

A World Wide Intifada? Why?

by WILLIAM A. COOK

A satellite view of attacks against western interests spotlights the reality that a world-wide intifada against the "developed" nations of the west and their allies is already underway. Russian apartment houses and, recently, a theater, the Twin Towers in New York, two Bali discos, a French super tanker blown up off the coast of Yemen, an Israeli hotel destroyed in Kenya, a failed missile shot at an Israeli passenger plane off the coast of Africa, and others too numerous to mention demonstrate the magnitude of the effort underway to wake up the west to the consequences of its dominance over the lives and interests of peoples throughout the world. Recent events, coupled with the investigations of Jean-Louis Bruguiere, the French Judge who has been tracking terrorist acts for two decades, forces us to grapple with why this is happening. Bruguiere recently warned that France is one of the two or three countries "most at risk of attack due to its historic links to Algeria." "Islamic extremism," he noted, "is breeding like a virus in Europe." (World-Reuters, Sunday, Dec. 1, 2002)

What conditions prefigure the coming "Intifada" against the United States and the west? The first is misunderstanding of the deprived and displaced people of the world, a subject far too broad for this article. Let us concentrate on what Bin Laden told us was the most egregious cause: "You attacked us in Palestine. Palestine, which has sunk under military occupation for more than 80 years. The British handed over Palestine, with your (US) help and your support, to the Jews, who have occupied it for more than 50 years; years overflowing with oppression, tyranny, crimes, killing, expulsion, destruction and devastation" (Bin Laden, "Letter to America," 11/24/02). Harley Sorensen pointed out, tellingly, that Osama's letter had virtually no publicity in the American Press; America's corporate press does not want Americans to know why they are hated. (San Francisco Gate, Dec. 2, 2002)

Most citizens in the west, and certainly American citizens, do not understand the Palestinian people, their history, and their perception of the existence that has been thrust upon them, what I will label as "The Stolen Homeland"; the second is consciousness of the disparity that exists between the Palestinians and the Israelis and the reluctance of the state of Israel and its major supporter in the west, the United States, to engage that disparity, which results from the economic controls, the indignity and disrespect engendered by the Ultra-Orthodox Right-Wing Likud and the military, and this I label "The Chasm of Indifference and Desperation"; and, finally, the third is the corrosive destruction of a culture by brute force in the bulldozing of their memory and the destructive power implicitly present in globalization that impacts the uniqueness of a people's culture, its economic structures, and its values, what can only be labeled "Ethnic Erasure by Globalized Capitalism".

In many ways, these three form a complex interwoven fabric that makes it difficult if not impossible to see each clearly, yet, unless we make the attempt, we are doomed to find ourselves constrained to our homes through fear of the unknown individual(s) who must resort to self-sacrifice as the last resort to rectify the unacceptable disparity that allows no alternative.

The Stolen Homeland:

Most Americans know nothing about the way in which Israel was created. They do not know that Britain turned Palestine over to the UN for resolution because it could not continue its governance in light of the rising tensions that existed between Zionists and Palestinians. In 1947 the UN General Assembly resolved by a two-thirds vote to endorse the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state (Resolution No. 181). The Palestinians did not accept that resolution, yet the partition went forward even though the General Assembly had no legal authority to divide a country especially through the process of endorsing a Resolution. The proposed partition called for 55% of the Palestinian area to be given to the Israelis, yet they comprised slightly more than 30% of the population and owned only 6% of the land. The Jewish population was composed mostly of foreign-born immigrants, only one-third of whom had acquired Palestinian citizenship. In addition, the territory allocated to the Jews comprised the coastal plain from Akka to Ashdod and other fertile lands. The Palestinians were left with mainly mountainous areas and arid regions.

Americans receive most of their information regarding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict from corporate controlled, politically manipulated mainstream media. Few have the opportunity to scrutinize the reality of the history that has resulted in the tensions that exist in the mid-east. Few know that Palestinians are, in all legitimate ways, the indigenous population of the area; that the land now occupied by the Israelis was owned by the Palestinians; that in 1870, 98% of the population was Arab and only 2% Jewish; that in 1940, Palestinians accounted for 69% of the population even as Jews thronged to the area from Europe in an attempt to escape the Nazis; that in 1946, the year that the UN created Israel without the approval of the indigenous population, the Palestinians represented 65% and the Israelis less than 35% of the 1,845,000 who lived there; that Israel now occupies all but 22% of the Palestinian land having taken it in the 1967 war and consistently refused to return it to its proper owners in direct refutation of UN resolutions demanding its return; that Israel has created illegal settlements in Palestinian areas, with a population in excess of 400,000, taking land and aquifers from the Palestinians, 34 of those settlements created during the two year Prime Ministry of Ariel Sharon, and in direct violation of UN mandates.

