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GAZA
Massacre of a nation

JENNIFER LOEWENSTEIN NIR ROSEN CHRIS HEDGES JOHN PILGER DAHR JAMAIL JONATHAN COOK URI AVNERY
STUART LITTLEWOOD RAMZY BAROUD JOHAN HARI BILL VAN AUKEN ROBERT PARRY HABIB BATTAH ALAN MAAS



Western enthusiasm for democracy stops when those opposed to its policies are elected to office. The west and Israel tried everything to secure a Fatah victory: Palestinian voters rebuffed the concerted threats and bribes of the “international community” in a campaign that saw Hamas members and other oppositionists routinely detained or assaulted by the IDF, their posters confiscated or destroyed, US and EU funds channelled into the Fatah campaign, and US congressmen announcing that Hamas should not be allowed to run. Even the timing of the election was set by the determination to rig the outcome. Scheduled for the summer of 2005, it was delayed till January 2006 to give Abbas time to distribute assets in Gaza – in the words of an Egyptian intelligence officer, “the public will then support the Authority against Hamas.”

– Tariq Ali

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Many thanks to the writers and photographers
for their contributions to this supplement

Tony Sutton, Editor

January 9, 2009

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IF HAMAS DID NOT EXIST

JENNIFER LOEWENSTEIN

The lifeblood of the Palestinian National Movement flows through the streets of Gaza today. Every drop that falls waters the soil of vengeance, bitterness and hatred not only in Palestine but across the Middle East and much of the world. We do have a choice over whether or not this should continue. Now is the time to make it.

Let us get one thing perfectly straight. If the wholesale mutilation and degradation of the Gaza Strip is going to continue; if Israel's will is at one with that of the United States; if the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and all the international legal agencies and organizations spread across the globe are going to continue to sit by like hollow mannequins doing nothing but making repeated "calls" for a "ceasefire" on "both sides"; if the cowardly, obsequious and supine Arab States are going to stand by watching their brethren get slaughtered by the hour while the world's bullying

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The state terror unleashed from the skies and on the ground against the Gaza Strip as we speak has nothing to do with Hamas. It has nothing to do with "Terror"

Superpower eyes them threateningly from Washington lest they say something a little to their disliking; then let us at least tell the truth why this hell on earth is taking place.

The state terror unleashed from the skies and on the ground against the Gaza Strip as we speak has nothing to do with Hamas. It has nothing to do with "Terror". It has nothing to do with the long-term "security" of the Jewish State or with Hizbullah or Syria or Iran except insofar as it is aggravating the conditions that have led up to this crisis today. It has nothing to do with some conjured up "war" – a cynical and overused euphemism that amounts to little more the wholesale enslavement of any nation that dares claim its sovereign rights; that dares assert that its resources are its own; that doesn't want one of the Empire's obscene military bases sitting on its cherished land.

This crisis has nothing to do with freedom, democracy, justice or peace. It

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is not about Mahmoud Zahhar or Khalid Mash'al or Ismail Haniyeh. It is not about Hassan Nasrallah or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. These are all circumstantial players who have gained a role in the current tempest only now that the situation has been allowed for 61 years to develop into the catastrophe that it is today. The Islamist factor has colored and will continue to color the atmosphere of the crisis; it has enlisted the current leaders and mobilized wide sectors of the world's population. The primary symbols today are Islamic – the mosques, the Qur'an, the references to the Prophet Muhammad and to Jihad. But these symbols could disappear and the impasse would continue.

There was a time when Fatah and the PFLP held the day; when few Palestinians wanted anything to do with Islamist policies and politics. Such politics have nothing to do with primitive rockets being fired over the border, or smuggling tunnels and black-market weapons; just as Arafat's Fatah had little to do with stones and suicide bombings. The associations are coincidental; the creations of a given political environment. They are the result of something entirely different than what the lying politicians and their analysts are telling you. They have become part of the landscape of human events in the modern Middle East today; but incidentals wholly as lethal, or as recalcitrant, deadly, angry or incorrigible could just as soon have been in their places.

Strip away the clichés and the vacuous newspeak blaring out across the servile media and its pathetic corps of voluntary state servants in the Western world and what you will find is the naked desire for

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Such politics have nothing to do with primitive rockets being fired over the border, or smuggling tunnels and black-market weapons; just as Arafat's Fatah had little to do with stones and suicide bombings

hegemony; for power over the weak and dominion over the world's wealth. Worse yet you will find that the selfishness, the hatred and indifference, the racism and bigotry, the egotism and hedonism that we try so hard to cover up with our sophisticated jargon, our refined academic theories and models actually help to guide our basest and ugliest desires. The callousness with which we indulge in them all are endemic to our very culture; thriving here like flies on a corpse.

Strip away the current symbols and language of the victims of our selfish and devastating whims and you will find the simple, impassioned and unaffected cries of the downtrodden; of the 'wretched of the earth' begging you to cease your cold aggression against their children and their homes; their families and their villages; begging you to leave them alone to have their fish and their bread, their oranges, their olives and their thyme; asking you first politely and then with increasing disbelief why you cannot let them live undisturbed on the land of their ancestors; unexploited, free of the fear of expulsion; of ravishment and devastation; free of permits and roadblocks and checkpoints and crossings; of monstrous concrete walls, guard towers, concrete bunkers, and barbed wire; of tanks and prisons and torture and death. Why is life without these policies and instruments of hell impossible?

The answer is because Israel has no intention of allowing a viable, sovereign Palestinian state on its borders. It had no intention of allowing it in 1948 when it grabbed 24% more land than what it was allotted legally, if unfairly, by UN Resolution 181. It had no intention of allowing it throughout the massacres and ploys of

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the 1950s. It had no intention of allowing two states when it conquered the remaining 22% of historic Palestine in 1967 and reinterpreted UN Security Council Resolution 242 to its own liking despite the overwhelming international consensus stating that Israel would receive full international recognition within secure and recognized borders if it withdrew from the lands it had only recently occupied.

It had no intention of acknowledging Palestinian national rights at the United Nations in 1976, when – alone with the United States – it voted against a two-state solution. It had no intention of allowing a comprehensive peace settlement when Egypt stood ready to deliver but received, and obediently accepted, a separate peace exclusive of the rights of Palestinians and the remaining peoples of the region. It had no intention of working toward a just two state solution in 1978 or 1982 when it invaded, fire-bombed, blasted and bulldozed Beirut so that it might annex the West Bank without hassle. It had no intention of granting a Palestinian state in 1987 when the first Intifada spread across occupied Palestine, into the Diaspora and then into the spirits of the global dispossessed, or when Israel deliberately aided the newly formed Hamas movement so that it might undermine the strength of the more secular-nationalist factions.

Israel had no intention of granting a Palestinian state at Madrid or at Oslo where the PLO was superseded by the quivering, quisling Palestinian Authority too many of whose cronies grasped at the wealth and prestige it gave them at the expense of their own kin. As Israel beamed into the world's satellites and mi-

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As Israel beamed into the world's satellites and microphones its desire for peace and a two-state solution, it more than doubled the number of illegal Jewish settlements on the ground in the West Bank and around East Jerusalem, annexing them as it built and continues to build a superstructure of bypass roads and highways over the remaining, severed cities and villages of earthly Palestine

crophones its desire for peace and a two-state solution, it more than doubled the number of illegal Jewish settlements on the ground in the West Bank and around East Jerusalem, annexing them as it built and continues to build a superstructure of bypass roads and highways over the remaining severed cities and villages of earthly Palestine. It has annexed the Jordan valley, the international border of Jordan, expelling any 'locals' inhabiting that land. It speaks with a viper's tongue over the multiple amputee of Palestine whose head shall soon be severed from its body in the name of justice, peace and security.

Through the home demolitions, the assaults on civil society that attempted to cast Palestinian history and culture into a chasm of oblivion; through the unspeakable destruction of the refugee camp sieges and infrastructure bombardments of the second Intifada, through assassinations and summary executions, past the grandiose farce of disengagement and up to the nullification of free, fair and democratic Palestinian elections Israel has made its view known again and again in the strongest possible language, the language of military might, of threats, intimidation, harassment, defamation and degradation.

Israel, with the unconditional and approving support of the United States, has made it dramatically clear to the entire world over and over and over again, repeating in action after action that it will accept no viable Palestinian state next to its borders. What will it take for the rest of us to hear? What will it take to end the criminal silence of the 'international community'? What will it take to see past the lies and indoctrination to what is tak-

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ing place before us day after day in full view of the eyes of the world? The more horrific the actions on the ground, the more obscenely insistent are the words of peace. To listen and watch without hearing or seeing allows the indifference, the ignorance and complicity to continue and deepens with each grave our collective shame.

The destruction of Gaza has nothing to do with Hamas. Israel will accept no authority in the Palestinian territories that it does not ultimately control. Any individual, leader, faction or movement that fails to accede to Israel's demands or that seeks genuine sovereignty and the equality of all nations in the region; any government or popular movement that demands the applicability of international humanitarian law and of the universal declaration of human rights for its own people will be unacceptable for the Jewish State. Those dreaming of one state must be forced to ask themselves

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Those dreaming of one state must be forced to ask themselves what Israel would do to a population of 4 million Palestinians within its borders when it commits on a daily, if not hourly basis, crimes against their collective humanity while they live alongside its borders?

what Israel would do to a population of 4 million Palestinians within its borders when it commits on a daily, if not hourly basis, crimes against their collective humanity while they live alongside its borders? What will suddenly make the *raison d'être*, the self-proclaimed purpose of Israel's reason for being change if the Palestinian territories are annexed to it outright?

The lifeblood of the Palestinian National Movement flows through the streets of Gaza today. Every drop that falls waters the soil of vengeance, bitterness and hatred not only in Palestine but across the Middle East and much of the world. We do have a choice over whether or not this should continue. Now is the time to make it. **CT**

Jennifer Loewenstein is the Associate Director of the Middle East Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

THE LOGIC OF COLONIAL POWER

NIR ROSEN

I have spent most of the Bush administration's tenure reporting from Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Somalia and other conflicts. I have been published by most major publications. I have been interviewed by most major networks and I have even testified before the senate foreign relations committee. The Bush administration began its tenure with Palestinians being massacred and it ends with Israel committing one of its largest massacres yet in a 60-year history of occupying Palestinian land. Bush's final visit to the country he chose to occupy ended with an educated secular Shiite Iraqi throwing his shoes at him, expressing the feelings of the entire Arab world save its dictators who have imprudently attached themselves to a hated American regime.

Once again, the Israelis bomb the starving and imprisoned population of Gaza. The world watches the plight of 1.5 million Gazans live on TV and online; the western media largely justify the Israeli action. Even some Arab outlets try

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The Bush administration began its tenure with Palestinians being massacred and it ends with Israel committing one of its largest massacres yet in a 60-year history of occupying Palestinian land

to equate the Palestinian resistance with the might of the Israeli military machine. And none of this is a surprise. The Israelis just concluded a round-the-world public relations campaign to gather support for their assault, even gaining the collaboration of Arab states like Egypt.

The international community is directly guilty for this latest massacre. Will it remain immune from the wrath of a desperate people? So far, there have been large demonstrations in Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Iraq. The people of the Arab world will not forget. The Palestinians will not forget. “All that you have done to our people is registered in our notebooks,” as the poet Mahmoud Darwish said.

I have often been asked by policy analysts, policy-makers and those stuck with implementing those policies for my advice on what I think America should do to promote peace or win hearts and minds in the Muslim world. It too often feels futile, because such a revolution in

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American policy would be required that only a true revolution in the American government could bring about the needed changes.

An American journal once asked me to contribute an essay to a discussion on whether terrorism or attacks against civilians could ever be justified. My answer was that an American journal should not be asking whether attacks on civilians can ever be justified. This is a question for the weak, for the Native Americans in the past, for the Jews in Nazi Germany, for the Palestinians today, to ask themselves.

Terrorism is a normative term and not a descriptive concept. An empty word that means everything and nothing, it is used to describe what the Other does, not what we do. The powerful – whether Israel, America, Russia or China – will always describe their victims' struggle as terrorism, but the destruction of Chechnya, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, the slow slaughter of the remaining Palestinians, the American occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan – with the tens of thousands of civilians it has killed . . . these will never earn the title of terrorism, though civilians were the target and terrorising them was the purpose.

Counterinsurgency, now popular again among in the Pentagon, is another way of saying the suppression of national liberation struggles. Terror and intimidation are as essential to it as is winning hearts and minds.

Normative rules are determined by power relations. Those with power determine what is legal and illegal. They besiege the weak in legal prohibitions to prevent the weak from resisting. For the weak to resist is illegal by definition. Concepts like terrorism are invented and

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The land of Palestine is being stolen day after day; the Palestinian people are being eradicated day after day. As a result, they respond in whatever way they can to apply pressure on Israel

used normatively as if a neutral court had produced them, instead of the oppressors. The danger in this excessive use of legality actually undermines legality, diminishing the credibility of international institutions such as the United Nations. It becomes apparent that the powerful, those who make the rules, insist on legality merely to preserve the power relations that serve them or to maintain their occupation and colonialism.

Attacking civilians is the last, most desperate and basic method of resistance when confronting overwhelming odds and imminent eradication. The Palestinians do not attack Israeli civilians with the expectation that they will destroy Israel. The land of Palestine is being stolen day after day; the Palestinian people are being eradicated day after day. As a result, they respond in whatever way they can to apply pressure on Israel. Colonial powers use civilians strategically, settling them to claim land and dispossess the native population, be they Indians in North America or Palestinians in what is now Israel and the Occupied Territories. When the native population sees that there is an irreversible dynamic that is taking away their land and identity with the support of an overwhelming power, then they are forced to resort to whatever methods of resistance they can.

Not long ago, 19-year-old Qassem al-Mughrabi, a Palestinian man from Jerusalem drove his car into a group of soldiers at an intersection. “The terrorist”, as the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* called him, was shot and killed. In two separate incidents last July, Palestinians from Jerusalem also used vehicles to attack Israelis. The attackers were not part of an organisation. Although those Palestinian men were

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also killed, senior Israeli officials called for their homes to be demolished. In a separate incident, *Haaretz* reported that a Palestinian woman blinded an Israeli soldier in one eye when she threw acid in his face. “The terrorist was arrested by security forces,” the paper said. An occupied citizen attacks an occupying soldier, and she is the terrorist?

In September, Bush spoke at the United Nations. No cause could justify the deliberate taking of human life, he said. Yet the US has killed thousands of civilians in airstrikes on populated areas. When you drop bombs on populated areas knowing there will be some “collateral” civilian damage, but accepting it as worth it, then it is deliberate. When you impose sanctions, as the US did on Saddam era Iraq, that kill hundreds of thousands, and then say their deaths were worth it, as secretary of state Albright did, then you are deliberately killing people for a political goal. When you seek to “shock and awe”, as president Bush did, when he bombed Iraq, you are engaging in terrorism.

