

Propaganda, Perception, and Truth

Consider the Realities of Gaza

by WILLIAM COOK

“How dreadful knowledge of the truth can be”

– Oedipus Rex, Scene I

As the Israeli military launched an “all-out war” with Hamas in the Gaza strip, as casualties mounted to 400 dead and another 1450 wounded, as tanks and troops massed in the area just outside the wall that imprisons the people of Gaza, as preparations for a ground assault into the “closed military zone” around the Gaza strip moved forward, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni on Saturday the 27th “... instructed the Foreign Ministry to take emergency measures to adapt Israel’s international public relations to the ongoing escalation in the Gaza Strip.” (Haaretz, 12/28/08). “An aggressive and diplomatic international public relations campaign” needed to be launched simultaneously with the estimated “60 raids” that now pummel Gaza each day, raids that, in human terms, have taken the lives of five children, all girls, of the Ba’losha family killed in Bait Lahia City north of Gaza and three children from the Al Absi family in Rafah refugee camp as Israeli rockets collapsed their roof. (freepalestine.ps, Sameh, Habeeb).

I provide names and locations of these families to give reality to the statistics that numb the mind; multiply the suffering of these families as 400 lie dead from this “turkey shoot” against fenced in civilians launched by this compassionate Olmert administration that closes out its criminal tenure in office awaiting the election of yet another militaristic administration.

Unfortunately some ministry officials had to interrupt their vacations to return immediately to their posts abroad. Their purpose, like Livni’s, to “explain the rationale for the expanded IDF operations in the Gaza Strip.” (Haaretz, 12/28/08). The ministry also seeks speakers of foreign languages, especially Arabic, Italian, Spanish, and German to ensure that its message is received by all. An international media broadcast outlet opened on Sunday in Sderot, the hapless Israeli town that has been the recipient of most of Hamas’ rockets over the past 8 years. Tours are planned for “foreign media and diplomatic figures.” Livni noted that “Israel expects the support and understanding of the international community, as it confronts terror, and advances the interest of all those who wish the forces of peace and co-existence to determine the agenda of this region.” (Haaretz)

Not mentioned by Livni, though reported in the same newspaper on the same day, was an article by Barak Ravid, “Disinformation, secrecy and lies: How the Gaza offensive

came about.” Ravid discloses that Olmert had “instructed the Israel Defense Forces to prepare for the operation over six months ago, even as Israel was beginning to negotiate a ceasefire agreement with Hamas.” Interesting how propaganda precedes perception and negates reality. In 1958 Aldus Huxley commented in “Brave New World Revisited” that “truth is great” but “silence about truth is greater still.” Hitler used just this “silence about truth” to imprison the minds of his civilians by silencing his actions in the media and creating instead a “new” truth from fabricated lies that cloaked reality in acceptable clothing by redefining actuality.

While Livni’s hordes roam the world’s TV talk shows and pen articles about “scores” or “showers” or “barrages” of “rockets” pouring on Sderot or other towns near Gaza, Olmert meets with his cabinet for “five hours of discussion about the operation” reserving “one line devoted to the situation in Gaza, compared to one whole page that concerned the outlawing of 35 Islamic organizations.” In short what the public is told by Livni’s PR campaign is not the reason Israel has attacked Gaza. The reason for this invasion is to wipe out Palestinian resistance, something the British had to face in the 1930s and 1940s as Jewish “gangs,” in reality organized and trained military forces (Irgun, Stern, and Hagana), confronted their rule as determined by the UN under the Mandate. But the deception did not end there. Israel continued “to send out disinformation in announcing it would open the crossings to the Gaza strip” and that Olmert “would decide whether to launch the strike following three more deliberations on Sunday – one day after the actual order to launch the operation was issued.” Hamas, which had vacated its headquarters because of these announcements, returned just in time to be killed, a deception comparable in its consequence to that 1946 “false flag” operation that destroyed the King David Hotel killing 91.