Is it surprising that the Palestinians have rejected the existence of a state imposed upon its population by foreign powers? Is it surprising that it has rejected the Oslo Agreement when its full implementation was not part of the "final" settlement and provided no resolution of the refugee problem? Is it surprising that a people

occupied by a state supported by the world's greatest military power which supplies the Israeli people with more than 3 billion dollars for military hardware a year, more than any other nation receives from the US, finds itself oppressed and humiliated?

The Chasm of Indifference and Desperation:

On May 4, 2002, the New York Times reported that "It is safe to say that the infrastructure of life itself and of any future Palestinian state roads, schools, electricity pylons, water pipes, telephone lines has been devastated." The most recent estimate of the infrastructure damage alone by the UN and the World Bank comes to over 361 million dollars. The totality of Sharon's destruction can never be known because Sharon refused to admit the United Nations to inspect the carnage, but it is safe to say that if we limit our focus to the Human Rights Watch reports alone, the savagery is more than terrorism, it is barbaric. Palestinians, especially the families who suffered immediate devastation of homes and family members, cannot but perceive the dehumanization of their lot by the Israelis. HRW reports that 22 civilians in the Jenin refugee camp "were killed willfully or unlawfully" (5/3/02), civilians were used as human shields, medical personnel were killed, and civilian homes became military targets. Yet no one cared.

Perhaps nothing is so incomprehensible to the deprived as the indifference of those who are responsible for the deprivation. Nothing is more devastating to human dignity than to be ignored. Nothing is more destructive to communication among people than the hypocrisy of "developed", "democratic", and "Judaic-Christian" nations exploiting "under-developed", non-democratic, and non-Christian nations.

The United States, led by a "reborn" Christian, supported by a fundamentalist Attorney General and by fundamentalist denominations like Pat Robertson's, rally behind support of Israel because they believe that their God has determined that the Jews must be resident in "Judea" if they are to be converted to the one true faith, Christianity. They willingly accept the necessity of Sharon's slaughter of the Palestinians to accomplish that goal. It matters not that Christ said you should not take up the sword; the myths of the Old Testament shall carry the day, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." These are the Christians who support the right-wing elements among the Jews who call Palestinians "two-legged vermin" (former Prime Minister Golda Meir) and "drugged roaches in a bottle" (former Prime Minister Begin). These are bloodthirsty Christians unwilling to give their cloak to the beggar, unwilling to give shelter to the homeless, unwilling to give food to the hungry, unwilling to succor the weak and the dying. These are the Americans willing to provide on average \$500.00 per Israeli citizen per year beyond that provided for the military, but unwilling to provide comparably for the Palestinians. This is the born again President who extols Sharon, a man condemned by an Israeli court for allowing the wanton slaughter of thousands at Shabra, as a "man of peace."

Considering the slave-like conditions imposed on the Palestinians by the Israelis, it might be instructive to hear the thoughts of the former slave Frederick Douglas as he contemplated his condition: "I loathed them (my oppressors) as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men." And that inner anger tormented him day and night, "I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it I found myself wishing myself dead " Here is an explanation for the "suicide bombers," intolerable indignities and humiliations inflicted by those who are the chosen of God. They are acts of absolute desperation wrought by futility as Daoud abu Sway's family suggested as they attempted to explain why a father of eight would detonate himself: "That he did so illustrates the depths to which people caught up in this conflict are sinking." (L.A. Times 12/9/01)

Consider the slave-like conditions we as Americans have imposed on the deprived of the world to fuel our economy at home and we can understand how desperation will seek its solace in destruction through sacrifice. Such people need only a bin Laden, a man driven by hatred of the perceived oppressors, to bring the requisite money to achieve his ends, and the future state of fear for America becomes immediately apparent.

Israel's oppression of the Palestinians mirrors how the deprived of the world perceive America, a land that could receive the same condemnation from Hosea in 800BC: "Sins of greed are compounded by Israel's arrogance."