Just as the traditional American cowboy film presented white Americans under siege, with Indians as the aggressors, which was the opposite of reality, so, too, have Palestinians become the aggressors and not the victims. Beginning in 1948, 750,000 Palestinians were deliberately cleansed and expelled from their homes, and hundreds of their villages were destroyed, and their land was settled by colonists, who went on to deny their very existence and wage a 60-year war against the remaining natives and the national liberation movements the Palestinians established around the world. Every day, more of Palestine is stolen, more Palestinians are killed. To call oneself an Israeli

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Just as the traditional American cowboy film presented white Americans under siege, with Indians as the aggressors, which was the opposite of reality, so, too, have Palestinians become the aggressors and not the victims

Zionist is to engage in the dispossession of entire people. It is not that, qua Palestinians, they have the right to use any means necessary, it is because they are weak. The weak have much less power than the strong, and can do much less damage. The Palestinians would not have ever bombed cafes or used home-made missiles if they had tanks and airplanes. It is only in the current context that their actions are justified, and there are obvious limits.

It is impossible to make a universal ethical claim or establish a Kantian principle justifying any act to resist colonialism or domination by overwhelming power. And there are other questions I have trouble answering. Can an Iraqi be justified in attacking the United States? After all, his country was attacked without provocation, and destroyed, with millions of refugees created, hundreds of thousands of dead. And this, after 12 years of bombings and sanctions, which killed many and destroyed the lives of many others.

I could argue that all Americans are benefiting from their country's exploits without having to pay the price, and that, in today's world, the imperial machine is not merely the military but a military-civilian network. And I could also say that Americans elected the Bush administration twice and elected representatives who did nothing to stop the war, and the American people themselves did nothing. From the perspective of an American, or an Israeli, or other powerful aggressors, if you are strong, everything you do is justifiable, and nothing the weak do is legitimate. It's merely a question of what side you choose: the side of the strong or the side of the weak.

Israel and its allies in the west and in

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Arab regimes such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia have managed to corrupt the PLO leadership, to suborn them with the promise of power at the expense of liberty for their people, creating a first – a liberation movement that collaborated with the occupier. Israeli elections are coming up and, as usual, these elections are accompanied by war to bolster the candidates. You cannot be prime minister of Israel without enough Arab blood on your hands. An Israeli general has threatened to set Gaza back decades, just as they threatened to set Lebanon back decades in 2006. As if strangling Gaza and denying its people fuel, power or food had not set it back decades already.

The democratically elected Hamas government was targeted for destruction from the day it won the elections in 2006. The world told the Palestinians that they cannot have democracy, as if the goal was to radicalise them further and as if that would not have a consequence. Israel claims it is targeting Hamas's military forces. This is not true. It is targeting Palestinian police forces and killing them, including some such as the chief of police, Tawfiq Jaber, who was actually a former Fatah official who stayed on in his post after Hamas took control of Gaza. What will happen to a society with no security forces? What do the Israelis expect to happen when forces more radical than Hamas gain power?

A Zionist Israel is not a viable long-term project and Israeli settlements, land expropriation and separation barriers have long since made a two state solution impossible. There can be only one state in historic Palestine. In coming decades, Israelis will be confronted with two options. Will they peacefully transition towards

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In coming decades, Israelis will be confronted with two options. Will they peacefully transition towards an equal society, where Palestinians are given the same rights, à la post-apartheid South Africa? Or will they continue to view democracy as a threat?

an equal society, where Palestinians are given the same rights, à la post-apartheid South Africa? Or will they continue to view democracy as a threat? If so, one of the peoples will be forced to leave. Colonialism has only worked when most of the natives have been exterminated. But often, as in occupied Algeria, it is the settlers who flee. Eventually, the Palestinians will not be willing to compromise and seek one state for both people. Does the world want to further radicalise them?

Do not be deceived: the persistence of the Palestine problem is the main motive for every anti-American militant in the Arab world and beyond. But now the Bush administration has added Iraq and Afghanistan as additional grievances. America has lost its influence on the Arab masses, even if it can still apply pressure on Arab regimes. But reformists and elites in the Arab world want nothing to do with America.

A failed American administration departs, the promise of a Palestinian state a lie, as more Palestinians are murdered. A new president comes to power, but the people of the Middle East have too much bitter experience of US administrations to have any hope for change. President-elect Obama, Vice President-elect Biden and incoming secretary of state Hillary Clinton have not demonstrated that their view of the Middle East is at all different from previous administrations. As the world prepares to celebrate a new year, how long before it is once again made to feel the pain of those whose oppression it either ignores or supports? **CT**

Nir Rosen's book, "In the Belly of the Green Bird: The Triumph of the Martyrs in Iraq," is published by Simon and Schuster

A NEW GENERATION OF MILITANTS

CHRIS HEDGES

Can anyone who is following the Israeli air attacks on Gaza – the buildings blown to rubble, the children killed on their way to school, the long rows of mutilated corpses, the wailing mothers and wives, the crowds of terrified Palestinians not knowing where to flee, the hospitals so overburdened and out of supplies they cannot treat the wounded, and our studied, callous indifference to this widespread human suffering – wonder why we are hated?

Our self-righteous celebration of ourselves and our supposed virtue is as false as that of Israel. We have become monsters, militarized bullies, heartless and savage. We are a party to human slaughter, a flagrant war crime, and do nothing. We forget that the innocents who suffer and die in Gaza are a reflection of ourselves, of how we might have been should fate and time and geography have made the circumstances of our birth different. We forget that we are all absurd

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We forget that the innocents who suffer and die in Gaza are a reflection of ourselves, of how we might have been should fate and time and geography have made the circumstances of our birth different

and vulnerable creatures. We all have the capacity to fear and hate and love. “Expose thyself to what wretches feel,” King Lear said, entering the mud and straw hovel of Poor Tom, “and show the heavens more just.”

Privilege and power, especially military power, is a dangerous narcotic. Violence destroys those who bear the brunt of its force, but also those who try to use it to become gods. Over 350 Palestinians have been killed, many of them civilians, and over 1,000 have been wounded since the air attacks began.

Ehud Barak, Israel’s defense minister, said Israel is engaged in a “war to the bitter end” against Hamas in Gaza. A war? Israel uses sophisticated attack jets and naval vessels to bomb densely crowded refugee camps and slums, to attack a population that has no air force, no air defense, no navy, no heavy weapons, no artillery units, no mechanized armor, no command and control, no army, and calls it a war. It is not a war. It is murder.

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The UN special rapporteur for human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, former Princeton University law professor Richard Falk, has labeled what Israel is doing to the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza “a crime against humanity.” Falk, who is Jewish, has condemned the collective punishment of the Palestinians in Gaza as “a flagrant and massive violation of international humanitarian law as laid down in Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.” He has asked for “the International Criminal Court to investigate the situation, and determine whether the Israeli civilian leaders and military commanders responsible for the Gaza siege should be indicted and prosecuted for violations of international criminal law.”

Falk’s unflinching honesty has enraged Israel. He was banned from entering the country on Dec. 14 during his attempt to visit Gaza and the West Bank.

“After being denied entry I was put in a holding room with about 20 others experiencing entry problems,” he said. “At this point I was treated not as a UN representative, but as some sort of security threat, subjected to an inch-by-inch body search, and the most meticulous luggage inspection I have ever witnessed. I was separated from my two UN companions, who were allowed to enter Israel. At this point I was taken to the airport detention facility a mile or so away, required to put all my bags and cell phone in a room, taken to a locked, tiny room that had five other detainees, smelled of urine and filth, and was an unwelcome invitation to claustrophobia. I spent the next 15 hours so confined, which amounted to a cram course on the miseries of prison life, including dirty sheets, inedible food, and

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There are reports that the sonic booms associated with Israeli overflights have caused widespread deafness, especially among children. Gazan children need thousands of hearing aids

either lights that were too bright or darkness controlled from the guard office.”

The foreign press has been, like Falk, barred by Israel from entering Gaza to report on the destruction.

Israel’s stated aim of halting home-made rockets fired from Gaza into Israel remains unfulfilled. Gaza militants have fired more than 100 rockets and mortars into Israel, killing four people and wounding nearly two dozen more, since Israel unleashed its air assault. Israel has threatened to launch a ground assault and has called up 6,500 army reservists. It has massed tanks on the Gaza border and declared the area a closed military zone.

The rocket attacks by Hamas are, as Falk points out, also criminal violations of international law. But as Falk notes, “... such Palestinian behavior does not legalize Israel’s imposition of a collective punishment of a life- and health-threatening character on the people of Gaza, and should not distract the UN or international society from discharging their fundamental moral and legal duty to render protection to the Palestinian people.”

“It is an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe that each day poses the entire 1.5 million Gazans to an unspeakable ordeal, to a struggle to survive in terms of their health,” Falk has said of the ongoing Israeli blockade of Gaza. “This is an increasingly precarious condition. A recent study reports that 46 percent of all Gazan children suffer from acute anemia. There are reports that the sonic booms associated with Israeli overflights have caused widespread deafness, especially among children. Gazan children need thousands of hearing aids. Malnutrition is extremely

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high in a number of different dimensions and affects 75 percent of Gazans. There are widespread mental disorders, especially among young people without the will to live. Over 50 percent of Gazan children under the age of 12 have been found to have no will to live.”

Before the air assaults, Gaza spent 12 hours a day without power, which can be a death sentence to the severely ill in hospitals. Most of Gaza is now without power. There are few drugs and little medicine, including no cancer or cystic fibrosis medication.

Hospitals have generators but often lack fuel. Medical equipment, including one of Gaza’s three CT scanners, has been destroyed by power surges and fluctuations. Medical staff cannot control the temperature of incubators for newborns. And Israel has revoked most exit visas, meaning some of those who need specialized care, including cancer patients and those in need of kidney dialysis, have died.

Of the 230 Gazans estimated to have died last year because they were denied proper medical care, several spent their final hours at Israeli crossing points where they were refused entry into Israel. The statistics gathered on children—half of Gaza’s population is under the age of 17—are increasingly grim. About 45 percent of children in Gaza have iron deficiency from a lack of fruit and vegetables, and 18 percent have stunted growth.

“It is macabre,” Falk said of the blockade. “I don’t know of anything that exactly fits this situation. People have been referring to the Warsaw ghetto as the nearest analog in modern times.”

“There is no structure of an occupation that endured for decades and involved

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The point of the Israeli attack, ostensibly, is to break Hamas, the radical Islamic group that was elected to power in 2007. But Hamas has repeatedly proposed long-term truces with Israel and offered to negotiate a permanent truce

this kind of oppressive circumstances,” the rapporteur added. “The magnitude, the deliberateness, the violations of international humanitarian law, the impact on the health, lives and survival and the overall conditions warrant the characterization of a crime against humanity. This occupation is the direct intention by the Israeli military and civilian authorities. They are responsible and should be held accountable.”

The point of the Israeli attack, ostensibly, is to break Hamas, the radical Islamic group that was elected to power in 2007. But Hamas has repeatedly proposed long-term truces with Israel and offered to negotiate a permanent truce. During the last cease-fire, established through Egyptian intermediaries in July, Hamas upheld the truce although Israel refused to ease the blockade. It was Israel that, on Nov. 4, initiated an armed attack that violated the truce and killed six Palestinians. It was only then that Hamas resumed firing rockets at Israel.

“This is a crime of survival,” Falk said of the rocket attacks by Palestinians. “Israel has put the Gazans in a set of circumstances where they either have to accept whatever is imposed on them or resist in any way available to them. That is a horrible dilemma to impose upon a people. This does not alleviate the Palestinians, and Gazans in particular, for accountability for doing these acts involving rocket fire, but it also imposes some responsibility on Israel for creating these circumstances.”

Israel seeks to break the will of the Palestinians to resist. The Israeli government has demonstrated little interest in diplomacy or a peaceful solution. The rapid expansion of Jewish settlements

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on the West Bank is an effort to thwart the possibility of a two-state solution by gobbling up vast tracts of Palestinian real estate. Israel also appears to want to thrust the impoverished Gaza Strip onto Egypt. Dozens of tunnels had been the principal means for food and goods, connecting Gaza to Egypt. Israel had permitted the tunnels to operate, most likely as part of an effort to further cut Gaza off from Israel. This ended, however, when Israeli fighter jets bombed over 40 tunnels along Gaza's border with Egypt. The Israeli military said that the tunnels, on the Gaza side of the border, were used for smuggling weapons, explosives and fugitives. Egypt has sealed its border and refused to let distraught Palestinians enter its territory.

"Israel, all along, has not been prepared to enter into diplomatic process that gives the Palestinians a viable state," Falk said. "They [the Israelis] feel time is on their side. They feel they can create enough facts on the ground so people will come to the conclusion a viable state cannot emerge."

The use of terror and hunger to break a hostile population is one of the oldest forms of warfare. I watched the Bosnian Serbs employ the same tactic in Sarajevo. Those who orchestrate such sieges do not grasp the terrible rage born of

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Those who orchestrate such sieges do not grasp the terrible rage born of long humiliation, indiscriminate violence and abuse

long humiliation, indiscriminate violence and abuse. A father or a mother whose child dies because of a lack of vaccines or proper medical care does not forget. A boy whose ill grandmother dies while detained at an Israel checkpoint does not forget. A family that loses a child in an airstrike does not forget. All who endure humiliation, abuse and the murder of family members do not forget. This rage becomes a virus within those who, eventually, stumble out into the daylight. Is it any wonder that 71 percent of children interviewed at a school in Gaza recently said they wanted to be a "martyr"?

The Israelis in Gaza, like the American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, are foolishly breeding the next generation of militants and Islamic radicals. Jihadists, enraged by the injustices done by Israel and the United States, seek to carry out reciprocal acts of savagery, even at the cost of their own lives. The violence unleashed on Palestinian children will, one day, be the violence unleashed on Israeli children. This is the tragedy of Gaza. This is the tragedy of Israel. **CT**

*Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer prize-winning reporter, is a Senior Fellow at the Nation Institute. His latest book is *Collateral Damage: America's War Against Iraqi Civilians*.*

THE LYING SILENCE OF THOSE WHO KNOW

JOHN PILGER

When the truth is replaced by silence,” the Soviet dissident Yevgeny Yevtushenko said, “the silence is a lie.” It may appear the silence is broken on Gaza. The cocoons of murdered children, wrapped in green, together with boxes containing their dismembered parents and the cries of grief and rage of everyone in that death camp by the sea, can be viewed on al-Jazeera and YouTube, even glimpsed on the BBC.

