

Palestine is a glimpse of the dystopic future that awaits us

AI-powered human extermination is no longer science fiction. It is the reality.

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Putting my two girls to bed is a daily ritual for me. I lie down in their bed and have one by each side. We read a story, and they play around, tease each other, tease me. Finally, I ask them to go to bed firmly, and they fall asleep in a second.

Recently we had particularly intense weather here in Oslo, with loud thunderstorms disturbing our routine. The girls were scared of the deafening sound that sometimes seemed so close

that it even scared me, but I kept it together for them.

As they curled closer to me, I reassured them with the same words my own parents used when I was a child to calm me and my siblings down: that we were safe and that God is the most merciful, so not to worry.

Still, the girls asked a million questions as children often do: Who sends the thunder? Why does God do this to us? Doesn't God see and hear everything?

As I struggled to answer amid the thunderstorm, I thought about Gaza. At that moment, somewhere in the ruins of a home or in a tent, a Palestinian father was also hugging his two daughters and struggling to answer similar questions.

My thoughts raced. What was he telling his children? That it is not God, the most merciful, making the scary, thunderous sounds, but a kid in a military uniform behind a screen, playing god and making decisions about who lives and who dies with a touch of a button? How do you explain a high-tech genocide to a child? How do you tell them that they are living

in an extermination campaign of the future?

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As I lay there with my two scared girls, I thought about what Gaza is and what it tells us about our own future and the future of our children.

I am somewhat of a sci-fi buff. Over the past three decades, I have consumed hundreds of science fiction movies, series and comic books. As I read the news and watch videos of the reality the people of Palestine face today, I cannot but get constant *deja vus* of scenes, concepts and scenarios that I have seen repeatedly in the dystopia genre.

The ongoing genocide in Gaza is perhaps the most technology-enabled in

the history of humanity. Every aspect of the extermination is powered by technology: the bombs, the shooting, the decisions on who lives and who dies.

The trendy “Artificial Intelligence” (AI) is of course all over it. An AI program called Lavender has the names of nearly everyone in Gaza and churns out suggestions for people to attack based on “data inputs”, such as social media use. Another system called “the Gospel” generates endless numbers of “military targets”, including residential buildings. A third AI invention called grotesquely “Where’s Daddy?” checks if a “suspect” is at home so they can be bombed – which usually kills their families and neighbours as well.

What is going on in Gaza really sounds like a plot of a Hollywood movie about AI going rogue. But it is more than that. It is also what war will look like in our near future: humans will hide behind screens and let technology carry out the killing.

The Israelis are doing that quite extensively already. The use of drones and quadcopters to shoot at civilians even in their homes has been well-

documented. Fearing Hamas's tunnels, they have also deployed dog-shaped robots to explore the underground. Seeing images of these reminded me of Metalhead, an episode of the British sci-fi series, Black Mirror, in which AI-powered robot dogs hunt people.

Another aspect of the use of AI and other high tech is that it brings the Israeli campaign of dehumanising Palestinians to a grand finish. There is nothing that says more clearly "We do not consider Palestinians human" than allowing technology to kill them indiscriminately.

Indeed, the Israelis have perfected dehumanisation. They do not need to implant their soldiers with neurochips – like in the Black Mirror episode Men Against Fire – so they do not feel remorse. The extensive [brainwashing in Israeli schools](#) and society has rendered the majority of Israeli soldiers willing to go along with genocide – some appearing to even enjoy it.

Israel's genocidal AI technology has been empowered and fed by another

major high-tech sector: surveillance.

Israel's tremendous progress in surveillance technology has been driven by the need to control the population it occupies.

In what Amnesty International calls "[automated apartheid](#)", the Israeli authorities have deployed such sophisticated surveillance mechanisms – and so many of them – that Palestine today looks like a much worse version of George Orwell's 1984.

In Orwell's novel, an omnipresent regime watches every move of its subjects, its surveillance and repression penetrating and destroying the most intimate, the most precious aspects of human life. The Israeli apartheid regime works in similar ways.

There is not a Palestinian cry, not a Palestinian sigh that the Israeli colonial regime does not know about. It knows everything about everyone. By using powerful technological tools – from drones, to various hacking software, high-tech cameras and special facial recognition instruments – it has gained

access to all Palestinian public and private spaces.

“[T]he drone is constantly with me in my bedroom – worry and fear don’t leave our homes,” a Palestinian teenager [told the AFP](#) in 2022, a year before the war started.

She said she had trouble sleeping and concentrating because of the constant buzzing sound of Israeli military drones flying above the crowded Palestinian enclave. “Sometimes I have to put the pillow on my head so I don’t hear its buzz,” she added.

Back then, Israel would fly drones above Gaza for 4,000 flying hours every month – the equivalent of having five such aircraft permanently in the sky.

In the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, the situation has been no better. There, Israel has deployed vast networks of security cameras, many pointed directly at the windows of Palestinian homes, closely watching family life.

It is also extensively using facial recognition technology. There have been media reports of the so-called Blue Wolf program, in which soldiers are encouraged to take photos of Palestinians, including children and the elderly, to feed a database, with prizes awarded to the units that gather the most.

The psychological toll of feeling constantly watched can be immense. Indeed, it is akin to the oppressive atmosphere in Orwell's dystopian world.

But the impact of surveillance goes beyond instilling anxiety and fear. Just like in 1984, Israel's surveillance monster machine uses information about Palestinians' private affairs against them. It is one of its most destructive methods of recruiting informants and collaborators, which undermines internal cohesion and solidarity among Palestinians and destroys families and friendships.

There is one more aspect of Orwell's novel that I see in the Israeli genocide of the Palestinians: the propensity for double-speak. Genocide is "self-

defence”; Palestinian civilians are “terrorists” or “not innocent”; resistance fighters are “terrorists”; colonialism and land theft are “making the desert bloom”.

Talking about “making the desert bloom” – this is among the spin Israel is putting on its genocidal campaign in Gaza as well. In May, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office released information about its Gaza 2035 plan, which has the strip looking like a high-tech, prosperous city of the future, with a port, a railway and glitzy residential buildings. This is what Gaza will look like 10 years after the genocide – its survivors enjoying the sweet life of economic progress, bestowed upon them by their Israeli genocidaires.

It sounds almost like a plot taken out of The Matrix trilogy, where the oppressors force the oppressed into a virtual reality of an easy life to blind them to their reality – a life of slavery and exploitation.

But promises of material prosperity have not dissuaded Palestinians from giving up on their homeland before. This ruse will not work in the future, either.

There is an iconic scene in *The Matrix* illustrating a very human choice between obedience and resistance. Neo has to choose between a blue pill, which maintains the illusion, and a red one – which breaks it. The Palestinian people have made that choice long ago; for them, the blue pill has never been an option.

The question now is what choice we will make in the face of the very real possibility that what we see in Gaza today will become the new normal in the very near future. Do we ignore it, and swallow the blue pill? Or do we wake up with the red one?

For many people in the world, the genocide in Gaza may seem like a faraway tragedy – one that cannot happen to them. But these killing and surveillance technologies Israel is testing on the Palestinians are up for sale. And many governments and non-state actors have their eyes on them.

“Just as Israel’s technological revolution provided the world with breathtaking innovation, I am confident that AI developed by Israel will benefit all of

humanity,” Netanyahu [said](#) ominously at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2023, less than three weeks before his army launched a genocidal war.

As I lay next to my two sleeping girls, I fear for their future. I fear that not enough of us are willing to see reality for what it is and take a stance now before it is too late, before the whole world slips down the path towards Gaza.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial stance.