

Letter: Re: Famine in Gaza

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Editor: The Perspective piece “Famine in Gaza: an Example of the Global Humanitarian Crisis” by Alex de Waal [1], from the World Peace Foundation, is problematic in several dimensions.

There is no doubt that the suffering in this war is tragic for millions of noncombatants—Israelis and Palestinians alike, as well as for aid workers accidentally killed and wounded in this area of intense and complex asymmetric urban warfare.

Precisely for this reason, in making accusations and assigning blame, it is important to examine and verify the claims carefully, and to avoid actions that contribute to this tragedy and the surrounding hatred.

The first issue concerns the methodology used to present factual claims in this article. Most of the sources cited are not subject to independent verification and are inaccurate or blatantly false, as they are based on statements from the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry.

For example, major sections are based on the reports of the Famine Review Committee of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system. The factual claims in the IPC publications regarding the availability or unavailability of food supplies primarily reference United Nations (UN) agencies, such as the UN Relief and Works Agency—27 references; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—86; WHO including the Palestinian Health Cluster—13, and the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Cluster—State of Palestine—composed of the UN Children’s Fund, other UN agencies and political advocacy organizations including the Union of Agricultural Workers Committees, which is directly linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine terror organization [2,3].

As has been documented and as reflected in the IPC documents, the primary source of information for all the UN agencies and NGOs operating in Gaza is the Hamas-controlled Health Ministry [4]. In addition, in his Perspective article, de Waal assigns responsibility and blame to Israel, specifically claiming that it is Israel that lacks “the will to provide” and facilitate what he refers to as the necessary “humanitarian response.” In this way, he completely absolves Hamas—widely designated as a terrorist organization with the explicit objective of eliminating Israel. Hamas has controlled Gaza since violently taking power in 2007, and they have full legal and moral responsibility for the terrible consequences of the war that they planned, initiated, and continue to pursue.

The large-scale diversion of aid by Hamas and its allies has been documented in detail over many years, as well as the ongoing armed attacks that prevent distribution of food and water to noncombatants in Gaza [5]. Yet De Waal fails to mention these basic facts. Without considering the consequences of the large-scale diversion of humanitarian aid for terror, the prescriptions that

follow consist of abstract declarations that are divorced from reality. This is particularly blatant in the claim that “The expertise for humanitarian response exists. What is lacking is the will to provide it.”

The problem is not the lack of will, but rather, the lack of pragmatic and realistic policies to prevent diversion among the international actors involved in providing aid, including governments, international institutions, and non-governmental organizations. Also, conspicuously absent in de Waal’s article and the sources that he cites is the considerable evidence that leads to the opposite conclusion of his central claim - specifically that Israel has provided and facilitated large-scale provision of humanitarian aid for many months [6,7,8].

Although it is certainly possible and legitimate to disagree with the Israeli assessment, by neglecting this information, there is no opportunity for evidence-based consideration of the important issues. Furthermore, the complexities of credible allegations of starvation under international law in asymmetric conflicts involving terror groups are replaced by a one-dimensional and often misleading presentation [9]. The horrifying October 7 mass slaughter, brutality, and rape of Israelis is reduced to a brief reference to the “ Hamas attack on Israel and massacre,” and the ongoing suffering of the Israeli hostages held in Gaza, as well as the over 20,000 rockets targeting Israeli civilians, have been erased.

In discussing the tragic incident that resulted in the accidental deaths of World Central Kitchen staffers in Gaza, de Waal cites “experts” who “have posed sharp questions over the legality of the Israel Defense Forces strike,” without any detail and only citing a New York Times article based on a few selected quotes.

Similarly, in his discussion of the International Court of Justice proceedings that cynically exploit accusations of “genocide,” and the attempts to force an Israel Defense Forces ceasefire, allowing Hamas to recover and resume attacks, he omits the underlying political foundations [10]. The selective quote from one aspect of Israeli Judge Aharon Barak’s dissenting International Court of Justice opinion fails to mention Barak’s condemnation (“three fatal flaws”) of the entire process. In summary, while Mr. de Waal’s humanitarian concerns regarding the tragedy in Gaza are noble and understandable, the numerous distortions and omissions severely reduce the credibility and reliability of his analysis.

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