

The Israel-Palestine conflict remains contentious in the world and in the pages of HP. We received two articles on the subject with very different perspectives from Morgan Duchesney and Sophie Dulesh. Both are published here.

Gaza's Agony

An Alternative Perspective On Recent Events

Morgan Duchesney

Introduction: Historical Context Missing From Corporate Media Coverage

The corporate media has largely ignored the brutal chronology of events in Gaza and the horrific living conditions that have gradually intensified since Israel officially left the territory in 2005. While the reasons for such blinkered journalism are beyond the scope of this article, I will offer an idea from Chomsky and Pappé for the reader's consideration: "...the imperial mentality is so deeply embedded in Western culture that this travesty passes without criticism, even notice."¹ Considering the current state of affairs in Gaza, this absence of depth and context creates the false impression that Palestinians are innately violent and self-destructive.

Former Israeli leader Ariel Sharon cynically agreed to abandon Gaza to the Palestinians in 2005, although the move was falsely presented to the world as a magnanimous gesture. As senior Sharon advisor Dov Weissglass said to a *Haaretz* reporter in a 2004 moment of candor typical of the Israeli press:

The struggle of
people against
power is the
struggle of memory
against forgetting.

– Milan Kundera

The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process...And when you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. Effectively, this whole package called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed from our agenda.²

Since Gaza's Palestinian leadership are aware of this attitude, their tendency to cynicism and mistrust in dealing with a peace partner so vastly superior in arms, finance and superpower backing is understandable.

The Western public needs more accurate information about the punitive conditions Gaza residents endure and how that might explain the rise of a brutal organization like Hamas. While little is said about the highly effective pre-1948 Jewish terrorism campaign in Palestine, reference to those past events might provide much-needed context for the current activities of Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups who attack Israel with futile tactics like suicide bombers, mortars and crude rockets. These attacks are consistently met with a devastatingly dispro-

portionate Israeli response but the rocket attacks continue. The IDF (Israeli Defense Force) in 2008 adopted the brutal *Dahiyya Doctrine*, so named for the Shiite quarter of Beirut that was obliterated in a 2006 IDF air bombardment. In Chomsky and Pappé's words, the doctrine requires "...the comprehensive destruction of areas in their entirety and the employment of disproportional force in response to the launch of missiles."³

While the corporate media consistently condemns Hamas' refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli state, they ignore the fact that this refusal is mainly based on the reality that inherent in such recognition is abandonment of the Palestinian diaspora's right of return to their lost homes. On the other hand, "Israel's settlement and development programs in the occupied territories – all illegal, as Israel was informed in 1967 by its highest court and recently affirmed by the World Court – are designed to undermine the possibility of a viable Palestinian state."⁴ In fact, Israel has seized so much of the West Bank and East Jerusalem that a Palestinian state will only be possible with a mass evacuation of Israelis, an unlikely event. While Hamas is often accused to wishing to destroy Israel, they certainly have little ability to accomplish such a goal.

Corporate Media Assumptions about the Cause of the Recent Violence in Gaza

Canada's corporate media continue to provide propaganda services to the Israeli state by presenting recent events as a noble and measured Israeli response to the terrorists of Hamas. According to an August 22, 2014, Associated Press article in the *Globe and Mail*:

...the [Hamas] kidnapping of three Israeli teens while they were hitchhiking on June 12, along with the discovery of their bodies two weeks later, sparked a broad Israeli crackdown on Hamas members in the West Bank, Hamas responded with heavy rocket fire out of the Gaza strip, leading Israel to launch an aerial and ground invasion of the territory.

The July 21, 2014, issue of *Maclean's* magazine echoed this condemnation of Hamas by declaring, "Israel launched air strikes in the Gaza Strip in retaliation for Palestinian rocket attacks on Israeli towns; escalation seems inevitable..." In an editorial of September 4, 2014, *Sun Media* offered the following critique of Liberal candidate and former Canadian general Andrew Leslie who dared hold the Israeli military accountable for civilian casualties in Gaza: "No mention that Hamas started the conflict by murdering three Israeli students. No mention that Hamas uses civilians as human shields when firing rockets at Israel, or that it tells civilians to ignore Israeli warnings of an imminent attack."

Both media outlets omitted the fact that Gaza is so crowded that it is nearly impossible to perform any military activity without some proximity to civilians. As for Israeli warnings, Gaza Palestinians have nowhere to hide as the bombs and missiles explode around them. Perhaps Hamas rocket attacks on Israel will be more acceptable if they adopt an Israeli-style early warning system.

Israeli Violation of 2012 Ceasefire Agreement

Notably absent from the corporate media is any mention of the deeper reasons for the recent spate of Hamas rocket attacks. Contrary to corporate media reports, IDF began immediately violating the ceasefire agreement that followed Operation Pillar of Defense, the 2012 invasion of Gaza. In commenting on the violation, Noam Chomsky refers to the work of Nathan Thrall, senior Middle East analyst for the International Crisis Group:

Israeli intelligence recognized that Hamas was observing the terms of the ceasefire. "Israel," Thrall wrote, "therefore saw little incentive in upholding its end of the deal. In the three months following the ceasefire, its forces made regular incursions into Gaza..."⁵

Therefore, when one considers those events, July 2014's Operation Protective Edge was almost inevitable, as Chomsky notes:

The two major Palestinian groupings, Gaza-based Hamas and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in the West Bank signed a unity agreement. Finally, the unity government accepted the three conditions that Washington and the European Union had long demanded: non-violence, adherence to past agreements, and the recognition of Israel.⁶

As well, the IDF's July 2014 attack was preceded by another Israeli action in April that further exacerbated existing tensions. As Moun Rabbani wrote in the *London Review of Books*, "Negotiations that had been going on for nine months stalled after the Israeli government renegeed on its commitment to release a number of Palestinian prisoners, incarcerated since before the 1993 Oslo Accords..."⁷ The Netanyahu regime felt it could not risk being seen as too conciliatory with an election looming, and again these developments were notably absent in corporate media coverage of the July, 2014, violence. There are good reasons why The Israeli state utterly opposes any unification of Palestinian factions.