But Russia’s incorrigible poet was not referring to the ephemeral we call news; he was asking why those who knew the why never spoke it and so denied it. Among the Anglo-American intelligentsia, this is especially striking. It is they who hold the keys to the great storehouses of knowledge: the historiographies and archives that lead us to the why.

They know that the horror now raining on Gaza has little to do with Hamas or, absurdly, “Israel’s right to exist.” They

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Arriving at a scene of this carnage, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, was asked by a general, Yigal Allon, “What shall we do with the Arabs?” Ben-Gurion, reported the Israeli historian Benny Morris, “made a dismissive, energetic gesture with his hand and said, ‘Expel them

know the opposite to be true: that Palestine’s right to exist was canceled 61 years ago and the expulsion and, if necessary, extinction of the indigenous people was planned and executed by the founders of Israel. They know, for example, that the infamous “Plan D” resulted in the murderous depopulation of 369 Palestinian towns and villages by the Haganah (Jewish army) and that massacre upon massacre of Palestinian civilians in such places as Deir Yassin, al-Dawayima, Eilaboun, Jish, Ramle and Lydda are referred to in official records as “ethnic cleansing.”

Arriving at a scene of this carnage, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, was asked by a general, Yigal Allon, “What shall we do with the Arabs?” Ben-Gurion, reported the Israeli historian Benny Morris, “made a dismissive, energetic gesture with his hand and said, ‘Expel them’.

The order to expel an entire population “without attention to age” was signed by Yitzhak Rabin, a future prime

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minister promoted by the world's most efficient propaganda as a peacemaker. The terrible irony of this was addressed only in passing, such as when the Mapan Party co-leader Meir Ya'ari noted "how easily" Israel's leaders spoke of how it was "possible and permissible to take women, children and old men and to fill the roads with them because such is the imperative of strategy ... who remembers who used this means against our people during the [Second World] war ... we are appalled."

Every subsequent "war" Israel has waged has had the same objective: the expulsion of the native people and the theft of more and more land. The lie of David and Goliath, of perennial victim, reached its apogee in 1967 when the propaganda became a righteous fury that claimed the Arab states had struck first.

Since then, mostly Jewish truth-tellers such as Avi Schlaim, Noam Chomsky, the late Tanya Reinhart, Neve Gordon, Tom Segev, Uri Avnery, Ilan Pappé and Norman Finklestein have dispatched this and other myths and revealed a state shorn of the humane traditions of Judaism, whose unrelenting militarism is the sum of an expansionist, lawless and racist ideology called zionism.

"It seems," wrote the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé on 2 January, "that even the most horrendous crimes, such as the genocide in Gaza, are treated as desperate events, unconnected to anything that happened in the past and not associated with any ideology or system ... Very much as the apartheid ideology explained the oppressive policies of the South African government, this ideology – in its most consensual and simplistic variety – has allowed all the Israeli governments in the

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past and the present to dehumanize the Palestinians wherever they are and strive to destroy them. The means altered from period to period, from location to location, as did the narrative covering up these atrocities. But there is a clear pattern [of genocide].”

In Gaza, the enforced starvation and denial of humanitarian aid, the piracy of life-giving resources such as fuel and water, the denial of medicines and treatment, the systematic destruction of infrastructure and the killing and maiming of the civilian population, 50 per cent of whom are children, meet the international standard of the Genocide Convention. “Is it an irresponsible overstatement,” asked Richard Falk, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and international law authority at Princeton University, “to associate the treatment of Palestinians with this criminalized Nazi record of collective atrocity? I think not.”

In describing a “holocaust-in-the-making,” Falk was alluding to the Nazis’ establishment of Jewish ghettos in Poland. For one month in 1943, the captive Polish Jews led by Mordechai Anielewicz fought off the German army and the SS, but their resistance was finally crushed and the Nazis exacted their final revenge. Falk is also a Jew. Today’s holocaust-in-the-making, which began with Ben-Gurion’s Plan D, is in its final stages. The difference today is that it is a joint US-Israeli project.

The F-16 jet fighters, the 250-pound “smart” GBU-39 bombs supplied on the eve of the attack on Gaza, having been approved by a Congress dominated by the Democratic Party, plus the annual \$2.4 billion in war-making “aid,” give

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Washington de facto control. It beggars belief that President-elect Obama was not informed. Outspoken on Russia's war in Georgia and the terrorism in Mumbai, Obama's silence on Palestine marks his approval, which is to be expected, given his obsequiousness to the Tel Aviv regime and its lobbyists during the presidential campaign and his appointment of Zionists as his secretary of state, chief of staff and principal Middle East advisers. When Aretha Franklin sings "Think," her wonderful 1960s anthem to freedom, at Obama's inauguration on 21 January, I trust someone with the brave heart of Muntadar al-Zaidi, the shoe-thrower, will shout: "Gaza!"

The asymmetry of conquest and terror is clear. Plan D is now "Operation Cast Lead," which is the unfinished "Operation Justified Vengeance." The latter was launched by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2001 when, with Bush's approval, he used F-16s against Palestinian towns and villages for the first time.

In the same year, the authoritative *Jane's Foreign Report* disclosed that the Blair government had given Israel the "green light" to attack the West Bank after it was shown Israel's secret designs for a bloodbath. It was typical of New Labor Party's enduring, cringing complicity in Palestine's agony. However, the 2001 Israeli plan, reported *Jane's*, needed the "trigger" of a suicide bombing which would cause "numerous deaths and injuries [because] the 'revenge' factor is crucial."

This would "motivate Israeli soldiers to demolish the Palestinians." What alarmed Sharon and the author of the plan, General Shaul Mofaz, the Israeli Chief of Staff, was a secret agreement be-

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Something uncannily similar happened on 5 November last, when Israeli special forces attacked Gaza, killing six people. Once again, they got their propaganda "trigger"

tween Yasser Arafat and Hamas to ban suicide attacks. On 23 November, 2001, Israeli agents assassinated the Hamas leader, Mahmud Abu Hunud, and got their "trigger"; the suicide attacks resumed in response to his killing.

Something uncannily similar happened on 5 November last, when Israeli special forces attacked Gaza, killing six people. Once again, they got their propaganda "trigger." A ceasefire initiated and sustained by the Hamas government – which had imprisoned its violators – was shattered by the Israeli attack and homemade rockets were fired into what used to be Palestine before its Arab occupants were "cleansed." Then on 23 December, Hamas offered to renew the ceasefire, but Israel's charade was such that its all-out assault on Gaza had been planned six months earlier, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Behind this sordid game is the "Dagan Plan," named after General Meir Dagan, who served with Sharon in his bloody invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Now head of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence organization, Dagan is the author of a "solution" that has seen the imprisonment of Palestinians behind a ghetto wall snaking across the West Bank and in Gaza, effectively a concentration camp.

The establishment of a quisling government in Ramallah under Mohammed Abbas is Dagan's achievement, together with a hasbara (propaganda) campaign relayed through a mostly supine, if intimidated western media, notably in America, that says Hamas is a terrorist organization devoted to Israel's destruction and to "blame" for the massacres and siege of its own people over two generations, long before its creation.

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“We have never had it so good,” said the Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Gideon Meir in 2006. “The hasbara effort is a well-oiled machine.” In fact, Hamas’s real threat is its example as the Arab world’s only democratically elected government, drawing its popularity from its resistance to the Palestinians’ oppressor and tormentor.

This was demonstrated when Hamas foiled a CIA coup in 2007, an event ordained in the western media as “Hamas’s seizure of power.” Likewise, Hamas is never described as a government, let alone democratic. Neither is its proposal of a ten-year truce as a historic recognition of the “reality” of Israel and support for a two-state solution with just one condition: that the Israelis obey international law and end their illegal occupation beyond the 1967 borders.

As every annual vote in the UN General Assembly demonstrates, 99 per cent of humanity concurs. On 4 January, the president of the General Assembly, Miguel d’Escoto, described the Israeli attack on Gaza as a “monstrosity.”

When the monstrosity is done and the people of Gaza are even more stricken, the Dagan Plan foresees what Sharon called a “1948-style solution” – the destruction of all Palestinian leadership and authority followed by mass expulsions into smaller and smaller “cantonments” and perhaps finally into Jordan. This demolition of institutional and educational life in Gaza is designed to produce, wrote Karma Nabulsi, a Palestinian exile in Britain, “a Hobbesian vision of an anarchic society: truncated, violent, powerless, destroyed, cowed ... Look to the Iraq of today: that is what [Sharon] had in store for us, and he has nearly achieved it.”

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Are British universities now, as Terry Eagleton believes, no more than “intellectual Tescos, churning out a commodity known as graduates rather than greengroceries”?

Dr. Dahlia Wasfi is an American writer on Palestine. She has a Jewish mother and an Iraqi Muslim father. “Holocaust denial is anti-Semitic,” she wrote on 31 December. “But I’m not talking about World War Two, Mahmoud Ahmedinijad (the president of Iran) or Ashkenazi Jews. What I’m referring to is the holocaust we are all witnessing and responsible for in Gaza today and in Palestine over the past 60 years ... Since Arabs are Semites, US-Israeli policy doesn’t get more anti-Semitic than this.”

She quoted Rachel Corrie, the young American who went to Palestine to defend Palestinians and was crushed by an Israeli bulldozer. “I am in the midst of a genocide,” wrote Corrie, “which I am also indirectly supporting and for which my government is largely responsible.”

Reading the words of both, I am struck by the use of “responsibility.” Breaking the lie of silence is not an esoteric abstraction but an urgent responsibility that falls to those with the privilege of a platform. With the BBC cowed, so too is much of journalism, merely allowing vigorous debate within unmovable invisible boundaries, ever fearful of the smear of anti-Semitism. The unreported news, meanwhile, is that the death toll in Gaza is the equivalent of 18,000 dead in Britain. Imagine, if you can.

Then there are the academics, the deans and teachers and researchers. Why are they silent as they watch a university bombed and hear the Association of University Teachers in Gaza plea for help? Are British universities now, as Terry Eagleton believes, no more than “intellectual Tescos, churning out a commodity known as graduates rather than greengroceries”?

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Then there are the writers. In the dark year of 1939, the Third Writers' Congress was held at Carnegie Hall in New York and the likes of Thomas Mann and Albert Einstein sent messages and spoke up to ensure the lie of silence was broken. By one account, 3,500 jammed the auditorium and a thousand were turned away. Today, this mighty voice of realism and morality is said to be obsolete; the literary review pages affect an ironic hauteur of irrelevance; false symbolism is all. As for the readers, their moral and political imagination is to be pacified, not primed. The anti-Muslim Martin Amis expressed this well in *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov*: "The dominance of the self is not a flaw, it is an evolutionary characteristic; it is just how things are."

If that is how things are, we are diminished as a civilized society. For what happens in Gaza is the defining moment

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What happens in Gaza is the defining moment of our time, which either grants the impunity of war criminals the immunity of our silence, while we contort our own intellect and morality, or gives us the power to speak out

of our time, which either grants the impunity of war criminals the immunity of our silence, while we contort our own intellect and morality, or gives us the power to speak out. For the moment I prefer my own memory of Gaza: of the people's courage and resistance and their "luminous humanity," as Karma Nabulsi put it. On my last trip there, I was rewarded with a spectacle of Palestinian flags fluttering in unlikely places. It was dusk and children had done this. No one told them to do it. They made flagpoles out of sticks tied together, and a few of them climbed on to a wall and held the flag between them, some silently, others crying out. They do this every day when they know foreigners are leaving, believing the world will not forget them. **CT**

*John Pilger's latest book, **Freedom Next Time**, is now available in paperback.*

THE MONSTROSITY OF WAR

DAHR JAMAIL

“Foreseen for so many years: these evils, this monstrous violence, these massive agonies: no easier to bear.” – Robinson Jeffers, American poet

Agence France-Presse reports that the first person killed when the Israeli military began to enter Gaza on Saturday, January 3, was a Palestinian child.

The following day, a Palestinian woman and her four children were blown to pieces when Israeli warplanes bombed their home. They are among the 521 victims (at the time of this writing) of the ongoing air and ground assault on the Gaza Strip by a 9,000 strong force, which the Israeli government has launched on one of the most densely populated tracts of land in the world, home to 1.5 million Palestinians, half of them under 17 years of age.

“The ground invasion was preceded by large scale artillery shelling from around 4pm, intended to ‘soften’ the tar-

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Israel began the military assault on Gaza on November 4, breaking the truce that Hamas had observed for many months. It went on to block food supplies to be delivered into Gaza by the UN Relief Works and World Food Program

gets as artillery batteries deployed along the Strip in recent days began bombarding Hamas targets and open areas near the border,” Israel’s *Haaretz* newspaper wrote of the onslaught. “Hundreds of shells were fired, including cluster bombs aimed at open areas.”

Israel began the military assault on Gaza on November 4, breaking the truce that Hamas had observed for many months. It went on to block food supplies to be delivered into Gaza by the UN Relief Works and World Food Program. The next casualty was the crucial fuel delivery service used to run Gaza’s power plant. Finally, Israel banned journalists and aid workers from entering Gaza.

It is important to note that in mid-December, during a visit to Israel, UN Human Rights Investigator Richard Falk called the Israeli blockade of Gaza “a crime against humanity” and a “flagrant and massive violation of international law.”

Falk, a professor emeritus of interna-

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tional law at Princeton University and United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, urged the UN to invoke “the agreed norm of a responsibility to protect a civilian population being collectively punished by policies that amount to a Crime Against Humanity.” Falk also called for an International Criminal Court investigation of Israeli military and civilian officials for potential prosecution.

For this, he was detained at Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion Airport for 20 hours before being expelled from Israel.

As Israeli tanks and ground troops pour into Gaza to engage in the worst kind of combat (should we even measure types of warfare against one another?), urban warfare, the atrocities on both sides continue, and one may assume that the situation will only worsen with time, as it inevitably does in progressive stages of war.

“Operation Cast Lead” as Israel’s latest offensive is named, has claimed, since December 27, over 520 Palestinian lives. Gaza medical officials put the number of wounded at over 2,400, most of them civilians.

Hamas rockets have killed five Israelis, one of them a soldier and four of them civilians. As with Israeli attacks that kill and wound Palestinian civilians are a war crime, Hamas firing their grossly inaccurate rockets into Israel, which then wound and kill Israeli civilians, is also a war crime.