Ethnic Erasure by Globalized Capitalism:

Beyond America's image as overseer of Israel and protector of her right to exist, is the image created by America as the protector of transnational corporations. This image coupled with the presence of America's military creates a negative image of the US as the perpetrator of Third World exploitation, the destroyer of forests, minerals, metal resources, land, and people. And the people of these poor nations must live with the environmental disasters, soil erosion, pollution, poisonings from toxic waste, and industrial accidents. With only 5% of the world's population America emits 1.5 billion tons per year of carbon dioxide, a quarter of the world's total.

Hatred of America grows with each passing day. The most recent Pew Foundation Report detailing that dislike came out this week and shows that European states as well as Arab have the same loathing. People feel deprived, taken advantage of, and ignored. They see the disparate conditions because the west has made available, through satellite communications, the viewing of the standard of living available in the west, particularly in the US, since its programming dominates the airwaves. They understand that Americans and Europeans spend 17 billion a year on pet food, 4 billion more than the estimated annual additional total needed to provide basic health and nutrition for everyone in the world. (UN Human Development Report, 1997). The excessive use of natural resources in the US,

resources taken from Third World countries, explodes visually on the TV screen even in the worst of hovels in Africa, South and Central America, Asia, and the Mid-East. These are the deprived who have nothing to lose and much to hate. These are the people that the CIA and the FBI talk about when they warn Americans of future "terrorist" acts. As this anger erupts, America will live in the same atmosphere of fear that envelops Israel.

Consider the reality of this "Ethnic Erasure by Globalized Capitalism" and the perceptions and reactions it causes in the minds and hearts of the deprived as it prefigures attitudes and behaviors in lands beyond Palestine impacted by the west and particularly the United States. As transnational corporations spread their tentacles around the world, they create strangleholds on local governments forcing them to concede relaxation of tax income, release of land areas for industrial development, sale of natural resources, and exploitation of citizens. Martin Khor has noted how transnational corporations have moved their operations to Third World countries "where safety and environmental regulations are either lax or nonexistent." The result is exposure for Third World citizens to hazardous products, toxic or dangerous technologies, crippling drugs, pesticides and the like. (Global Economy and the Third World)

The introduction of global agreements that benefit transnationals has negated the standards forced upon these corporations in the United States, standards that require regulations to protect against child labor that regulate safety conditions, and protect workers' health. Neither NAFTA nor GATT imposes regulations that ensure worker protection in these areas. Sunday's Los Angeles Times (December 1, 2002) carried a magazine story detailing the end of Levi Strauss Company's production in America. Levi had to resort to production abroad because it is caught in the web of competition and must "chase low-cost labor." These wages reflect the full exploitation of people in "underdeveloped" countries: Guatemala, 37 cents per hour; China, 28 cents; Nicaragua, 23 cents; Bangladesh, 13 to 20 cents.

The transnationals have deforested more than half of the forest area in developing nations, created large infrastructures to support industrial projects, built huge steel plants, cement plants, vast highways, bridges, all requiring enormous land holdings taken out of the control of the weak nation states, all needing energy resulting in hydroelectric dams and nuclear power stations. These conditions result in displacement of thousands of people, the crowding of populations into cramped quarters in urban areas, sanitation problems, homelessness and poverty.

The chasm of disparity glares through the statistics: the richest fifth of the world's population receives 86% of global income while 1.2 billion live on the equivalent of less than a dollar a day. Edward Goldsmith explains the situation in these terms: "Even strong national governments are no longer able to exert any sort of control over TNCs (Transnationals) Indeed, TNCs are now free to scour the globe and establish themselves wherever labor is the cheapest, environmental laws are the laxest, fiscal regimes are the least onerous, and subsidies are the most

generous." (Development as Colonialism) Documentation of human exploitation in Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Malaysia, and Mexico is readily available. What is not available, then, is an understanding of the feelings that gnaw at the souls of the deprived: the sense of hopelessness, of indignity, of lack of respect, of dehumanization.

In addition, the United States military presence in a hundred and fifty nations, ostensibly for the protection of US interests, results in huge areas owned and/or controlled by a foreign power. As the US pours millions of dollars into the economy of these countries, the benefits are seen by the local population as going to the local power elite, as is evident most recently in the case of Saudi Arabia. But the same conditions have resulted in flare-ups in Japan, Korea, and Greece (until the US was expelled under the Papandreou regime in the early '90s). In short, the people of these countries are at odds with their rulers. This has been painfully evident in recent months as even Kuwait citizens have demonstrated against their government and the US.

