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Mortality in the Gaza-Israel War



Based on reported and estimated mortality, it appears clear that the Palestinian death toll in Gaza is among the highest civilian mortality rates of the 21st century. Credit: WHO

PORTLAND, USA, Oct 17 2024 (IPS) - Following the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel by [Hamas-led militants](#), Israel's response has led to unprecedented high mortality levels in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian death toll over the twelve month period is believed to be among the [highest](#) such civilian casualty rates in the 21st century.

During the first seven months of the war, Israel is estimated to have dropped more than [70,000 tons](#) of bombs on Gaza, far [surpassing](#) that of Dresden, Hamburg, and London combined during World War II. In addition, some have concluded that Israel's [bombing](#) of the Gaza Strip, which included 900-kilogram (2,000 pound) "[bunker-busters](#)", is one of the most intense civilian [punishment campaigns](#) in history.

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U.S. President Biden [warned](#) Israel that it was losing international support, which has become increasingly [evident](#) worldwide, because of its "[indiscriminate bombing](#)" of Gaza. The president described Israel's [military response](#) in Gaza as "[over the top](#)".

And despite President Biden's declarations of [red lines](#), calls for restraint and [ultimatum](#) for Israel to limit Palestinian civilian deaths, the president has experienced a [moral failure](#) with his unwavering backing of Israel with unequal treatment and [oppression](#) of Palestinians. While seeking peace, the president has [facilitated](#) the Israel-Gaza war.

In addition to the president's expressed concerns about Israel's military operations, dozens of [U.S. officials](#) resigned over the Biden administration's position in the conflict. They were critical of Israel's actions in Gaza and accused the administration of not telling the truth about [Israel's obstruction](#) of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Although the numbers of deaths continue to rise and are being updated, the current reported levels of mortality provide an intelligible picture of the war's lethal consequences on human life in Gaza and Israel. In addition to the mortality based on official reported deaths by Israeli and Palestinian authorities, higher levels of mortality have been estimated by health experts.

According to Israeli officials, the number of Israeli deaths resulting from the attack in southern Israel on 7 October 2023 is [1,163](#), with close to [70 percent](#) of the victims identified as civilians. The attack is considered to be the country's worst [loss of life](#) in a single day since its founding in 1948 (Table 1).

Table 1. Mortality in the Gaza-Israel War: 7 Oct 2023 - 7 Oct 2024		
<u>Individuals</u>	<u>Deaths</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Israelis & others on 7 Oct.	1,163	
Israeli hostages	70	
Israeli soldiers	728	
Subtotal	1,961	4.4%
Death rate (per 100,000 pop.)	20	
Palestinians in Gaza	41,909	
Subtotal	41,909	93.3%
Death rate (per 100,000 pop.)	1,957	
Israelis in West Bank	33	
Palestinians in West Bank	742	
Subtotal	775	1.7%
United Nations employees	150	
Journalists & media workers	128	
Others	?	
Subtotal	278	0.6%
Grand total	44,923	100.0%

Source: Reported mortality from Israel Shin Bet, Gaza Ministry of Health and United Nations.

In addition to those deaths on 7 October, no less than [728 Israeli soldiers](#) are reported to have been killed in combat since the Gaza ground invasion began and [33 Israeli deaths](#) occurred in the West Bank.

Given Israel's total population of nearly [10 million](#), the number of Israeli deaths on 7 October and the subsequent twelve months represents about 0.02 percent of the Israeli population, or 20 deaths per 100,000 population.

As reported by the Gaza Ministry of Health, the death toll in the Gaza Strip from Israeli military operations after one year following the 7 October attack is **41,909 Palestinians**. That number of deaths represents about 2 percent of the Palestinians in Gaza.