According to KPFA radio correspondent Sameh Habeeb, “Around 17 people [from the Al-Atatra family] were killed in Bait Lahia town north of Gaza. Amongst them were several children, two brothers, 20-year-olds and many old men who were

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The slaughter only compounds the hardships that Palestinians have suffered due to the severe shortages of food and medical supplies accruing from the two-year-old economic blockade imposed upon Gaza by Israel

all killed by one rocket.” Habeeb also reports of Israeli war planes striking water plants, dozens of houses, the use of white phosphorous incendiary weapons and of at least 15 mosques having been bombed. Dozens of people have been killed in the attacks against the mosques. Israeli Foreign Minister Ms. Tzipi Livni explains patiently, “But a war is a war; these things can happen. This is not our intention, but we cannot avoid completely any kind of civilian casualties. But the responsibility for this lies on Hamas’ shoulders.” The slaughter only compounds the hardships that Palestinians have suffered due to the severe shortages of food and medical supplies accruing from the two-year-old economic blockade imposed upon Gaza by Israel.

In 2006, Dov Weisglass, an adviser to the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, said of the blockade: “The idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger.”

The UN has warned that there are “critical gaps” in aid reaching Gaza, despite claims from Livni that aid was getting through.

Christopher Gunness, the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) spokesman, dismisses the claim that there is no humanitarian crisis as an absurdity. He informs us, “The organization for which I work, UNRWA – has approximately 9 to 10,000 workers on the ground. They are speaking with the ordinary civilians in Gaza ... People are suffering. A quarter of all those being killed now are civilians [the majority of the over 2,400 wounded are civilians]. So when I hear people say we’re doing our best to avoid civilian casualties that rings very hollow indeed.”

From Iraq, I had reported on how the

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US military regularly blockaded cities during military operations, disconnecting power, food, water and medical supplies. Let us not forget the March 2003 US invasion of Iraq followed 12 and a half years of genocidal sanctions against that country, which claimed the lives of half a million children. The people of Iraq, like the people of Gaza, had been placed on a “diet.”

Back in Gaza, the International Committee for the Red Cross said on Sunday its medical emergency team had been prevented by the Israeli military for a third day from entering the territory. Here again, is an uncanny similarity with the situation in Iraq, particularly during the two US sieges of Fallujah during 2004, when medical and aid teams were not allowed into the city, and teams already inside were regularly targeted by the military when they attempted to rescue the wounded.

KPFA correspondent Habeeb has reported of Israeli tanks preventing ambulances from reaching the wounded and of three paramedics and ambulance staff having been killed by the Israeli military while trying to rescue a family. The Oxfam aid agency also reported on the incident. Journalist activist Ewa Jasiewicz reported, “On 31st December, around 2 am, two emergency medical services personnel were targeted by an Israeli missile as they attempted to reach injured in the Jabaliya region, northern Gaza. The first died immediately, the second soon after of complications from his internal injuries. Two days later, two more medics were injured in the area east of Gaza, again in the line of duty, again trying to reach the injured. Under the Geneva Conventions, Israel is obliged to allow

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and ensure safe passage to medical personnel to the injured. Instead, Israel routinely targets them.”

I am aware that for those who have not experienced war firsthand, an accusation against a supposedly civilized government of the deliberate targeting of medical personnel, who are, in theory, protected by international law, is unbelievable and shocking. But there are others like me who have witnessed such tactics firsthand on several occasions. I saw it being used by the Israeli military during their assault on southern Lebanon during summer 2006, just as I had seen the US military doing in Fallujah in 2004.

Such is the madness of war.

Veteran journalist Robert Fisk describes war as “the total failure of the human spirit.”

How can anyone expect the wide-scale butchering in Gaza to be any different when the dogs of war have been let loose? Psychosis, mental illness, the specious “logic” of it all: The fundamental assumption that war can ever solve a crisis is false. Has this not been apparent from the beginning of history?

“These events of war were performed not by atavistic savages following the code of archaic rituals, but usually by trained troops from societies boasting civilized values, humane laws, moral education, and aesthetic culture. Nor were these acts specific to one nation – typically Japanese, typically American, or German or Serbian ... Nor were they confined to exceptional psychopathic criminals among the troops. No: this is what wars do, what battles are; conventions of rampage on both a monstrous collective and monstrous individual scale, implacable archetypal behaviors, be-

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haviors of an archetype, governed by, possessed by, commanded by Mars.” – James Hillman, Jungian psychologist, from “A Terrible Love of War”

At this point, it simply must be stopped. No human, no matter what their race, religion or nationality, should ever have to endure the effects of war. Yet, impotent governments across the world remain unwilling to intervene, some conniving proactively to aggravate the distress of the targeted populations. Egypt has completely closed the Rafah crossing, effectively cutting off aid supplies to the hapless surviving residents of Gaza.

It is the United Nations, however, that must be granted the undisputed crowning glory of impotence. In a move tried and tested for years now, last Saturday evening (Jan 3), the United States, yet again wielding its veto power to protect the actions of Israel, blocked approval of a UN Security Council statement expressing concern at the escalation of violence between Israel and Hamas and calling for an immediate cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. Perhaps, there is consolation in the fact that this was no great loss because, had the statement been approved, it would still have remained an empty gesture unable to check the violence.

Frustrated by the untenable nature of the crisis and obviously angered by the veto power of the United States in the UN, president of the UN General Assembly, Miguel d’Escoto Brockman of Nicaragua, blasted the Israeli action, and said, “I think it’s a monstrosity; there’s no other way to name it ... Once again, the world is watching in dismay the dysfunctionality of the Security Council.”

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Professor Falk, in a recent article titled “Understanding the Gaza Catastrophe,” writes, “The people of Gaza are victims of geopolitics at its inhumane worst: producing what Israel itself calls a ‘total war’ against an essentially defenseless society that lacks any defensive military capability whatsoever and is completely vulnerable to Israeli attacks mounted by F-16 bombers and Apache helicopters. What this also means is that the flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, as set forth in the Geneva Conventions, is quietly set aside while the carnage continues and the bodies pile up. It additionally means that the UN is once more revealed to be impotent when its main members deprive it of the political will to protect a people subject to unlawful uses of force on a large scale. Finally, this means that the public can shriek and march all over the world, but that the killing will go on as if nothing is happening. The picture being painted day by day in Gaza is one that begs for renewed commitment to international law and the authority of the UN Charter, starting here in the United States, especially with a new leadership that promised its citizens change, including a less militarist approach to diplomatic leadership.”

“And where two raging fires meet together, they do consume the thing that feeds their fury...” said Shakespeare in *The Taming of the Shrew*. But one of the worst conflict conditions in the world indicates otherwise. The fury and the fire rage unabated. **CT**

Dahr Jamail is author of Beyond The Green Zone: Dispatches From An Unembedded Journalist in Iraq (Haymarket Books)

MAKING THE PRISON MORE SECURE

JONATHAN COOK

There are two persistent myths about the aim of Israel's onslaught on Gaza: the first that it is an entirely defensive move, a way to end the rocket fire of Hamas; and the second that it is designed to restore the army's credibility after its failure to cow Hizbollah in 2006.

No doubt the Israeli army has been itching to repair its battered image, and for sure the rocket attacks from Gaza create domestic pressures that are only too clear to an Israeli government about to face an election.

But it is a gross misunderstanding of what is unfolding in Gaza to believe Israel's motives are capricious. The politicians and generals have been preparing for this attack for many months, possibly years – a fact alone that suggests they have bigger objectives than commonly assumed.

Israel seized this particular moment – with western politicians dozing through the holidays and a changeover of admin-

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Despite talk in Israel that a chance to topple Hamas is within reach, that option does not have to be pursued. Israel's aims can be achieved whether Hamas stays or falls – as long as it is crushed politically

istrations in Washington – because it ensured the longest period to implement its plan without diplomatic interference.

The pressure on Israel to reach a political settlement will grow, however, as the inauguration of Barack Obama on Jan 20 approaches. That explains why, as the army brings ever greater force to bear on Hamas's urban heartlands, the outlines of an Israeli plan are starting to become visible.

Despite talk in Israel that a chance to topple Hamas is within reach, that option does not have to be pursued. Israel's aims can be achieved whether Hamas stays or falls – as long as it is crushed politically.

Certainly, a permanent re-occupation of the enclave with its 1.5 million inhabitants is not desired by Israel, which withdrew its settlers and soldiers in 2005 precisely because the demographic, economic and military costs of directly policing Gaza's refugee camps were considered too high.

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It therefore needs another ceasefire similar to the one that expired on Dec 19. The questions are: who will “sign” it and what will be its terms?

Writing in the *Jerusalem Post* newspaper this week, Martin Kramer, a leading Washington neoconservative, suggested that Israel’s goal was to forge an agreement with Mahmoud Abbas and restore his rule in Gaza. “ Hamas would swallow the pill in the name of ‘national unity,’” he argued.

The idea that Mr Abbas and his Fatah party can ride into the Gaza Strip on the back of Israeli tanks may be a fantasy that makes sense to the neocons who brought us “regime change” in Iraq, but few in the Israeli government or army seem to believe it is feasible.

In any case, the distinction between Fatah’s “rule” over the West Bank ghettos Israel has created and Hamas’s oversight of the prison that Gaza has become is one Israel appears keen to maintain. The Israeli vision for the West Bank, in which significant parts are annexed, depends on its political severance from Gaza.

Instead, Israel is again pursuing its favourite mode of diplomacy: unilateralism. According to officials quoted in the local media, it wants a deal that is approved by the United States and western governments but passes over the heads of Hamas and the Palestinians.

At a recent cabinet meeting, Tzipi Livni, the foreign minister, put it this way: “There is no intention here of creating a diplomatic agreement with Hamas. We need diplomatic agreements against Hamas.”

According to the latest reports, the ceasefire would require, as before, that Hamas prevent all rocket fire out of the

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Strip, but it would also introduce what officials are vaguely terming a “mechanism” on the only border with Gaza not under Israel’s control.

During its lengthy blockade, Israel has been able to prevent goods, including food, medicines and fuel, from entering the Gaza Strip through crossing points on its two land borders while its navy patrols the sea coast. But Gaza also shares a short southern land border, next to the town of Rafah, with Egypt.

Before the 2005 disengagement, Israel sought to control this fourth border too by bulldozing swathes of Palestinian homes to create a no-man’s land between Rafah and Egypt. This area, overlooked by military watchtowers, was referred to as the Philadelphi corridor.

After the withdrawal, Israel hoped the steel wall along the Rafah border and its oversight of the crossing point into Egypt would ensure that nothing went in or out without its approval.

However, a small private industry of tunnelling under the wall quickly burgeoned, becoming a lifeline for ordinary Gazans and a route for smuggling in weapons for Hamas.

Egypt had little choice but to turn a blind eye, despite being profoundly uncomfortable with an Islamic party ruling next door. It faces its own domestic pressures over the humanitarian catastrophe that has been visibly created in Gaza.

Israel believes the current invasion will have achieved nothing unless this time it regains absolute control of the Rafah border, undercutting Hamas’s claims to be running the Strip. The “mechanism” therefore requires that technical responsibility is lifted from Egyptian shoulders.

According to the Israeli plan, it will

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pass to the Americans, whose expertise will be called on to stop the tunnelling and prevent Hamas from rebuilding its arsenal after the invasion comes to an end.

Israel may additionally seek the involvement of international forces to diffuse the censure the Arab publics are likely to direct at Egypt as a result.

Once Hamas has no hope of rearming and cannot take any credit for the Gazans' welfare, Israel will presumably allow in sufficient supplies of humanitarian aid to pacify western governments concerned about the images of Gaza's cold and hungry children.

Ghassan Khatib, a Palestinian analyst, believes that in this scenario Israel would probably insist that such supplies come

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Once the Gazan albatross is lifted from Israel's neck, Mr Abbas and his West Bank regime will be more isolated than ever

only through the Egyptian crossing, thereby “fulfilling another strategic aim: that of making Gaza Egypt's responsibility”.

And once the Gazan albatross is lifted from Israel's neck, Mr Abbas and his West Bank regime will be more isolated than ever. Undoubtedly, the hope in Israel is that, with Gaza disposed of, the pressure will grow on the Palestinian Authority to concede in a “peace” deal yet more Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. **CT**

*Jonathan Cook is a writer and journalist based in Nazareth, Israel. His latest book is *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair* (Zed Books). His website is www.jkcook.net*

MOLTEN LEAD

URI AVNERY

Just after midnight, Aljazeera's Arabic channel was reporting on events in Gaza. Suddenly the camera was pointing upwards towards the dark sky. The screen was pitch black. Nothing could be seen, but there was a sound to be heard: the noise of airplanes, a frightening, a terrifying droning.

It was impossible not to think about the tens of thousands of Gazan children who were hearing that sound at that moment, cringing with fright, paralyzed by fear, waiting for the bombs to fall.

"Israel must defend itself against the rockets that are terrorizing our Southern towns," the Israeli spokesmen explained. "Palestinians must respond to the killing of their fighters inside the Gaza Strip," the Hamas spokesmen declared.

As a matter of fact, the cease-fire did not collapse, because there was no real cease-fire to start with. The main requirement for any cease-fire in the Gaza Strip must be the opening of the border crossings. There can be no life in Gaza

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As a matter of fact, the cease-fire did not collapse, because there was no real cease-fire to start with

without a steady flow of supplies. But the crossings were not opened, except for a few hours now and again. The blockade on land, on sea and in the air against a million and a half human beings is an act of war, as much as any dropping of bombs or launching of rockets. It paralyzes life in the Gaza Strip: eliminating most sources of employment, pushing hundreds of thousands to the brink of starvation, stopping most hospitals from functioning, disrupting the supply of electricity and water.

Those who decided to close the crossings – under whatever pretext – knew that there is no real cease-fire under these conditions.

That is the main thing. Then there came the small provocations which were designed to get Hamas to react. After several months, in which hardly any Qassam rockets were launched, an army unit was sent into the Strip "in order to destroy a tunnel that came close to the border fence". From a purely military

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point of view, it would have made more sense to lay an ambush on our side of the fence. But the aim was to find a pretext for the termination of the cease-fire, in a way that made it plausible to put the blame on the Palestinians. And indeed, after several such small actions, in which Hamas fighters were killed, Hamas retaliated with a massive launch of rockets, and – lo and behold – the cease-fire was at an end. Everybody blamed Hamas.

What was the aim? Tzipi Livni announced it openly: to liquidate Hamas rule in Gaza. The Qassams served only as a pretext.

Liquidate Hamas rule? That sounds like a chapter out of “The March of Folly”. After all, it is no secret that it was the Israeli government which set up Hamas to start with. When I once asked a former Shin-Bet chief, Yaakov Peri, about it, he answered enigmatically: “We did not create it, but we did not hinder its creation.”

For years, the occupation authorities favored the Islamic movement in the occupied territories. All other political activities were rigorously suppressed, but their activities in the mosques were permitted. The calculation was simple and naive: at the time, the PLO was considered the main enemy, Yasser Arafat was the current Satan. The Islamic movement was preaching against the PLO and Arafat, and was therefore viewed as an ally.

