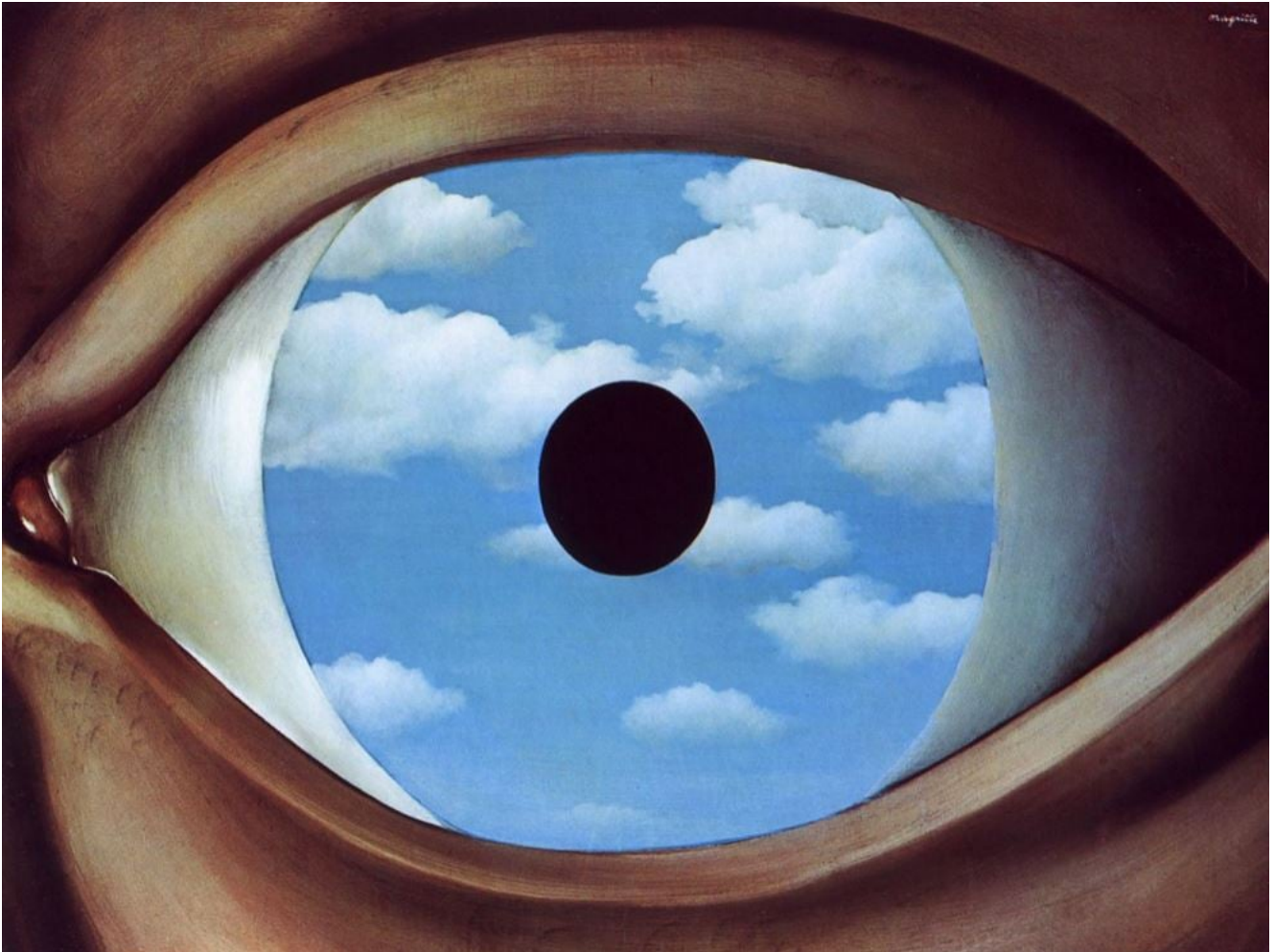


Genocide by Assertion: When Experts Lose Expertise

by [Sammy Stein](#) (March 2026)



The False Mirror (René Magritte, 1928)

Over the past few years I have become instinctively wary of headlines that rely on the familiar formulation “experts say.” Experience has taught me that this phrase is often used not to enlighten the reader, but to shut down scrutiny. Who are these experts? What qualifies them as such? And do their conclusions withstand even the most basic examination?

These questions became particularly relevant a few months ago

when the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) adopted a resolution accusing Israel of committing genocide in its war against Hamas. As expected, much of the mainstream media reported the story with uncritical enthusiasm, repeatedly describing the IAGS as “the world’s leading association of genocide scholars,” as if that description alone settled the matter.

The reality, however, was far less definitive. The resolution was passed despite the fact that approximately three quarters of the Association’s roughly 500 members did not vote on it at all. Nevertheless, the Association’s president, Melanie O’Brien, claimed that the resolution represented “a definitive statement from experts in the field of genocide studies that what is happening on the ground in Gaza is genocide.”