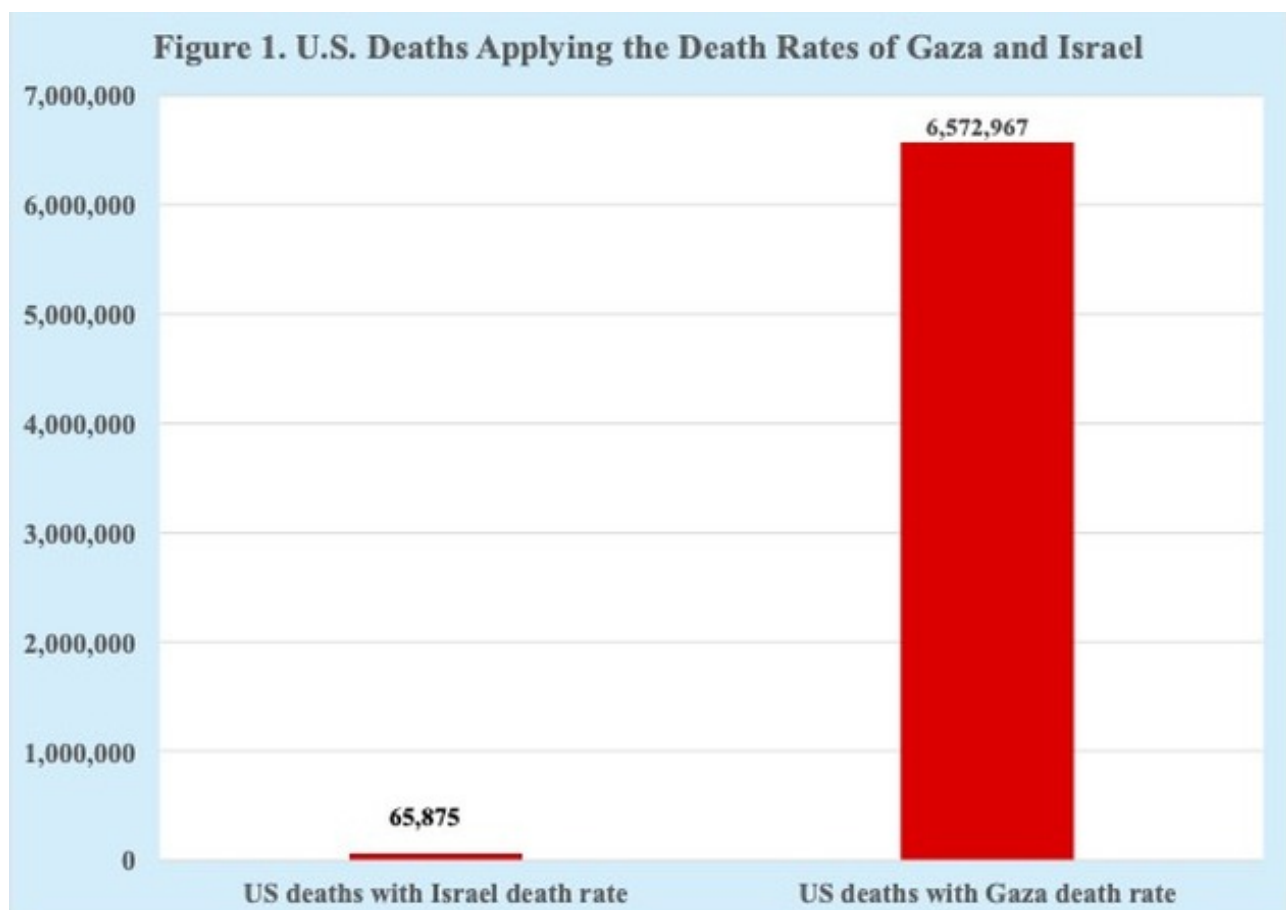
According to the Israeli Shin Bet, the proportion of Hamas fighters among the Palestinian deaths is approximately **40 percent**. While the Gaza Ministry of Health does not identify whether the deaths are civilian or combatant, approximately **two-thirds** are reported to be women and children. According to Oxfam, the war in Gaza killed more **women and children** than any other war in the last two decades.