With the outbreak of the first intifada in 1987, the Islamic movement officially renamed itself Hamas (Arabic initials of “Islamic Resistance Movement”) and joined the fight. Even then, the Shin-Bet took no action against them for almost a year, while Fatah members were executed or imprisoned in large numbers. Only

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After the murder of Arafat, Ariel Sharon declared that Mahmoud Abbas, who took his place, was a “plucked chicken”. Abbas was not allowed the slightest political achievement. The negotiations, under American auspices, became a joke

after a year, were Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and his colleagues also arrested.

Since then the wheel has turned. Hamas has now become the current Satan, and the PLO is considered by many in Israel almost as a branch of the Zionist organization. The logical conclusion for an Israeli government seeking peace would have been to make wide-ranging concessions to the Fatah leadership: ending of the occupation, signing of a peace treaty, foundation of the State of Palestine, withdrawal to the 1967 borders, a reasonable solution of the refugee problem, release of all Palestinian prisoners. That would have arrested the rise of Hamas for sure.

But logic has little influence on politics. Nothing of this sort happened. On the contrary, after the murder of Arafat, Ariel Sharon declared that Mahmoud Abbas, who took his place, was a “plucked chicken”. Abbas was not allowed the slightest political achievement. The negotiations, under American auspices, became a joke. The most authentic Fatah leader, Marwan Barghouti, was sent to prison for life. Instead of a massive prisoner release, there were petty and insulting “gestures”.

Abbas was systematically humiliated, Fatah looked like an empty shell and Hamas won a resounding victory in the Palestinian election – the most democratic election ever held in the Arab world. Israel boycotted the elected government. In the ensuing internal struggle, Hamas assumed direct control over the Gaza Strip.

And now, after all this, the government of Israel decided to “liquidate Hamas rule in Gaza” – with blood, fire and columns of smoke.

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The official name of the war is “Cast Lead”, two words from a children’s song about a Hanukkah toy.

It would be more accurate to call it “the the Election War”.

In the past, too, military action has been taken during election campaigns. Menachem Begin bombed the Iraqi nuclear reactor during the 1981 campaign. When Shimon Peres claimed that this was an election gimmick, Begin cried out at his next rally: “Jews, do you believe that I would send our brave boys to their death or, worse, to be taken prisoner by human animals, in order to win an election?” Begin won.

Peres is no Begin. When, during the 1996 election campaign, he ordered the invasion of Lebanon (operation “Grapes of Wrath”), everybody was convinced that he had done it for electoral gain. The war was a failure and Peres lost the elections and Binyamin Netanyahu came to power.

Barak and Tzipi Livni are now resorting to the same old trick. According to the polls, Barak’s predicted election result rose within 48 hours by five Knesset seats. About 80 dead Palestinians for each seat. But it is difficult to walk on a pile of dead bodies. The success may evaporate in a minute if the war comes to be considered by the Israeli public as a failure. For example, if the rockets continue to hit Beersheba, or if the ground attack leads to heavy Israeli casualties.

The timing was chosen meticulously from another angle, too. The attack started two days after Christmas, when American and European leaders are on holiday until after New Year. The calculation: even if somebody wanted to try and stop the war, no one would give up

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According to the polls, Barak’s predicted election result rose within 48 hours by five Knesset seats. About 80 dead Palestinians for each seat

his holiday. That ensured several days free from outside pressures.

Another reason for the timing: these are George Bush’s last days in the White House. This blood-soaked moron could be expected to support the war enthusiastically, as indeed he did. Barack Obama has not yet entered office and had a ready made pretext for keeping silent: “there is only one President”. The silence does not bode well for the term of president Obama.

The main line was: not to repeat the mistakes of Lebanon War II. This was endlessly repeated on all the news programs and talk shows.

This does not change the fact: the Gaza War is an almost exact replica of the second Lebanon war.

The strategic concept is the same: to terrorize the civilian population by unremitting attacks from the air, sowing death and destruction. This poses no danger to the pilots, since the Palestinians have no anti-aircraft weapons at all. The calculation: if the entire life-supporting infrastructure in the Strip is utterly destroyed and total anarchy ensues, the population will rise up and overthrow the Hamas regime. Mahmoud Abbas will then ride back into Gaza on the back of Israeli tanks.

In Lebanon, this calculation did not work out. The bombed population, including the Christians, rallied behind Hizbullah, and Hassan Nasrallah became the hero of the Arab world. Something similar will probably happen this time, too. Generals are experts on using weapons and moving troops, not on mass psychology.

Some time ago I wrote that the Gaza blockade was a scientific experiment de-

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signed to find out how much one can starve a population and turn its life into hell before they break. This experiment was conducted with the generous help of Europe and the US. Up to now, it did not succeed. Hamas became stronger and the range of the Qassams became longer. The present war is a continuation of the experiment by other means.

It may be that the army will “have no alternative” but to re-conquer the Gaza Strip because there is no other way to stop the Qassams – except coming to an agreement with Hamas, which is contrary to government policy. When the ground invasion starts, everything will depend on the motivation and capabilities of the Hamas fighters vis-à-vis the Israeli soldiers. Nobody can know what will happen.

Day after day, night after night, Al-jazeera’s Arabic channel broadcasts the atrocious pictures: heaps of mutilated bodies, tearful relatives looking for their dear ones among the dozens of corpses spread out on the ground, a woman pulling her young daughter from under the rubble, doctors without medicines trying to save the lives of the wounded. (The English-language Aljazeera, unlike its Arab-language sister-station, has undergone an amazing about face, broadcasting only a sanitized picture and freely distributing Israeli government propaganda. It would be interesting to know what happened there.)

Millions are seeing these terrible images, picture after picture, day after day. These images are imprinted on their minds forever: horrible Israel, abominable Israel, inhuman Israel. A whole generation of haters. That is a terrible price, which we will be compelled to pay long

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Millions are seeing these terrible images, picture after picture, day after day. These images are imprinted on their minds forever: horrible Israel, abominable Israel, inhuman Israel. A whole generation of haters

after the other results of the war itself have been forgotten in Israel.

But there is another thing that is being imprinted on the minds of these millions: the picture of the miserable, corrupt, passive Arab regimes.

As seen by Arabs, one fact stands out above all others: the wall of shame.

For the million and a half Arabs in Gaza, who are suffering so terribly, the only opening to the world that is not dominated by Israel is the border with Egypt. Only from there can food arrive to sustain life and medicaments to save the injured. This border remains closed at the height of the horror. The Egyptian army has blocked the only way for food and medicines to enter, while surgeons operate on the wounded without anesthetics.

Throughout the Arab world, from end to end, there echoed the words of Hassan Nasrallah: The leaders of Egypt are accomplices to the crime, they are collaborating with the “Zionist enemy” in trying to break the Palestinian people. It can be assumed that he did not mean only Mubarak, but also all the other leaders, from the king of Saudi Arabia to the Palestinian President. Seeing the demonstrations throughout the Arab world and listening to the slogans, one gets the impression that their leaders seem to many Arabs pathetic at best, and miserable collaborators at worst.

This will have historic consequences. A whole generation of Arab leaders, a generation imbued with the ideology of secular Arab nationalism, the successors of Gamal Abd-al-Nasser, Hafez al-Assad and Yasser Arafat, may be swept from the stage. In the Arab space, the only viable alternative is the ideology of Islamic

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fundamentalism.

This war is a writing on the wall: Israel is missing the historic chance of making peace with secular Arab nationalism. Tomorrow, It may be faced with a uniformly fundamentalist Arab world, Hamas multiplied by a thousand.

My taxi driver in Tel-Aviv the other

day was thinking aloud: Why not call up the sons of the ministers and members of the Knesset, form them into a combat unit and send them off to head the coming ground attack on Gaza? **CT**

Uri Avnery is an Israeli writer and peace activist with Gush Shalom

THE HOAX OF SDEROT

STUART LITTLEWOOD

Sderot, the Israeli township on which Hamas rockets have been “raining down”, is the main plank of the Israelis’ attempt to justify the bloodshed they have inflicted on the people of Gaza.

They use it *ad nauseam* to brainwash the media and their own people. They have studiously counted and broadcast the number of erratic, home-made Qas-sam rockets coming into Israel, without ever admitting to the huge number of missiles, bombs and shells that Israel’s high-tech military fires into Gaza with much more deadly effect.

Those sympathetic to Israel – can there really be any who still wish to be associated with such appalling crimes? – will be mortified to know that Sderot has no business being where it is. It is built on the lands of a Palestinian vil-lage called Najd, which was ethnically cleansed by Jewish terrorists in May 1948, before Israel was declared a state and be-fore any Arab armies entered Palestine.

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The 600+ villagers, were forced to flee for their lives. Britain was on watch as the mandated government, while this and many other atrocities were committed by terrorists.

Palestinian Arabs owned over 90 per-cent of the land in Najd and, according to UN Resolution 194 and also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they have a right to return home.

But as we have come to expect, Israel refuses to recognise the rights of others and will not allow them back. Anyway, what is there for them to return to?

The 82 homes there were bulldozed. Najd was one of 418 Palestinian villages and towns ethnically cleansed and wiped off the map by Zionist Jews. Its inhabit-ants, presumably, became refugees in Gaza and their families are probably still living in camps there. The sweet iron-y is that some of them were probably manning the rocket launchers.... Well, wouldn’t you?

Several months ago when Barak

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Obama visited Sderot (he didn't have the gumption to call in on Gaza) he spouted the well-worn mantra backing Israel's right to protect its citizens from rocket attacks. "If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I would do everything to stop that, and would expect Israel to do the same thing." Well said, Obama. But presumably you wouldn't be so stupid or arrogant as to live on land stolen from your neighbour at the point of a gun.

Find yourself some new advisers, Obama, ones that are savvy enough to brief you on the facts about Sderot and everything else about the Palestinians' plight. Relying on Israeli propaganda lies will only make you look like another mindless Zionist tool.

As the slaughter goes off the dial, what pearls of wisdom are we getting from the EU?

The Czech EU presidency spokesman defended Israel, saying: "We understand this step as a defensive, not offensive, action." Czech foreign minister Karel Schwarzenberg, currently leading a EU delegation to the region, said Israel had the right to defend itself, clearly reading off Israeli notes and forgetting that the Palestinians have an equal right to self defence. "Let us realize one thing: Hamas increased steeply the number of rockets fired at Israel since the ceasefire ended on Dec.19,"

This staunch ally of Washington understands nothing, as demonstrated when he went on to say that Hamas had excluded itself from serious political debate due to its rocket attacks on Israel. "Why am I one of the few that have expressed understanding for Israel? ... I am enjoying the luxury of telling the

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Find yourself some new advisers, Obama, ones that are savvy enough to brief you on the facts about Sderot and everything else about the Palestinians' plight

truth," said Schwarzenberg. This would have been achingly funny if ignorance at such a senior level weren't so dangerous! Those silly words earned him this cringe-making thank-you from none other than American Jewish Committee:

30 December 2008

Dear Minister Schwarzenberg:

On behalf of the American Jewish Committee, we write to thank you for your unwavering public recognition of Israel's right to self-defense against repeated rocket and mortar attacks from Hamas-controlled Gaza.

Your recent comments once again demonstrated the courage and moral clarity of your support for a fellow democracy, Israel, in the face of an unrelenting terrorist threat.

We applaud your principled leadership and your commitment to, in your words, "telling the truth." We will continue to rely upon both as the Czech Republic assumes the presidency of the European Union....

Respectfully,

**Richard J. Sideman
David A. Harris**

This is what happens when a juggernaut like the EU finds itself 'led' by a dumb-ass nobody in an hour of crisis. Back in the 1940s the Czechs supplied Jewish terrorists with weapons to be used against the British. How dare you, Schwarzenberg, make us Brits accomplices in Israel's crimes? Taint yourself if you wish, but DON'T TAINT US!

Sarkozy of France told the Lebanese press that the Hamas "bears major responsibility for the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza, because it decided to break the truce and begin launching

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rockets again into Israel.” Another one who doesn’t do his homework before opening his mouth.

And where is Tony Blair, our wonder peace-envoy in all this? Still trying to find the balls to go see Hamas. He says: “We are doing everything we possibly can to bring about an end to a situation of immense suffering and deprivation. I know over the next few days there are going to be intensive diplomatic efforts. We will increase our efforts to bring about a resolution to this situation.”

So why haven’t there been intensive efforts before now? How many must die or be maimed before you pull your finger out? Tell you what, Tony, if the Israelis won’t listen, say to them in a nice clear voice: “Ceasefire immediately or say goodbye to economic and technological co-operation.” If they still act deaf, you could add: “Say goodbye to your London embassy also. You loons are not taking us Brits down with you.”

Meantime Livni reiterated her country’s position, that it was Hamas and not the Palestinian people that were the tar-

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gets: “This is a war against terror... we have nothing against the Palestinians.” Great. So why does your illegal occupation continue? Why are you still making their lives a misery? Why slaughter their kids? Why trash their infrastructure and public institutions?

Today, I think the last (and most chilling) word goes to Dr Mahmoud Al-Zahar, a co-founder of Hamas. He warned: “They [the Israelis] have legitimised the murder of their own children by killing the children of Palestine. They have legitimised the destruction of their synagogues and their schools by hitting our mosques and our schools.”

Al-Zahar knows all about a father’s grief. He has been the target of assassination attempts. His two sons were killed and his daughter injured in Israeli raids.

CT

**Stuart Littlewood is author of the book Radio Free Palestine, which tells the plight of the Palestinians under occupation. For further information please visit www.radiofreepalestine.co.uk.*

WILL THINGS EVER CHANGE?

RAMZY BAROUD

In times of crisis, most Arabs tune in to Al Jazeera television. Sometimes it's comforting for the truth to be stated the way it is, with all of its gory and unsettling details, without blemishes and without censorship. When Israel carried out massive air strikes against Gaza on Saturday, December 27, terrorizing an already hostage and malnourished population, I too tuned in to Al Jazeera.

Within seconds I learned of the tally: 290 deaths and climbing, with 700 more wounded, all in one day. But as dramatic as this event may have seemed – the highest Israeli inflicted death toll in one day in Palestine since Israel's establishment in 1948 – there was nothing new to learn. Tragedies anywhere – natural or manmade – tend to lead to social, cultural, economic and political upheavals, revolutions even, that somehow alter the social, cultural, economic and ultimately political landscapes in the affected regions, save in Palestine.

I gazed pointlessly at the screen.

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Once again the US blamed Palestinians, and the Hamas “thugs” using words that defy logic, such as “Israel has the right to defend itself”

Learning of the aftermath of such tragedies seems more of a ritual than a purposeful habit. The Arab and international responses to the killings can only serve as a reminder of how ineffectual and irrelevant, if not complacent their timid mutterings are.