The world has been and is again being told how the people of Israel are victims of Hamas’ rockets that “pour” or “shower” their villages. Let’s consider the reality rather than the propaganda. Israel sets up Sderot as the suffering example of this terrorist action and provides tours for journalists and diplomats including Barak Obama. One step into Gaza and you will see real devastation, not remains of rockets that landed in fields or hit a building causing no deaths. Both Gaza and the West Bank speak vividly the results of military incursions, home demolitions, bulldozed farm land and fruit trees, and the most insidious icon of human brutality, the Wall of Fear erected by Ariel Sharon.

So let’s consider the reality not the propaganda. In 8 years an estimated 6000 rockets have been shot at Israel. That’s a slightly exaggerated number but one that will allow for increased attempts by Hamas or others to send additional rockets into Israeli towns. That means that on average 750 have been hurled at Israel each year, or 62.5 per month or 2 per day. In all that time 23 Israeli or non-Israelis living in Israel have been killed.

That represents about 2.8 a year. This past week, as Israel “showers” Gaza with \$300,000 precision missiles that unfortunately do not distinguish in their accuracy civilians from resistance fighters, more rockets have been launched per day by Hamas and other factions at Israel and at least 4 more have died. Now we can see how numbing statistics are. Those twenty three should never have been killed nor the four who died this week. But for Israel to use the rockets as the basis for this past weekend’s horrific slaughter of Palestinians is inexcusable by any measure. Four hundred and fourteen dead in (Guardian, UK, 1/2/2009) as Israeli missiles hammer civilian neighborhoods with, as they claim, precision, is nothing short of outright murder and the slaughter continues beyond the 325 sites struck in those first days by land sea and air, a true “rain” of death, devastation and psychological trauma.

Consider the conditions on the ground, the reality not the propaganda, as Israel attacks the residents of Gaza: for the past two years Israel has put Gaza under constant siege closing all gates thus preventing egress and ingress; it has destroyed the infrastructure of Gaza including sewage, electricity and water; it has barred international shipments of humanitarian goods and fuel; and it has maintained, even during the agreed upon cease fire, constant daily incursions into Gaza killing randomly and destroying at will. (PCHRGAZA Weekly Reports). Little or none of this is reported in American papers or on TV news broadcasts, only reference to terrorists and rockets constantly threatening the existence of Israel.

Consider as well the irony of this situation not the propaganda offered by Israel apologists. The people of Gaza are collectively refugees of Jewish forces driven from their homes, like Ashkelon, that is now hit randomly by Gazan rockets. They fire at their own land, at homes they used to live in before well-equipped and trained, “unofficial” military of the Jewish Agency during the Mandate years ethnically pushed them into Gaza. The Israelis, of course, do not mention that they stole Ashkelon from the very people who now send rockets into it.

Consider the reality, not the propaganda: the Palestinian people can go nowhere; they cannot escape through the Israeli controlled gates; they cannot flee by car, rail, air, boat or on foot; they are caged in a steel enclosed land area blocked on the west by Israeli gunboats. This is comparable in its way to the “highway of death” that slaughtered thousands of Iraqis as they fled from Kuwait in the 1991 war, surrounded and at the mercy of those hurling missiles from the air and the hills that overlooked their death throes.

Consider Livni’s public relations campaign, the reality not the propaganda, as it thunders forth the desperate condition the Israelis face as Hamas builds its strength in imitation of Hizbullah. Estimates reported in Ynet News (4/10/08) by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center place Hamas’ “military-security force” at 20,000, up

from an estimated 13,000 in 2007 as reported in Haaretz (7/21/07). These numbers threaten the Israeli military despite the fact that Israel can field an estimated two million troops; despite its state of the art military that is considered the fourth largest in the world; and despite its possession of 200 to 400 nuclear weapons. All of this force against weapons smuggled into Gaza through tunnels; there's no other way to bring them in since they are under constant guard by the IDF.

Consider as well the Israeli effort to claim victim hood based on Hamas' terrorism against its civilians; consider the reality not the propaganda. The following statistics come from B'Tselem as recorded by www.ifamericaknew.org: 4,897 Palestinians killed since 9/29/00 to 11/30/08; 1062 Israelis killed during that same time period. Of these numbers, 1050 were Palestinian children and 123 Israeli; 2,227-3149 were Palestinian civilians and 727 were Israeli civilians. Since June 28, 2008, in Gaza, the start of the cease fire, a total of 247 were killed up to October 6, 2008, 155 of these were civilians and 57 were children.