The reported number deaths of Palestinians are deemed generally accurate and **widely accepted** by international monitoring organizations, including Israeli and US intelligence agencies. Independent **studies** of the deaths reported by the Gaza Ministry of Health show no evidence of inflated mortality figures.

In addition to the nearly 42 thousand Palestinian deaths, Israel's military action in Gaza has left many more **wounded**, exposed to **famine** and disease and most of Gaza's population **homeless**.

With an estimated total population of approximately **2.1 million** in Gaza, the Palestinian death rate from the war after one year is 1,957 deaths per 100,000 population. That Palestinian death rate in Gaza is 100 times greater than the Israeli death rate.

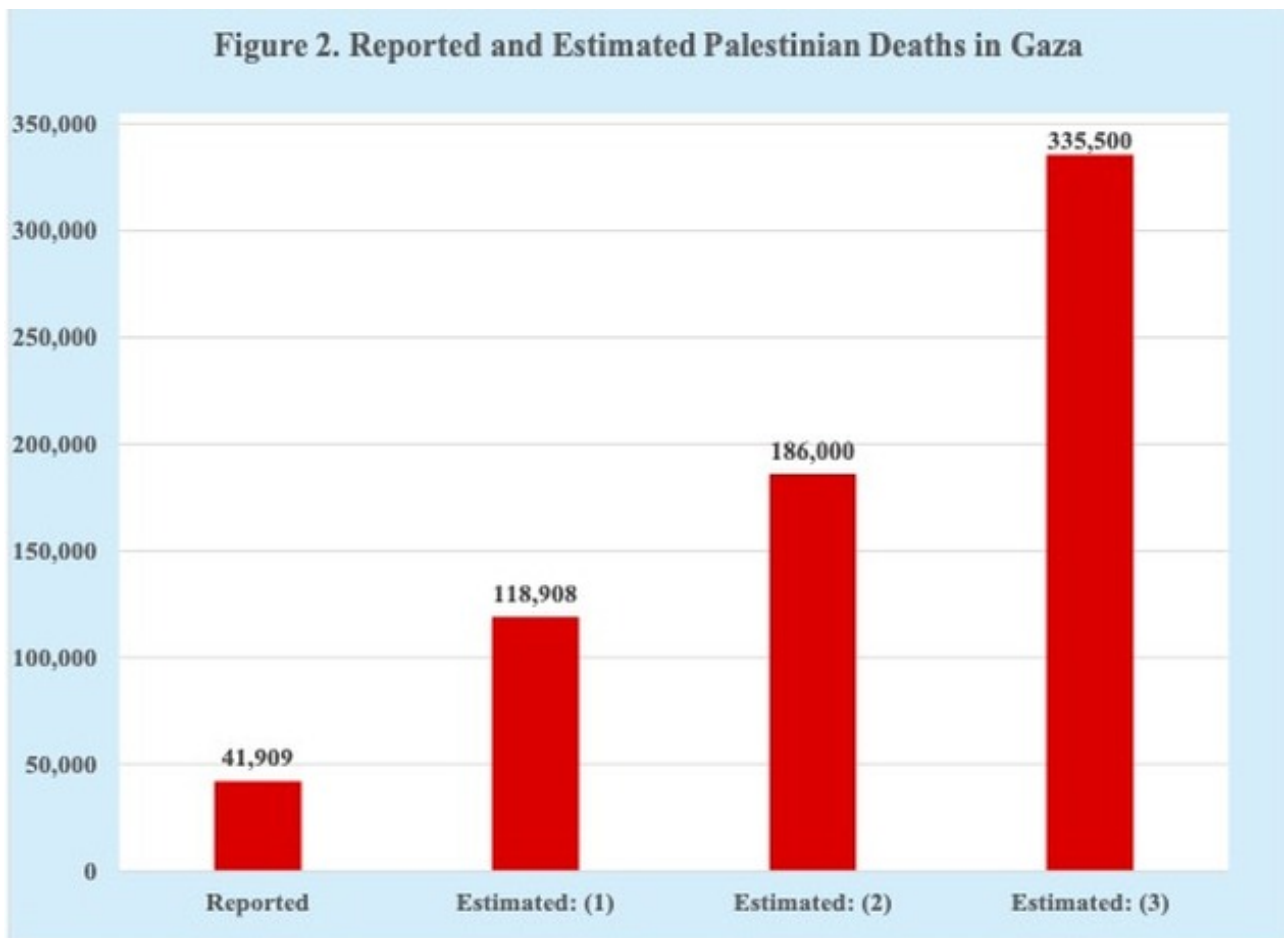
Applying the Israeli and Palestinian death rates to a third population, i.e., the United States, illustrates the striking differences in the mortality levels and their demographic impacts. When the death rate in Gaza is applied to America's population, the resulting mortality would be nearly 6.6 million deaths. Similarly, applying the Israeli death rate to the U.S. population yields close to 66 thousand deaths (Figure 1).