Once again the US blamed Palestinians, and the Hamas “thugs” using words that defy logic, such as “Israel has the right to defend itself.” The statement remains as ludicrous as ever, for a country like Israel with an army that possesses the world's most lethal weapons, including nuclear arms, cannot possibly feel threatened by an imprisoned population whose only defense mechanism are fertilizer-based homemade rockets. While Israel has killed and wounded thousands of Palestinians in Gaza (one thousand on Saturday alone) a handful of Israelis have reportedly died as a direct result of the Palestinian rockets in years. Do numbers matter at all?

European governments chose their

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words carefully, “expressing concern”, “calling on Israel to use restraint” and so on. Arab governments were, as usual, distracted with trivialities, protocols and easily lost sight of the crisis at hand.

Then the same, ever-predictable outbursts began. Passionate callers from all over the world called various TV and radio stations in the Middle East and shouted, yelled, cried, vented, called on God, called on Arab leaders, called on all of those with “living conscience” to do something. In turn, audiences too cried at home as they listened to the heated commentary and watched footage of heaps of Palestinian bodies throughout the Gaza Strip.

The passion soon spilled to the streets of Arab capitals, of course under the ever-vigilant eyes of Arab police and secret services. Flags of US and Israel, and in some cases Egypt were sat ablaze along with effigies of Bush and Israeli leaders.

Rising up to the occasion, some Arab governments declared their intention to send an airplane or two of medicine and food to Gaza, a few boxes clad with the donor country’s flag, flashed endlessly on local media. Meanwhile, news reports spoke of Palestinians attempting to flee the Gaza prison into the Sinai desert. They were met with decisive Egyptian security presence at the border.

Strangely enough, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas remained faithful to the script, despite Gaza’s unprecedented tragedy. On Sunday, he blamed Hamas for the bloodbath. “We talked to them (Hamas) and we told them, ‘please, we ask you, do not end the truce. Let the truce continue and not stop’, so that we could have avoided what happened.”

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Strangely enough, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas remained faithful to the script, despite Gaza’s unprecedented tragedy. On Sunday, he blamed Hamas for the bloodbath

Was Mr. Abbas informed of the fact that Hamas hasn’t carried out one suicide bombing since 2005? Or that the ‘truce’ never compelled Israel to allow Palestinians in Gaza access to basic necessities and medicine? Or that it was Israel that attacked Gaza in November, killing several people, claiming that it obtained information of a secret Hamas plot?

Even stranger that while Abbas has chosen such a position, many Israelis are not convinced that the war on Gaza was at all related to the Hamas’ rockets, and is in fact an election ploy for desperate politicians vying for Israel’s dominating right wing vote in the upcoming February elections. In fact, the Israeli design against Gaza had little to do with the ‘escalation’ of the rocket attacks of mid December.

“Long-term preparation, careful gathering of information, secret discussions, operational deception and the misleading of the public – all these stood behind the Israel Defense Forces “Cast Lead” operation against Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip,” wrote the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz* on December 28, which also revealed that the plan had been in effect for six months.

“Like the US assault on Iraq and the Israeli response to the abduction of IDF reservists Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser at the outset of the Second Lebanon War, little to no weight was apparently devoted to the question of harming innocent civilians,” said *Haaretz*.

And why should Israel devote a moment to the question of harming civilians or violating international law or any such seemingly irrelevant notions – as far as Israel is concerned – as long as their “Palestinian partners”, the Arab League,

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or the international community continue to teeter between silence, complacency, rhetoric and inaction?

By Thursday, January 1, the death toll climbed to 420, according to Palestinian medics and news reports, and over 2,000 wounded. A doctor from a Khan Yunis clinic in Gaza told me on the phone, “scores of the wounded are clinically dead. Others are so badly disfigured; I felt that death is of greater mercy for them than living. We had no more room at the Qarara Clinic. Body parts cluttered the hallways. People screamed in endless agony and we had not enough medicine or pain killers. So we had to choose which ones to treat and which not to. In that moment I genuinely wished I was killed in the Israeli strikes myself, but I kept running trying to do something, anything.”

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One has to wonder if Israel kills a thousand more, ten thousand, or half of Gaza, will the US still blame Palestinians?

Until Arab countries and nations translate their chants and condemnations into a practical and meaningful political action that can bring an end to the Israeli onslaughts against Palestinians, all that is likely to change are the numbers of dead and wounded. But still, one has to wonder if Israel kills a thousand more, ten thousand, or half of Gaza, will the US still blame Palestinians? Will Egypt open its Gaza border? Will Europe express the same “deep concern”? Will the Arabs issue the same redundant statements? Will things ever change? Ever? **CT**

Ramzy Baroud (www.ramzybaroud.net) is an author and editor of *PalestineChronicle.com*. His latest book is *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle* (Pluto Press, London).

THE TRUE STORY BEHIND THE WAR

JOHAN HARI

The world isn't just watching the Israeli government commit a crime in Gaza; we are watching it self-harm. This morning, and tomorrow morning, and every morning until this punishment beating ends, the young people of the Gaza Strip are going to be more filled with hate, and more determined to fight back, with stones or suicide vests or rockets. Israeli leaders have convinced themselves that the harder you beat the Palestinians, the softer they will become. But when this is over, the rage against Israelis will have hardened, and the same old compromises will still be waiting by the roadside of history, untended and unmade.

To understand how frightening it is to be a Gazan this morning, you need to have stood in that small slab of concrete by the Mediterranean and smelled the claustrophobia. The Gaza Strip is smaller than the Isle of Wight but it is crammed with 1.5 million people who can never leave. They live out their lives on top of

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To understand how frightening it is to be a Gazan this morning, you need to have stood in that small slab of concrete by the Mediterranean and smelled the claustrophobia

each other, jobless and hungry, in vast, sagging tower blocks. From the top floor, you can often see the borders of their world: the Mediterranean, and Israeli barbed wire. When bombs begin to fall – as they are doing now with more deadly force than at any time since 1967 – there is nowhere to hide.

There will now be a war over the story of this war. The Israeli government says, “We withdrew from Gaza in 2005 and in return we got Hamas and Qassam rockets being rained on our cities. Sixteen civilians have been murdered. How many more are we supposed to sacrifice?” It is a plausible narrative, and there are shards of truth in it, but it is also filled with holes. If we want to understand the reality and really stop the rockets, we need to rewind a few years and view the run-up to this war dispassionately.

The Israeli government did indeed withdraw from the Gaza Strip in 2005 – in order to be able to intensify control of the West Bank. Ariel Sharon's senior

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adviser, Dov Weisglass, was unequivocal about this, explaining: “The disengagement [from Gaza] is actually formaldehyde. It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians... this whole package that is called the Palestinian state has been removed from our agenda indefinitely.”

Ordinary Palestinians were horrified by this, and by the fetid corruption of their own Fatah leaders, so they voted for Hamas. It certainly wouldn't have been my choice – an Islamist party is antithetical to all my convictions – but we have to be honest. It was a free and democratic election, and it was not a rejection of a two-state solution. The most detailed polling of Palestinians, by the University of Maryland, found that 72 per cent want a two-state solution on the 1967 borders, while fewer than 20 per cent want to reclaim the whole of historic Palestine. So, partly in response to this pressure, Hamas offered Israel a long, long ceasefire and a de facto acceptance of two states, if only Israel would return to its legal borders.

Rather than seize this opportunity and test Hamas's sincerity, the Israeli government reacted by punishing the entire civilian population. It announced that it was blockading the Gaza Strip in order to “pressure” its people to reverse the democratic process. The Israelis surrounded the Strip and refused to let anyone or anything out. They let in a small trickle of food, fuel and medicine – but not enough for survival. Weisglass quipped that the Gazans were being “put on a diet”. According to Oxfam, only 137 trucks of food were allowed into Gaza last month to feed 1.5 million people. The United Nations says poverty has reached

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The American and European governments are responding with a lop-sidedness that ignores these realities. They say that Israel cannot be expected to negotiate while under rocket fire, but they demand that the Palestinians do so under siege in Gaza and violent military occupation in the West Bank

an “unprecedented level.” When I was last in besieged Gaza, I saw hospitals turning away the sick because their machinery and medicine was running out. I met hungry children stumbling around the streets, scavenging for food.

It was in this context – under a collective punishment designed to topple a democracy – that some forces within Gaza did something immoral: they fired Qassam rockets indiscriminately at Israeli cities. These rockets have killed 16 Israeli citizens. This is abhorrent: targeting civilians is always murder. But it is hypocritical for the Israeli government to claim now to speak out for the safety of civilians when it has been terrorising civilians as a matter of state policy.

The American and European governments are responding with a lop-sidedness that ignores these realities. They say that Israel cannot be expected to negotiate while under rocket fire, but they demand that the Palestinians do so under siege in Gaza and violent military occupation in the West Bank.

Before it falls down the memory hole, we should remember that Hamas offered a ceasefire in return for basic and achievable compromises. Don't take my word for it. According to the Israeli press, Yuval Diskin, the current head of the Israeli security service Shin Bet, “told the Israeli cabinet [on 23 December] that Hamas is interested in continuing the truce, but wants to improve its terms.” Diskin explained that Hamas was requesting two things: an end to the blockade, and an Israeli ceasefire on the West Bank. The cabinet – high with election fever and eager to appear tough – rejected these terms.

The core of the situation has been

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starkly laid out by Ephraim Halevy, the former head of Mossad. He says that while Hamas militants – like much of the Israeli right-wing – dream of driving their opponents away, “they have recognised this ideological goal is not attainable and will not be in the foreseeable future.” Instead, “they are ready and willing to see the establishment of a Palestinian state in the temporary borders of 1967.” They are aware that this means they “will have to adopt a path that could lead them far from their original goals” – and towards a long-term peace based on compromise.

The rejectionists on both sides – from Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran to Bibi Netanyahu of Israel – would then be marginalised. It is the only path that could yet end in peace but it is the Israeli government that refuses to choose it. Halevy explains: “Israel, for reasons of its own, did not want to turn the cease-fire into the start of a diplomatic process with Hamas.”

Why would Israel act this way? The Israeli government wants peace, but only one imposed on its own terms, based on

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The Israeli government wants peace, but only one imposed on its own terms, based on the acceptance of defeat by the Palestinians

the acceptance of defeat by the Palestinians. It means the Israelis can keep the slabs of the West Bank on “their” side of the wall. It means they keep the largest settlements and control the water supply. And it means a divided Palestine, with responsibility for Gaza hived off to Egypt, and the broken-up West Bank standing alone. Negotiations threaten this vision: they would require Israel to give up more than it wants to. But an imposed peace will be no peace at all: it will not stop the rockets or the rage. For real safety, Israel will have to talk to the people it is blockading and bombing today, and compromise with them.

The sound of Gaza burning should be drowned out by the words of the Israeli writer Larry Derfner. He says: “Israel’s war with Gaza has to be the most one-sided on earth... If the point is to end it, or at least begin to end it, the ball is not in Hamas’s court – it is in ours.” **CT**

Johan Hari is a columnist with the London Independent, in which this article first appeared.

WASHINGTON BEARS BLAME

BILL VAN AUKEN

The Israeli massacre of Palestinians in Gaza is a war crime for which not only the government of Israel but also that of the United States bears full responsibility.

The relentless bombing campaign, which in its first 48 hours has left at least 300 dead and 1,000 wounded, is a deliberate slaughter of innocent civilians and an act of state terror. The toll of casualties, many of them women and children, is certain to rise. As Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Gabi Ashkenaz put it, “This is only the beginning.”

The pretense that this assault is an act of retaliation for the recent scattered rocket attacks that have been carried out against Israeli territory from inside Gaza is preposterous. Israel, with the collaboration of Washington, has been preparing the current bombing campaign and threatened ground assault for months, under the cover of the supposed cease-fire with Gaza’s Hamas-led administration.

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The pretense that this assault is an act of retaliation for the recent scattered rocket attacks that have been carried out against Israeli territory from inside Gaza is preposterous

“These people are nothing but thugs,” said White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe, who insisted that Israel was only acting to “defend itself” against “terrorists.”

This is the official story that is largely echoed by the mass media and endorsed by the leadership of the Democratic Party. Few bother to point out that not a single Israeli was killed by the homemade rockets that supposedly justified Israel launching its Gaza bombardments and killing 300 (one Israeli died in a rocket attack afterwards.) Such a disproportionate response is hardly an aberration. During the last eight years, barely a score of Israelis have died in rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza. During the same period, Israeli forces have killed nearly 5,000 Palestinians.

Nor is there much concern over the fact that Israel chose to launch its bombing in the most crowded and desperately poor urban area on the face of the earth precisely at the hour that schoolchildren

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were making their way home. Under these conditions, ritualistic US statements urging Israel to “avoid civilian casualties” amount to mocking the victims.

Having maligned an entire people as “thugs,” the White House has given the green light for a bloodbath. More importantly, it has provided the indispensable resources for carrying out this crime, assuring Israel more than \$3 billion a year in US military aid and supplying the IDF with the deadly tools of its trade – F-16 fighter jets, Apache attack helicopters, TOW and Hellfire missiles and the fuel and spare parts needed to keep them in operation.

The dispatches from inside Gaza provide a graphic accounting of what Washington got for its arms and money.

Safa Joudeh, a freelance journalist in Gaza City, writes: “There were piles and piles of bodies in the locations that were hit. As you looked at them you could see that a few of the young men were still alive, someone lifts a hand, and another raises his head. They probably died within moments because their bodies were burned, most had lost limbs, some of their guts were hanging out and they were all lying in pools of blood.”

Ewa Jasiewicz reports from Gaza: “We saw a bearded man, on a stretcher on the floor of an intensive care unit, shaking and shaking, involuntarily, legs rigid and thrusting downwards. A spasm coherent with a spinal chord injury. Would he ever walk again or talk again? In another unit, a baby girl, no older than six months, had shrapnel wounds to her face. A relative lifted a blanket to show us her fragile bandaged leg. Her eyes were saucer-wide and she was making stilted, repetitive, squeaking sounds.”

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Having maligned an entire people as “thugs,” the White House has given the green light for a bloodbath

The Israeli newspaper Haaretz carried a report from its correspondent on the scene: “Relatives search among the bodies and the wounded in order to bring the dead quickly to burial. A mother whose three school-age children were killed, and are piled one on top of the other in the morgue, screams and then cries, screams again and then is silent.”

The *New York Times*, hardly known for its sympathy for the Palestinians, acknowledged: “Still, there was a shocking quality to Saturday’s attacks, which began in broad daylight as police cadets were graduating, women were shopping at the outdoor market, and children were emerging from school.

