A mass grave west of Gaza City is one of hundreds in the war zone, containing thousands of bodies, many unidentified. Thousands more unknown dead are believed buried in the rubble of collapsed buildings. These factors make accurate death-toll estimates today nearly impossible.

Arguing over Gaza War death tolls is a fool's game that hides the real question

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Dear Friend of Israel, Friend of FLAME:

Legacy media exploded last week with headlines like CNN's, claiming "Israeli military reportedly acknowledges 70,000 killed in Gaza after previously casting doubt on health ministry's count." The claim

was based on a statement by an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) staffer who was not authorized to comment on this matter. Later, an IDF spokesperson stated that "the details published do not reflect the official data of the IDF." In truth, it doesn't matter either way

Those who support Hamas's death-toll numbers want to prove that Israel is evil—because it killed so many people. Those who claim the death toll was fewer—and that in any case 25,000 of those dead were *fighters* who deserved their demise—want to prove that Israel righteously avoided unnecessary civilian deaths. Here's why the dispute is foolish:

First, neither Hamas nor Israel has any idea how many people were killed in the Gaza War. Neither side—let alone a neutral organization—has done the kind of thorough investigation necessary to assess the true number of people who died, let alone their ages, genders and cause of death.

Second, death assessments in modern wars are inherently unreliable—especially when taking place in urban areas, with terrorists hiding among civilians For example, it's difficult to find, let alone identify people buried under tons of rubble from large buildings. In addition, in most wars, hospitals provide invaluable records of deaths, both during and after a war. But because Hamas hid their soldiers, weapons and infrastructure in hospitals, most of Gaza's healthcare facilities have been destroyed, and with them its health system and records.

Third, it can take years, even decades to ascertain an accurate death toll—even when investigators are able to cross-reference multiple sources of fatality information. Eight years after the Battle of Mosul during the Iraq War, experts' estimates of death tolls still range from 20,000 to 100,000.

Fourth, death counts have no meaning without context. While it may be true that Israel's military killed 70,000 people and also true that more than a third were combatants, how does that death toll compare with those of other modern wars? What would a death count of 25,000 children dead mean? Is it a genocide, or "just" a war? Is a ratio of one fighter killed for every 1.8 civilians (1:1.8) a "good" or a "bad" ratio compared with other wars? Lacking such context, these numbers make it impossible for most people to judge . . . although, as we know, they will judge anyway.

Finally, arguments about the Gaza War's death toll miss the real point. If a ruling regime starts a war, it is putting its citizens at risk. If it doesn't have the resources to protect them, it puts those innocents at greater risk. Of course, if the belligerent regime *hides* behind its civilians—in their residences, places of worship, healthcare facilities, schools—it puts its population at a supremely high risk of death Presuming that the defending party exclusively targets only *fighters* of the belligerent regime—as Israel did—untold civilians will be killed anyway, and responsibility for those deaths lies fully with the belligerent regime.

While the first four reasons above make today's arguments about death tolls and demographics a fool's—or a fraudster's—game, it is for the last reason that discussions about death tools are totally irrelevant, even when we receive accurate numbers. The point is not how many citizens were killed—and what age or gender they were. Rather it's the war crime committed by Hamas in starting the war, failing to protect its civilians, and hiding behind those civilians that makes the terror group 100% culpable for every single Gazan death . . . and for Gaza's crumbled ruins.

Why no one knows *how many* people were killed in Gaza. Assessing the number of deaths in the "fog of war" is next to impossible, but especially since combatants rarely spend their resources keeping count. Some organizations, such as hospitals or funeral services, can offer numbers in real time, but best practices for counting war dead are usually employed *after* the war. The most reliable death tolls are calculated by accumulating statistics from various organizations—called Multiple Systems Integration (MSE). This

technique combines population censuses, birth/death registries and expected and observed deaths, as well as indirect deaths from famine and disrupted healthcare services.

Yet even experts using sophisticated multi-source methodologies can still only *approximate* actual war-related deaths and their demographics. Fact is, in today's war-demolished Gaza, no such studies for the recent war have been started, let alone completed. No wonder, even after a decade, death tolls for some conflicts, such as the Iran War, remain wide-ranging, rough guesses. Given the Gaza War's utter destruction, its death toll may take ten, even 20 years to establish.