Add to these horrific numbers the tally the Israeli's accumulated on December 27th, approximately a week ago, of 251 Palestinians killed, most civilians including 20 children and 9 women with another 584 wounded 130 of them children (PCHR). The death toll for Palestinians has exceeded that of the American casualties in Iraq, and continues to climb above 5200 as each day passes with no end in sight.

And so we must ask, why? What drives this merciless military machine that is the government and armed forces of Israel? Can it be true as Livni attests that "Israel expects the support and understanding of the international community, as it confronts terror, and advances the interest of all those who wish the forces of peace and co-existence to determine the agenda of this region." What is terror if not the forced imprisonment of 1.5 million people locked behind gates and walls of steel while a state of the art military including land, air and sea forces pummel the people day and night in a merciless barrage of devastation and mayhem? What civilized state in this community of nations could believe that Israel "advances the interest of all" by such devastation of a helpless neighbor? What civilized state could support, what Livni, without blushing, calls the "forces of peace and co-existence" that determine the agenda in the mid-east? Consider the reality not the propaganda.

Why? In July of 2004, Khalid Amayreh, writing in www.infoimagination.org, in a study of Israeli military strategy, noted the following: "Israel's hawkish Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon last week lashed out at the Knesset's influential committee on defense and foreign affairs, accusing some members of disclosing 'classified army secrets.'" The reason for the tongue lashing? That the Israeli occupation army "provoked the Palestinians into escalating the violence during the first few months of the second

intifada in order to give the army a pretext to hit hard on the Palestinian society and bully it into unconditional surrender.” How was this done? 1,300,000 bullets were fired by “occupation soldiers on Palestinian population centers and other targets.” “This massive firepower, which had no operational justification ... showed that the Israeli army was interested more in decimating and harming Palestinians and less in ending the violence.” Compare this newest incursion with its massive firepower against a people that have nowhere to go, but must live through the agony of a rain of death, a people that have had to endure a merciless siege for two years that has left them physically weakened, emotionally drained, psychologically distraught, and personally humiliated by unemployment, and helpless to alter the situation imposed on them. Before he was “extra-judicially executed,” Abd al-Aziz Rantisi, former Hamas Gaza leader, made this observation, “Israel is offering us two choices, either to die a meek lamb’s death at the slaughter house or as martyr-bombers.” Consider the reality not the propaganda.

Let me return now to the quote from Oedipus Rex that headlined this piece: “How dreadful knowledge of the truth can be.” The nations of the world are faced with a pulverizing public relations blitz by the Israeli government to justify its disproportionate destruction of the Palestinian people and their property. Silencing truth, the reality that exists behind a cloak of lies, destroys justice just as it destroys the people of Gaza. I look back at Hamas’ victory at the election booth, at their offer for peace following that election, both the Hamas offer to consider the Saudi Prince’s 2002 peace plan and Mahmoud Abbas’ offer for an International Peace Conference in Oslo, and realize that Israel and the United States ignored their offers, intentionally ignored their offers just as President Bush, earlier this fall, ignored, by refusing to reply, to a Hamas offer for an on-going ceasefire so that peace could be achieved. A different agenda is at work here, an agenda that seeks the total elimination of the Palestinian people as a people, subject to the authority and control of the Israeli government. As Mohammed Barakeh, an Arab member of the Israeli Knesset remarked about Israel’s strategy in 2004, “Israel sought to and almost succeeded in convincing the world that its violent onslaught against the Palestinian society was in reaction to Palestinian terror. This simplified and erroneous claim ignores the simple fact that Israel’s violent and racist occupation of the Palestinian homeland is the root cause of all violence.” Once again, the government of Israel has determined that it can, by stealth of propaganda, control how the world views its occupation and military conquest of the Palestinian people. Let’s hope reality overcomes deception.

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