That claim does not survive even minimal scrutiny. The IAGS announced that 86 percent of its members had concluded that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza. What it failed to emphasise was that only [28 percent of the membership actually voted](#) on the resolution, and that just 20 percent of the total membership voted in favour of it. To present this outcome as an authoritative consensus is, at best, misleading.

More troubling still was the resolution’s treatment of the crime of genocide itself. Genocide is not a moral descriptor or a political slogan; it is a specific crime in international law. It is defined as acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, as such. Without the establishment of specific intent, genocide cannot be said to have occurred.

The IAGS resolution did not even attempt to establish such intent. Instead, it relied on selective statements from third parties and on extrapolations drawn from the conclusions of other organisations. In legal terms, this approach is wholly inadequate. A finding of genocide requires a fully conclusive determination that no reasonable alternative explanation

exists for the events in question other than genocidal intent. In the case of Gaza, multiple alternative explanations for civilian casualties plainly exist, yet the resolution made no serious effort to engage with them.

Most notably, it ignored the role of Hamas altogether. This omission alone renders any serious legal analysis impossible.

It is now widely acknowledged that Hamas systematically embedded itself within civilian and humanitarian infrastructure during the conflict. This strategy deliberately exposed Palestinian civilians to harm and constituted a clear violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Under international law, when a hospital or other protected site is used as a base for military operations, it loses the protections that would otherwise apply to it once warnings have been issued. Such sites may then become legitimate military targets. International law also recognises that hostile forces may be attacked even when civilians are present, and it explicitly prohibits the use of human shields—a practice Hamas repeatedly employed by operating from within civilian areas.

These are not marginal or controversial points. Any genuine expert in genocide or international humanitarian law would be well aware of them. Yet the IAGS chose to exclude these factors from its deliberations. By doing so, it ensured that its analysis was neither objective nor legally sound.

The resolution further misrepresented the position of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), claiming that the Court had determined Israel to be plausibly committing genocide in Gaza. This assertion was false. The ICJ ruled that Palestinians have plausible rights under the Genocide Convention that must be protected, not that Israel is committing genocide. The distinction is fundamental, yet the IAGS collapsed it entirely.

This raises an obvious question: how did a body presenting

itself as a group of genocide experts arrive at a conclusion so disconnected from legal reality?

Part of the answer lies in the composition of the Association itself. The IAGS includes not only established scholars, but also students, artists, and individuals with no demonstrable expertise in genocide studies. All were permitted to vote on the resolution. The vote was conducted in secret, meaning there is no way to determine whether any recognised experts supported it at all. Authority was asserted, not demonstrated.

Like many others, I wish the war in Gaza had never taken place, and I am relieved that it now appears to be drawing to a close. There is widespread agreement that far too many innocent people have been killed on both sides. But civilian suffering, however tragic, is not evidence of genocide. History demonstrates that the concept of genocide was intentionally defined narrowly, precisely to prevent its use as a catch-all accusation in politically charged conflicts.

Israel made extensive efforts to minimise civilian casualties, often at significant military cost. Warnings, evacuations, and pauses in fighting were implemented despite Hamas's attempts to prevent civilians from leaving combat zones. These actions are fundamentally incompatible with intent to destroy a protected group and should have featured prominently in any serious assessment of the conflict.

The implications for genocide scholarship are profound. When the charge of genocide is applied carelessly or ideologically, it loses analytical power and moral force. Worse still, it risks transforming a legal concept designed to identify the gravest of crimes into a tool of political advocacy. Scholars who engage in this practice do not advance understanding and they corrode the standards of their own discipline.

It is therefore both necessary and justified to describe the IAGS resolution as immoral and reprehensible. By deliberately

mislabelling a complex armed conflict as genocide, the Association has not only undermined its own credibility but has also damaged public trust in genocide scholarship more broadly. Institutions that claim expertise must be held to higher standards, not exempted from accountability.

We have seen how accusations of genocide are now deployed by states, organisations and activists as a means of demonising Israeli Jews and by extension, Jews more generally. Yet Israel's war against Hamas, an internationally proscribed terrorist organisation, was an act of self-defence, not genocide.

Hamas fighters do not constitute a protected group under the Genocide Convention and cannot be framed as victims of genocide. By ignoring Hamas's deliberate endangerment of Palestinian civilians, the IAGS effectively legitimised the tactic of embedding military operations within civilian populations, granting terrorists moral cover while further degrading the meaning of genocide itself.

What are the chances that the leadership of the International Association of Genocide Scholars will acknowledge these failures, retract their deeply biased resolution and accept responsibility for the damage they have done to both their organisation and their field?

Almost none.

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Sammy Stein was born a Jewish Palestinian, a description that causes much confusion with people. In 1948, he and all other Jewish Palestinians living in Palestine became Israeli citizens. He now lives in Glasgow and has two daughters, two

grandchildren, and is married to Vicci. Sammy is Chair of Glasgow Friends of Israel, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in May 2025.

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