“The center of Gaza City was a scene of chaotic horror, with rubble everywhere, sirens wailing, and women shrieking as dozens of mutilated bodies were laid out on the pavement and in the lobby of Shifa Hospital so that family members could identify them. The dead included civilians, including several construction workers and at least two children in school uniforms.”

This is not self-defense; it is premeditated mass murder. The aim of the “shock and awe” campaign, as the assault on Gaza is widely described in Israel, is similar to that conducted by the US against Iraq – regime change.

Neither the Zionist regime nor Washington accepted the victory of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian election – hailed by the Bush administration (before the results were known) as part of a flowering of democracy in the Middle East wrought by American militarism.

In response, the US and its Israeli ally did their best to provoke a Palestinian civil war and military coup and, when this

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proved ineffective in ousting Hamas from power in Gaza, subjected the territory's one-and-a-half million people to relentless collective punishment. They imposed a siege that choked off supplies of food, medicine, potable water and electricity, condemning masses of people to poverty, unemployment, hunger and disease. The present killing represents a qualitative escalation of this merciless policy of making life for the people of Gaza so intolerable that the Hamas regime would fall.

The *New York Times* Sunday gave a concise analysis of the real relationship between the Israeli blockade and the rocket attacks from Gaza. The siege, it stated, had led to "the near death of the Gazan economy," adding, "While enough food has gone in to avoid starvation, the level of suffering is very high and getting worse every week."

Hamas had entered a cease-fire with Israel in a bid to reopen trade and alleviate this suffering. While the rocket attacks, supposedly Israel's main concern, fell "dramatically in the fall to 15 to 20 a month from hundreds a month," the *Times* noted, "Israel said it would not permit trade to begin again because the rocket fire had not completely stopped..." It was this intransigence that led to the collapse of the Israeli-Hamas cease-fire.

From the outset, Israeli actions have been motivated not by concerns for security, but rather by political aims. In the first instance, there is the desire to oust the Hamas administration in Gaza. Also in play are the desires of the Zionist establishment and military to offset the humiliation they suffered in Lebanon in 2006.

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ing a new order in the Middle East, one designed to assure undisputed US domination of the region and its oil wealth. Israel represents the junior partner in this bloody venture and is allowed to satisfy its aggressive appetites because they are seen as furthering US imperialist interests.

Regime change in Gaza is viewed by US policymakers as a steppingstone to similar changes elsewhere, particularly in Syria and Iran. Indeed, the unfolding events in Gaza foreshadow a broader intervention in the Middle East and the threat of a new war against Iran.

It is not, it must be noted, merely a question of the US and Israel. The assault on Gaza has enjoyed the direct or tacit support of the Arab bourgeois regimes, in the first instance that of Egypt, which has set up machineguns on its border with Gaza to shoot down fleeing Palestinians. The West Bank-based Palestinian Authority of President Mahmoud Abbas has likewise offered justifications for Israel's crimes.

The Bush administration has pursued its policy in the Middle East with relentless violence for the past eight years. There is no indication, however, that it will fundamentally change with the transfer of the White House to President-elect Barack Obama in less than a month.

Obama has maintained a discreet silence on Gaza, while consulting with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice from his vacation home in Hawaii. His aides have complacently insisted that there is "one president at a time" and it would be inappropriate for the advocate of "change we can believe in" to voice an opinion on the slaughter being carried out with US-supplied warplanes, bombs and missiles.

Elements of the Zionist establishment in Israel have voiced suspicion about

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Obama's policies, and there have been some suggestions that his approaching January 20 inauguration may have played a role in the timing of the Israeli assault.

It strains credulity, however, that Israel would have carried out its actions without prior consultations not only with the Bush administration, but with the Obama camp as well. Rather than trying to push through its Gaza attack out of fear of a less sympathetic environment in Washington after Obama enters the White House, it is far more likely that the Israeli government was doing Obama a favor by carrying out a crime that he supported before he had to take public responsibility for it.

The reality is that the Democratic president-elect has sworn to maintain US support for Israel and has repeatedly defended Israel's "right to self-defense," including during its criminal war against Lebanon in 2006 and in regard to its repeated attacks on Gaza. He has likewise promised to maintain the US pledge of \$30 billion in arms aid to Israel over the next decade.

Those he has chosen as his top aides – the congressman and former Israeli citizen Rahm Emanuel as chief of staff and his former presidential rival Hillary Clinton as secretary of state – are known for having criticized the Bush administration for being insufficiently supportive of Israeli aggression. During the election campaign last summer, Obama made a trip to the southern Israeli town of Sderot, which had been a target of rocket attacks from Gaza, to provide an explicit justification for the kind of assault now being waged.

"If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I'm going to do everything in my power to stop that," Obama said dur-

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Rather than trying to push through its Gaza attack out of fear of a less sympathetic environment in Washington after Obama enters the White House, it is far more likely that the Israeli government was doing Obama a favor by carrying out a crime that he supported before he had to take public responsibility for it

ing the visit. "And I would expect Israelis to do the same thing." He uttered not a word of sympathy for the Palestinians and gave no indication of what actions he expected from parents in Gaza who have watched their children torn to pieces by US-supplied bombs and missiles.

Meanwhile, Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi issued a statement providing an explicit endorsement of the Israeli bombing campaign. "When Israel is attacked," she said, "the United States must continue to stand strongly with its friend and democratic ally."

The response of Obama and the Democrats to the ongoing atrocity in Gaza represents a stark warning. Far from representing a last gasp of militarist aggression on the part of the lame duck Bush administration, the assault on Gaza is an indication of the shape of things to come.

The coming to office of the new Democratic administration will not spell an end to the crimes associated with US imperialism, but rather their continuation. Driven by the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression, American militarism will play an ever more prominent role in Washington's desperate struggle against its rivals for the domination of dwindling markets and vital resources.

The struggle against war and the fight to hold accountable the authors of war crimes from Iraq to Gaza can be advanced only through the independent mobilization of the working class in a new mass political movement based upon a socialist program. **CT**

Bill van Auken, the Socialist Equality Party's vice presidential candidate in 2008, This essay first appeared at the World Socialists Web Site – www.wsws.org

LONG AND BLOODY HYPOCRISY

ROBERT PARRY

Israel, a nation that was born out of Zionist terrorism, has launched massive airstrikes against targets in Gaza using high-tech weapons produced by the United States, a country that often has aided and abetted terrorism by its client military forces, such as Chile's Operation Condor and the Nicaraguan contras, and even today harbors right-wing Cuban terrorists implicated in blowing up a civilian airliner.

Yet, with that moral ambiguity excluded from the debate, the justification for the Israeli attacks, which have killed at least 364 people, is the righteous fight against "terrorism," since Gaza is ruled by the militant Palestinian group, Hamas.

Hamas rose to power in January 2006 through Palestinian elections, which ironically the Bush administration had demanded. However, after Hamas won a parliamentary majority, Israel and the United States denounced the outcome because they deem Hamas a "terrorist organization."

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Hamas then wrested control of Gaza from Fatah, a rival group that once was considered "terrorist" but is now viewed as a US-Israeli partner, so it has been cleansed of the "terrorist" label

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Unwilling to negotiate seriously with Hamas because of its acts of terrorism – which have included firing indiscriminate short-range missiles into southern Israel – the United States and Israel sat back as the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza worsened, with 1.5 million impoverished Palestinians packed into what amounts to a giant open-air prison.

When Hamas ended a temporary cease-fire on Dec. 19 because of a lack of progress in those negotiations and began lobbing its little missiles into Israel once more, the Israeli government reacted with its lethal "shock and awe" firepower – even though no Israelis had been killed by the post-cease-fire missiles launched from Gaza.

Israel claimed that its smart bombs targeted sites related to the Hamas se-

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curity forces, including a school for police cadets and even regular policemen walking down the street. But it soon became clear that Israel was taking an expansive view of what was part of the Hamas military infrastructure, with Israeli bombs taking out a television station and a university building as well as killing a significant number of civilians.

As the slaughter continued, Israeli officials confided to Western journalists that the war plan was to destroy the vast support network of social and other programs that undergird Hamas's political clout.

"There are many aspects of Hamas, and we are trying to hit the whole spectrum, because everything is connected and everything supports terrorism against Israel," a senior Israeli military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told the *Washington Post*.

"Hamas's civilian infrastructure is a very, very sensitive target," added Matti Steinberg, a former top adviser to Israel's domestic security service. "If you want to put pressure on them, this is how." [*Washington Post*, Dec. 30, 2008]

Since the classic definition of "terrorism" is the use of violence against civilians to achieve a political goal, Israel would seem to be inviting an objective analysis that it has chosen its own terrorist path. But it is clearly counting on the US news media to continue wearing the blinders that effectively limit condemnations about terrorism to people and groups that are regarded as Washington's enemies.

As a Washington-based reporter for the Associated Press in the 1980s, I once questioned the seeming bias that the US-based wire service applied to its use

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of the word "terrorist" when covering Middle East issues. A senior AP executive responded to my concerns with a quip. "Terrorist is the word that follows Arab," he said.

Though meant as a lighthearted riposte, the comment clearly had a great deal of truth to it. It was easy to attach "terrorist" to any Arab attack – even against a military target such as the bombing of the US Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983 after the Reagan administration had joined hostilities against Muslim forces by having US warships lob shells into Lebanese villages.

But it was understood that different rules on the use of the word "terrorism" applied when the terrorism was coming from "our side." Then, no American reporter with any sense of career survival would think of injecting the word "terrorist" whatever the justification.

Even historical references to acts of terrorism – such as the brutal practice by American revolutionaries in the 1770s of "tar and feathering" civilians considered sympathetic to the British Crown or the extermination of American Indian tribes – were seen as somehow diluting the moral righteousness against today's Islamic terrorists and in favor of George W. Bush's "war on terror."

Gone, too, from the historical narrative was the fact that militant Zionists employed terrorism as part of their campaign to establish Israel as a Jewish state. The terrorism included killings of British officials who were administering Palestine under an international mandate as well as Palestinians who were driven violently from their land so it could be claimed by Jewish settlers.

One of the most famous of those ter-

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rorist attacks was the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem where British officials were staying. The attack, which killed 91 people including local residents, was carried out by the Irgun, a terrorist group run by Menachem Begin who later founded the Likud Party and rose to be Israel's prime minister.

Another veteran of the campaign of Zionist terrorism was Yitzhak Shamir, who also became a Likud leader and eventually prime minister.

In the early 1990s, as I was waiting to interview Shamir at his Tel Aviv office, I was approached by one of his young female assistants who was dressed in a gray and blue smock with a head covering in the traditional Hebrew style.

As we were chatting, she smiled and said in a lilting voice, "Prime Minister Shamir, he was a terrorist, you know." I responded with a chuckle, "yes, I'm aware of the prime minister's biography."

To maintain one's moral purity in denouncing acts of terror by US enemies, one also needs a large blind spot for recent US history, which implicates US leaders repeatedly in tolerance or acts of terrorism.

For instance, in 1973, after a bloody US-backed coup overthrew the leftist Chilean government, the new regime of Gen. Augusto Pinochet joined with other South American dictatorships to sponsor an international terrorist organization called Operation Condor which assassinated political dissidents around the world.

Operation Condor mounted one of its most audacious actions on the streets of Washington in 1976, when Pinochet's regime recruited Cuban-American terrorists to detonate a car bomb that killed

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Chile's former foreign minister Orlando Letelier and an American co-worker, Ronni Moffitt. The Chilean government's role immediately was covered up by the CIA, then headed by George H.W. Bush. [For details, see Robert Parry's book *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

Only weeks later, a Venezuela-based team of right-wing Cubans – under the direction of Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles – blew a Cubana Airliner out of the sky, killing 73 people. Bosch and Posada, a former CIA operative, were co-founders of CORU, which was described by the FBI as "an anti-Castro terrorist umbrella organization."

Though the US government soon learned of the role of Bosch and Posada in the Cubana airline attack – and the two men spent some time in a Venezuelan jail – both Bosch and Posada since have enjoyed the protection of the US government and particularly the Bush family.

Rebuffing international demands that Bosch and Posada be held accountable for their crimes, the Bushes – George H.W., George W. and Jeb – have all had a hand in making sure these unrepentant terrorists get to live out their golden years in the safety and comfort of the United States.

In the 1980s, Posada even crossed over into another US-backed terrorist organization, the Nicaraguan contras. After escaping from Venezuela, he was put to work in 1985 by Oliver North's contra-support operation run out of Ronald Reagan's National Security Council.

The Nicaraguan contras were, in effect, a narco-terrorist organization that partially funded its operations with proceeds from cocaine trafficking, a secret

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that the Reagan administration worked hard to conceal along with the contras' record of murder, torture, rape and other crimes in Nicaragua. [See Parry's *Lost History*.]

President Reagan joined, too, in fierce PR campaigns to discredit human rights investigators who documented massive atrocities by US allies in Central America in the 1980s – not only the contras, but also the state terrorism of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan security forces, which engaged in wholesale slaughters in villages considered sympathetic to leftist insurgents.

Generally, the major US news outlets treaded very carefully when allegations arose about terrorism by “our side.”

When some brave journalists, like *New York Times* correspondent Raymond Bonner, wrote about politically motivated killings of civilians in Central America, they faced organized retaliation by right-wing advocacy groups which often succeeded in damaging or destroying the reporters' careers.

Eventually, the American press corps developed an engrained sense of the double standards. Moral outrage could be expressed when acts of terrorism were committed by US enemies, while studied silence – or nuanced concern – would be in order when the crimes were by US allies.

So, while the US news media had no doubt that the 9/11 terrorist attacks justified invading Afghanistan, there was very little US media criticism when President Bush inflicted his “shock and awe” assault on Iraq, a war that has resulted in

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Any attempt to cite the larger, more ambiguous and more troubling picture draws accusations from defenders of US-Israeli actions, especially the neoconservatives, of what they call “moral equivalence” or “anti-Semitism”

hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths.

Though many Muslims and others around the world have denounced Bush's Iraq invasion as “state terrorism,” such a charge would be considered far outside the mainstream in the United States. Instead, Iraqi insurgents are often labeled “terrorists” when they attack US troops inside Iraq. The word “terrorist” has become, in effect, a geopolitical curse word.

Despite the long and bloody history of US-Israeli participation in terrorism, the US news media continues its paradigm of pitting the US-Israeli “good guys” against the Islamic “bad guys.” One side has the moral high ground and the other is in the moral gutter.

Any attempt to cite the larger, more ambiguous and more troubling picture draws accusations from defenders of US-Israeli actions, especially the neoconservatives, of what they call “moral equivalence” or “anti-Semitism.”

Yet it is now clear that acquiescence to a double standard on terrorism is not just a violation of journalistic ethics or an act of political cowardice; it is complicity in mass murder. Without the double standard, it is hard to envision how the bloodbaths – in Iraq (since 2003), in Lebanon (in 2006) and in Gaza (today) – would be possible.