As a result of America's monetary support since its founding in 1947, Israel has prospered militarily and economically at a rate far greater and faster than any other nation anywhere. The US has poured more than 3 billion a year into the Israeli military since 1947, an amount that since 1995 equals more than 8 trillion dollars. Considering that this investment ensures the continuation of the military-industrial complex in the US, since Israel is required, by the agreement that provides this support, to buy three quarters of its equipment and technology from US firms, it is crystal clear why the corporate elite desire to maintain Israel's dominance in the mid-east. Israeli allegiance to the US interests ensures that the oil needed by the US will continue to flow. But Israel can demand a heavy price for their collusion with the US, and hence their defiance of Bush's demands that they withdraw from the West Bank.

The US's support for Sharon's government is touted throughout the world without regard for its consequences by Senate and Congressional resolutions; the standard of living in Israel which is a mirror image of its host, the United States, stands in mocking contrast to the squalor of the refugee camps and the sewage infested alleys of the Palestinians who are crammed into miniscule segments of land surrounded by their oppressors; the oppressors army controls Palestinian movement through heavily guarded positions with towers, barbed wire fences, and crossing guards whose attitude toward the Palestinian is one of hatred and disdain. These conditions give rise to jealousy, hatred, vengeance, despair, retaliation, and sacrifice against the enemy; conditions every Israeli should understand from their own unfortunate history. How many Jews offered themselves for sacrifice against the Nazi forces during the war and against the British when the Israelis were attempting to establish a Jewish state in Palestine?

In their drive to own and control all of Palestine, the right-wing Likud party and the Ultra Orthodox look only to the Old Testament, a text 2500 years old that does not

reflect the reality of the past two thousand years. Yet their absolute commitment to these ancient myths legitimizes their actions to suppress the Palestinians. They encouraged, nay they forced Sharon to bulldoze whole sections of ancient cities sacred to the Palestinians, demolish mosques so even the memory of their existence would be forgotten, destroy documents that established ownership of properties and the personal identities of Palestinian citizens as though through that destruction they could erase the memory of a people. How ironic that this was the purpose of the Nazi regime's eradication of the Jews.

They are indifferent to the plight of those who have been driven from their homeland penniless, uncompensated for the homes they have lost, who await the day when they can return after fifty years in refugee camps in foreign lands. They are indifferent to the rampant poverty that sits next to them in Jenin, Ramallah, or Rafah; they do not see or want to see the wastelands that the tanks and bulldozers have created in Rafah as they smashed 100s of homes, dozens of shops, leaving hundreds homeless, a scene repeated over and over again throughout Palestine. Yet these are the religious of Israel, those who claim to believe in the one true God, a God who willingly allows the destruction and slaughter of thousands of defenseless women and children. But, blinded by their ambition to claim once again God's Promised Land, they overlook the reality of what they have created, a people more defiant than ever, a people who have endured and will continue to endure even if that be their only lasting claim to their humanity, a people filled with patience, lacking hope, but determined to be a people, to retain a culture, to love a God, to share what little they have with those worse off than themselves.

The above scenario plays throughout the world in those nations labeled underdeveloped. The deprivation and poverty have been created by Capitalism's global thrust and by the indifference of its corporate elite who have only their investments to protect and the ultimate fulfillment of their faith's ultimate promise, globalized markets where products can be produced at the lowest possible cost and return the greatest profit for the investor regardless of the consequences to the workers, the natural resources, or the cultures that are destroyed in the process. Islamic fundamentalism has become the "repository of a passion for pure belonging, a passion exacerbated by the unsettlements of globalization," according to Todd Gitlin in a review of *In the Name of Identity*. (L.A. Times Book Review, 9/23/01). Gitlin's point refers to the helpless state of those deprived throughout the world, and Islamic fundamentalists capture only a small percentage of those deprived. He cautions that we must understand the hatred that drives the terrorist for he/she is neither a god or an animal but a wounded person touched by a community of wounded people among whom arises an agitator "who promises victory or vengeance" against those who deserve it and they slip imperceptibly from denouncing injustice to perpetrating it.

Unless the US and the west recognize the inherent and explosive consequences generated by their indifference to the plight of those exploited, unless sincere

attempts are made to realign the disparity between the haves and the have-nots, unless the arrogance of the elite changes to empathy for the deprived, the vicious and insidious behaviors of the fanatics, the desperate, and the powerful will explode throughout America.

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