Why we don't know *who* was killed in Gaza. Hamas's Health Authority—a notoriously untrustworthy source—estimates some 70,000 Gaza deaths, but does not distinguish fighters from civilians. They would prefer the public to conjure an image of 70,000 dead women and babies, not tens of thousands of ruthless, raping terrorists. But separating bodies of fighters from those of innocents is highly imprecise, since Hamas terrorists not only operate among civilians in civilian structures, they also *dress* as civilians. Likewise, Israeli estimates—known for being reliable and made in good faith—suggest that 25,000 fighters were killed, but this number is also likely imprecise. Remember, thousands of fighters and innocents are still buried under tons of rubble from massive, collapsed buildings.

Why we don't know whether a death toll of 70,000 is good or bad. In the Armenian Genocide (1915-1917), some 600,000-1.5 million were killed, accounting for 90% of Ottoman Armenians. In the Cambodian Genocide (1975-1979,) victims totaled 1.5-3 million, including 99% of Vietnamese Cambodians. More recently, in the U.S.-Iraq war (2003-2011), total deaths are documented at around 460,000. That's 650% more fatalities than estimated for the Gaza War.

But during the Iraq War, few campus demonstrators nor the U.N. accused the U.S. of genocide, as they did and still do Israel. Moreover, the ratio of combatant-to-civilian deaths in the Iraq war was estimated at 1:4.5—some 250% more deadly to civilians than the Gaza War. Yet during the Iraq War, few activists ran through the halls of Congress screaming "Baby killer! Baby killer!" at their elected representatives, as scores did during the Gaza War.

Hearing that 70,000 people (of 2.2 million) were killed in a war is disturbing, even with the clarifier that "only" 45,000 of them were innocent women, children and seniors. But we certainly can't assess the magnitude of death in Gaza without context compared to other modern wars. In perspective, the Gaza War death toll, with its far more favorable combatant-to-civilian ratio, was a minor disaster—and certainly no genocide—compared with the Armenian or Cambodian Genocides. Nor was it as bloody as the U.S.-Iran War, or many other conflicts in the last 100 years.

Why arguments over blame for Gaza War deaths are nonsense. When a country like Israel is attacked, unprovoked, in a massacre by its bordering neighbor, such as Hamas did on October 7, 2023, there's little question of responsibility for the conflagration. Hamas was the aggressor. When that aggressor fails to take precautions to protect its citizens in case of war, as Hamas failed to do, responsibility is again clear. Finally, if the aggressor uses a war strategy of human shields—deliberately operating within or around its civilian population, in residences, schools, mosques and hospitals—which is a war crime, we have a trifecta of unforgivable barbarism.

Please clarify for friends, family and colleagues that civilians who died under these circumstances—no matter the number—are the full responsibility of the aggressor, Hamas. To debate the actual death toll as though it has some inherent moral meaning, is irrational. To blame any of the deaths on Israel, which

fought strictly according to the rules of war—and in fact exceeded what is required in providing humanitarian aid—is i<u>rresponsible . . . and dead wrong</u>.

If you agree we need to spread this truth, please use your email browser to forward this Hotline issue to fellow lovers of Israel—and encourage them to join us by subscribing to the Hotline <u>at no charge.</u>

Best regards,
James Sinkinson, President
Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)

P.S.   Surely you've recently read of some celebrity, politician, radical student, foreign head of state or media pundit slander Israel with the "Gaza genocide" lie. Many who spread this lie are ignorant, but most are anti-Israel haters. They care nothing for the truth. The tragedy is, when they utter the Gaza genocide falsehood, too few knowledgeable people—and virtually no media—stand up to refute it. Indeed, when you share the simple facts, the genocide lie crumbles. Upon learning that Israel conducts its war against Hamas terrorists with the highest ethical standards—and that *nothing* Israel does in Gaza fits the definition of genocide—fair-minded people quickly see through the lie. I hope you'll agree that we supporters of the Israel-U.S. relationship need to speak out. FLAME's new *hasbarah*—explanatory message—"Facts Shatter Gaza Genocide Lies"—describes what genocide is *and is not* and proves factually that Israel's tactics in the war are ethical and righteous. It also reveals demographic data showing that the Palestinian population in Gaza is actually increasing. Finally, it notes that those who spread the Gaza genocide lie fit the classic definition of antisemites. Please review this convincing, fact-based editorial, which FLAME is about to publish to millions—in leading social media, as well as in the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal, New York Post*, *Chicago Tribune, Tampa Bay Times, Denver Post* and *Los Angeles Times*. This piece will also be sent to all members of Congress, the President and Vice President. If you agree that this kind of public relations effort on Israel's behalf is critical, I urge you to support us with a donation.