Hypocrisy over the word “terrorism” is not an innocent dispute over semantics; it kills. **CT**

*Robert Parry's new book is **Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq.** This essay originally appeared at www.consortiumnews.com*

IN THE US, GAZA IS A DIFFERENT WAR

HABIB BATTAH

The images of two women on the front page of an edition of the *Washington Post* at the end of December illustrates how mainstream US media has been reporting Israel's war on Gaza.

On the left was a Palestinian mother who had lost five children. On the right was a nearly equally sized picture of an Israeli woman who was distressed by the fighting, according to the caption.

As the Palestinian woman cradled the dead body of one child, another infant son, his face blackened and disfigured with bruises, cried beside her.

The Israeli woman did not appear to be wounded in any way but also wept.

To understand the frustration often felt in the Arab world over US media coverage, one only needs to imagine the same front page had the situation been reversed. If an Israeli woman had lost five daughters in a Palestinian attack, would the *Washington Post* run an equally sized photograph of a relatively unharmed

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To understand the frustration often felt in the Arab world over US media coverage, one only needs to imagine the same front page had the situation been reversed

Palestinian woman, who was merely distraught over Israeli missile fire?

When the front page photographs of the two women were published on December 30, over 350 Palestinians had reportedly been killed compared to just four Israelis.

What if 350 Israelis had been killed and only four Palestinians – would the newspaper have run the stories side by side as if equal in news value?

Like many major news organisations in the US, the *Washington Post* has chosen to cover the conflict from a perspective that reflects the US government's relationship with Israel. This means prioritising Israel's version of events while underplaying the views of Palestinian groups.

For example, the newspaper's lead article, which was published above the mothers' photographs, quotes Israeli military and civilian sources nine times before quoting a single Palestinian. The first seven paragraphs explain Israel's military strategy. The ninth paragraph describes

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the anxiety among Israelis, spending evenings in bomb shelters. Ordinary Palestinians, who generally have no access to bomb shelters, do not make an appearance until the 23rd paragraph.

To balance this top story, the *Washington Post* published another article on the bottom half of the front page about the Palestinian mother and her children. But would the paper have ever considered balancing a story about a massive attack on Israelis with an in-depth lead piece on the strategy of Palestinian militants?

Major US television channels also adopted the equal time approach, despite the reality that Palestinian casualties exceeded Israeli ones by a hundred fold. However, such comparisons were rare because the scripts read by American correspondents often excluded the overall Palestinian death count.

By stripping the context, American viewers may have easily assumed a level playing field, rather than a case of disproportionate force.

Take the opening lines of a report filed by NBC's Martin Fletcher on December 30: "In Gaza two little girls were taking out the rubbish and killed by an Israeli rocket - while in Israel, a woman had been driving home and was killed by a Hamas rocket. No let up today on either side on the fourth day of this battle."

Omitted from the report was the overall Palestinian death toll, dropped continuously in subsequent reports filed by NBC correspondents over the next several days.

When number of deaths did appear – sometimes as a graphic at the bottom of the screen – it was identified as the number of "people killed" rather than being attributed specifically to Palestinians.

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The reporter's script can be paraphrased as follows: Israel wanted a sustainable ceasefire; Israel needed to prevent Hamas from rearming; Hamas targets were hit; Israel was sending in aid and letting the injured out; Israel was doing "everything they can to alleviate the humanitarian crisis"

No wonder the overwhelmingly asymmetrical bombardment of Gaza has been framed vaguely as "rising tensions in the Middle East" by news anchors.

With the lack of context, the power dynamic on the ground becomes unclear.

ABC news, for example, regularly introduced events in Gaza as "Mideast Violence". And Like NBC, reporters excluded the Palestinian death toll.

On December 31, when Palestinian deaths stood at almost 400, ABC correspondent Simon McGregor-Wood began a video package by describing damage to an Israeli school by Hamas rockets.

The reporter's script can be paraphrased as follows: Israel wanted a sustainable ceasefire; Israel needed to prevent Hamas from rearming; Hamas targets were hit; Israel was sending in aid and letting the injured out; Israel was doing "everything they can to alleviate the humanitarian crisis". And with that McGregor-Wood signed off.

There was no parallel telling of the Palestinian perspective, and no mention of any damages to Palestinian lives, although news agencies that day had reported five Palestinians dead.

For the ABC correspondent, it seemed the Palestinian deaths contained less news value than damage to Israeli buildings. His narration of events, meanwhile, amounted to no less than a parroting of the official Israeli line.

In fact, the Israeli government view typically went unchallenged on major US networks.

Interviews with Israeli spokesmen and ambassadors were not juxtaposed with the voices of Palestinian leaders. Prominent American news anchors frequently adopted the Israeli viewpoint. In talk

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show discussions, instead of debating events on the ground, the pundits often reinforced each other's views.

Such an episode occurred on a December 30 broadcast of the MSNBC show, *Morning Joe*, during which host Joe Scarborough repeatedly insisted that Israel should not be judged.

Israel was defending itself just as the US had done throughout history. "How many people did we kill in Germany?" Scarborough posed.

The blame rested on the Palestinians, he concluded, connecting the Gaza attacks to the Camp David negotiations of 2000. "They gave the Palestinians everything they could ask for, and they walked away from the table," he said repeatedly.

Although this view was challenged once by Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former US official, who appeared briefly on the show, subsequent guests agreed incessantly with Scarborough's characterization of the Palestinians as negligent, if not criminal in nature.

According to guest Dan Bartlett, a former White House counsel, the Palestinian leadership had made it "very clear" that they were uninterested in peace talks.

Another guest, NBC anchor David Gregory, began by noting that Yasser Arafat, the late Palestinian president, "could not be trusted", according to Bill Clinton, the former US president.

Gregory then added that Hamas had "undercut the peace process" and actually welcomed the attacks.

"The reality is that Hamas wanted this, they didn't want the ceasefire," he said.

Columnist Margaret Carlson also joined the show, agreeing in principal that

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Arab audiences saw a different picture altogether. Rather than mulling Israel's dilemma, the Arab news networks captured the air assault in chilling detail from the perspective of its victims. The divide in coverage was staggering

Hamas should be "crushed" but voicing concern over the cost of such action.

Thus the debate was not whether Israel was justified, but rather what Israel should do next. The Palestinian human tragedy received little to no attention.

Arab audiences saw a different picture altogether. Rather than mulling Israel's dilemma, the Arab news networks captured the air assault in chilling detail from the perspective of its victims. The divide in coverage was staggering.

For US networks, the bombing of Gaza has largely been limited to two-minute video packages or five minute talk show segments. This has usually meant a few snippets of jumbled video: explosions from a distance and a momentary glance at victims; barely enough time to remember a face, let alone a personality. Victims were rarely interviewed.

The availability of time and space, American broadcast executives might argue, were mitigating factors.

On MSNBC for example, Gaza competed for air time last week with stories about the economy, such as a hike in liquor sales, or celebrity news, such as speculation over the publishing of photographs of Sarah Palin's new grandchild.

On Arab TV, however, Gaza has been the only story.

For hours on end, live images from the streets of Gaza are beamed into Arab households.

Unlike the correspondents from ABC and NBC, who have filed their reports exclusively from Israeli cities, Arab crews are inside Gaza, with many correspondents native Gazans themselves.

The images they capture are often broadcast unedited, and over the last week, a grizzly news gathering routine

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has been established.

The cycle begins with rooftop-mounted cameras, capturing the air raids live. After moments of quiet, thunderous bombing commences and plumes of smoke rise over the skyline. Then, anguish on the streets. Panicked civilians run for cover as ambulances careen through narrow alleys. Rescue workers hurriedly pick through the rubble, often pulling out mangled bodies. Fathers with tears of rage hold dead children up to the cameras, vowing revenge. The wounded are carried out in stretchers, gushing with blood.

Later, local journalists visit the hospitals and more gruesome images, more dead children are broadcast. Doctors wrap up the tiny bodies and carry them into overflowing morgues. The survivors speak to reporters. Their distraught voices are heard around the region; the outflow of misery and destruction is constant.

The coverage extends beyond Gaza. Unlike the US networks, which are often limited to one or two correspondents in Israel, major Arab television channels maintain correspondents and bureaus throughout the region. As angry protests take place on a near daily basis, the crews are there to capture the action live.

Even in Israel, Arab reporters are employed, and Israeli politicians are regularly interviewed. But so are members of Hamas and the other Palestinian factions.

The inclusion of Palestinian voices is not unique to Arab media. On a number of international broadcasters, including

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The soundbites are parroted by US broadcasters throughout the day and then reinforced by pundits, fearing the dangerous Hamas

BBC World and CNN International, Palestinian leaders and Gazans in particular are regularly heard. And the Palestinian death toll has been provided every day, in most broadcasts and by most correspondents on the ground. Reports are also filed from Arab capitals.

On some level, the relatively small American broadcasting output can be attributed to a general trend in downsizing foreign reporting. But had a bloodbath on this scale happened in Israel, would the networks not have sent in reinforcements?

For now, the Israeli viewpoint seems slated to continue to dominate Gaza coverage. The latest narrative comes from the White House, which has called for a “durable” ceasefire, preventing Hamas terrorists from launching more rockets.

Naturally the soundbites are parroted by US broadcasters throughout the day and then reinforced by pundits, fearing the dangerous Hamas.

Arab channels, however, see a different outcome. Many have begun referring to Hamas, once controversial, as simply “the Palestinian resistance”.

While American analysts map out Israel’s strategy, Arab broadcasters are drawing their own maps, plotting the expanding range of Hamas rockets, and predicting a strengthened hand for opposition to Israel, rather than a weakened one. **CT**

Habib Battah is a freelance journalist and media analyst based in Beirut and New York. This essay was originally published by Al Jazeera

MASSACRE AT A GAZA SCHOOL

ALAN MAAS

An Israeli attack on a United Nations school where hundreds of desperate Gazans had taken refuge from the 11-day-old onslaught has dramatized the barbarism of the latest stage of Israel's war on Palestinians.

At least 40 people were killed and as many injured in the January 6 shelling of the school, which was filled with men, women and children who had fled their homes in fear, and who thought they had found a safe refuge from the violence.

"Most of those killed were in the school playground and in the street, and the dead and injured lay in pools of blood," reported Britain's *Guardian* newspaper. "Pictures on Palestinian TV showed walls heavily marked by shrapnel and bloodstains, and shoes and shredded clothes scattered on the ground."

Earlier in the day, a family, including seven children between the ages of one and 12, was killed in an air strike on their home in Gaza City. The Israel Defense Force (IDF)

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The IDF claimed its forces were responding to mortar fire from Palestinian fighters inside the school compound

admitted it attacked the school, which UN officials had identified to the invaders as a building where people from the surrounding Jabaliya refugee camp had been encouraged to take shelter.

The IDF claimed its forces were responding to mortar fire from Palestinian fighters inside the school compound. "They shot back to save their own lives," said Israeli military spokesman Ilan Tal. Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni insisted that Hamas, the Islamist party that won elections for the Palestinian National Assembly three years ago, was "hiding amongst civilians." But John Ging, head of the UN Palestinian refugee agency which runs the school, said, "So far, we've not had violations by militants of our facilities."

This isn't the first time Israel has served up the same excuse – nor the first time the US media repeated it ad nauseum. Israeli officials claim that Hamas has "cynically and callously" put civilians at risk by positioning fighters among the population at large. No one in a position of power in Is-

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rael or the US cares to admit it, but Hamas is popular in Gaza. The idea that a core of hardened Hamas fighters willing to defend themselves against Israel's onslaught can be identified separate from the population as a whole is preposterous. Moreover, Gaza is one of the most densely populated places in the world, with 1.5 million people packed into a 140-square-mile area and subjected to worsening conditions that have led residents to describe it as the world's largest open-air prison. These close quarters made it "entirely inevitable if artillery shells landed in that area [that] there would be a high number of casualties," the UN's Ging said.

Despite this, no weapon or tactic has been too savage for Israel to use in its assault. When the Israeli military targeted a senior Hamas leader, Nizar Rayyan, it used a 2,000-pound bomb that killed him and 15 members of his family, and obliterated their home and surrounding buildings.

When the ground offensive began, Israeli forces used white phosphorous shells, allegedly as a smokescreen to obscure its troop movements, though this chemical weapon causes horrific burns if it comes in contact with a person's skin.

The US media report on the conflict as if Israeli and Palestinian military forces are evenly matched. Yet the casualties are horrifically one-sided. When four Israeli soldiers were killed by shells from their own tanks on January 6, the toll from these "friendly fire" incidents nearly equaled the total number dead from Palestinian resistance to the ground invasion and Palestinian rockets fired from Gaza at southern Israel.

These rocket attacks are the stated pretext for Israel's offensive against Gaza, and US and Israeli officials are united in

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The idea that a core of hardened Hamas fighters willing to defend themselves against Israel's onslaught can be identified separate from the population as a whole is preposterous

blaming Palestinians for breaking a six-month truce by firing them. But it was Israel that broke the truce with an attack on November 5 that killed six Palestinians. Palestinian fighters resumed firing rockets as a response, and though they have reached further into Israel than previously, the rockets haven't inflicted even a tiny amount of the carnage that Israel has with its US-supplied fighter planes, attack helicopters and advanced armaments.

Yet almost none of this penetrates the mainstream press in the US. In its latest editorial, the *New York Times* urged Israel to "end this conflict as soon as possible"—but not out of outrage at the human suffering in Gaza. On the contrary, the editorial repeated every false claim and distortion—that Palestinian rockets were "terrorizing" the people of southern Israel; that Hamas is to blame for breaking the truce; even that Hamas, a predominantly Sunni organization, is a mere "proxy of Iran" and its Shia-led government.

Instead, the *Times* recommends a settlement out of fear that Israel is pursuing its war past a "point of diminishing returns." So at what number of Palestinians maimed and murdered did the "returns" start to diminish? Hundreds? Thousands?

Israel has been able to rely on the US political and media establishment — Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives — taking up its every justification for devastating Gaza. It is up to opponents of war and supporters of the rights of Palestinians to live free from Israel's terror to expose the lies and protest these latest war crimes. **CT**

Alan Maas is editor of Socialist Worker. This essay was originally published at www.socialistworker.org



The bulk of the western media would have us believe that the cause of this war is Hamas's firing of mostly home-made rockets into Israel – which no state could tolerate without retaliation.

In this myopic fantasy land, there is no 61-year national dispossession, no refugee camps, no occupations, no siege, no multiple Israeli violations of UN security council resolutions and the Geneva conventions, no illegal wall, no routine assassinations, no prisoners and no West Bank

– Seumas Milne,
The Guardian, London

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