Source: Reported mortality for Israelis from Israel Shin Bet and for Palestinians from Gaza Ministry of Health, and the estimates of U.S. mortality levels calculated by author.

It is widely recognized that the true death toll in Gaza is likely to be [higher](#) than being reported by the Gaza Ministry of Health. A major contributing factor to higher mortality is the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza with more than [10,000 missing](#), untold numbers buried under rubble and many experiencing disease and malnutrition, as [humanitarian assistance](#) is limited by Israel's [blockade](#).

[One group](#) of 99 American health care workers returning from Gaza estimated that the true death toll in Gaza is at least [four times higher](#) than the official reported count, or approximately 119 thousand. In a published [open letter](#) dated 2 October 2024, the group transmitted their estimated number of Palestinian deaths in Gaza and their concerns over the mortality level to President Biden and Vice-President Harris (Figure 2).



Source: Reported: Gaza Ministry of Health; Estimated (1): Sidhwa; Estimated (2): Khatib, McKee & Yusuf; Estimated (3): Sridhar.

A [second analysis](#) by a team of three researchers, which was published in [The Lancet](#), estimated that the number of deaths in Gaza by mid-year was about [186 thousand](#). The researchers estimated that the actual death toll in Gaza could conservatively be about four times the reporting figure at that time. Their estimated level of mortality includes direct deaths due to bombings as well as indirect deaths due to the destruction of the health, food and sanitation systems in Gaza.

A [third analysis](#) of the deaths in Gaza by the chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh estimated the death toll to be even higher. Building on the mortality figure that appeared in [The Lancet](#), the number of deaths in Gaza twelve months after the 7 October attack is estimated at approximately [336 thousand](#). That mortality level also took into account indirect deaths due to widespread disease and starvation.

One year after the 7 October 2023 Hamas-led attack on Israel, the resulting mortality levels of the Israelis and the Palestinians in Gaza are both high and strikingly dissimilar.

For Israel, the deaths from the attack represent the highest loss of life in a single day since the country's founding. For the Palestinians, the reported number of deaths represents an alarming proportion of the Gaza resident population.

Over the past year of conflict, the reported number of Palestinian deaths in Gaza is about 20 times greater than the number of Israeli deaths. Also, the mortality rate of the Palestinians is 100 times greater than the Israeli mortality rate.

In addition to direct reporting of deaths due to bombing and military operations, the crisis in Gaza has led to high levels of indirect deaths. Those deaths are mainly due to [malnutrition](#), wasting, stunting and trauma reaching famine thresholds largely due to the [Israeli blockade](#). UNICEF has [warned](#) that the lack of water, food, medicine, sanitation, road and electricity infrastructures is a bigger threat than bombs to the lives of thousands in Gaza.

The true death toll in Gaza may not be known for many years, especially as indirect deaths are expected to exceed the direct death toll. However, based on reported and estimated mortality, it appears clear that the Palestinian death toll in Gaza is among the [highest](#) civilian mortality rates of the 21st century.

***Joseph Chamie** is a consulting demographer, a former director of the United Nations Population Division and author of numerous publications on population issues, including his recent book, [“Population Levels, Trends, and Differentials”](#).*