and the displacement of nearly 1.9 million people (OCHA 2024) have created a dire humanitarian crisis. The psychological trauma inflicted on civilians, particularly children who make up more than one-third of the casualties (UNICEF 2023), underscores the human cost of these strategic calculations. As Abed Alah (2024) notes, the enduring mental health struggles of Gaza's population will have long-term repercussions, complicating efforts at recovery and reconciliation.

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