One is that the Hamas-Fatah conflict has provided a useful pretext for refusing to engage in serious negotiations. How can one negotiate with a divided entity? More significantly, for more than 20 years, Israel has been committed to separating Gaza from the West Bank in violation of the Oslo Accords it signed in 1993, which declare Gaza and the West Bank to be an inseparable territorial unity.⁸

Such unification would seriously interfere with Israeli plans to dominate the West Bank and isolate existing Palestinian enclaves as current maps indicate. These plans bode ill for the shrinking prospects of a viable Palestinian state.

Separated from Gaza, any West Bank enclaves left to Palestinians have no access to the outside world. They are contained by two hostile powers, Israel and Jordan, both close U.S. allies...Furthermore, Israel has been systematically taking over the Jordan Valley, driving out Palestinians, establishing settlements, sinking wells, and otherwise ensuring

that the region – about one-third of the West Bank, with much of its arable land – will ultimately be integrated into Israel...⁹

As previously mentioned, the IDF required a pretext for Operation Protective Edge and, "Such an occasion arose when three Israeli boys from the settler community in the West Bank were brutally murdered. The Israeli government evidently quickly realized that they were dead, but pretended otherwise, which provided the opportunity to launch a 'rescue operation'..."¹⁰ ...and the ensuing invasion of Gaza. The pattern is well-established but unremarked in the pages of publications like the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*.

The Subjectivity of Terrorism: Palestinian versus Israeli Guerrilla Tactics

While Israeli leaders and Western pundits offer scathing critiques of Hamas "human shield" tactics, a glance backwards reveal Jewish guerrillas operating with similar tactics and motives in the late nineteen-forties:

...Bell does offer some excellent insights about the motives of the Irgun and the Stern Gang, which also help to explain why other terrorist groups also perpetrate seemingly hopeless acts of violence. Bell's keenest observation was that the Irgun used violent acts of terrorism because they wanted to force the British to interrogate and imprison members of the Jewish community in Palestine to create more sympathizers and increase support for their terrorist group within the Yishuv. This is an important point because other terrorist groups have also justified their use of violence by saying it is designed to provoke government crackdowns on the general population that will, in turn, create more sympathizers for the terrorist groups within the communities they operate in.¹¹

Similarly, Palestinian terror acts have consistently invited the wrath of the IDF and Israeli state security services that target Gaza Palestinians in retaliatory actions like air raids, artillery attacks and collective punishments like

border closings. The Israeli state may well be a vibrant democracy but the Palestinians under Israeli authority are subject to arbitrary arrest and confinement without charge under a harsh penal code designed to break their will to resist occupation and oppression. Israel's prisons are full of Palestinian prisoners with little recourse to comprehensive legal representation. In fairness, occasionally captured Israeli soldiers have fared little better in Palestinian custody and are usually used for prisoner exchange. As well, Palestinian desperation has spawned a martyr's cult of suicide bombers. Ironically, the mass suicide of Jews under Roman attack at Masada is still venerated as a sacred act of nobility.

The Canadian Angle

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has presented Canadians with a false choice on Middle East peace: either voice "absolute, non-negotiable belief in Israel" or be declared an anti-Semite. Emma Teitel of *Maclean's* wrote that, "His cheerleading for the Jewish state was excessive enough (even for a Jew) that it verged on the absurd."¹² Stephen Harper refuses to be a real friend to the Israelis in the sense that he openly excuses their more objectionable behaviour for the sake of political support, fundamentalist religiosity and what he calls principle.

"Two days after Harper won a minority government on January 23, Hamas won Canadian-monitored and facilitated elections in Palestine."¹³ Canada was quick to condemn these fair and democratic elections and immediately cut off aid to Gaza. "The aid cutoff, which was designed to sow division within Palestinian society, had devastating social effects."¹⁴ Since Canada is among those few nations (also Israel and the U.S.) who consider Hamas a terrorist entity, it is worth commenting on the Harper government's approach to the highly subjective concept of terrorism.

Much like the corporate media, the vital element of context is absent from the government's stance although it is probably aware of the history of Hamas and the inevitability of its creation. An *Ottawa Citizen* editorial of September

16, 2014, examined the fact that Harper refuses to acknowledge or investigate the root causes of terrorism, choosing instead to simply declare it an "evil" that must be fought with state security and military forces. The editorial states that "Conservatives like to use 'root causes' as code for naïve and simplistic attempts to excuse terrorism as the inevitable result of poverty or some other social factor."

It is beyond dispute that the magnitude of Jewish terrorism in pre-1948 Palestine and the current violence perpetrated by illegal Israeli settlers has been minimized in the Western media. Such violence remains safely outside the realm of examination. Refusing to discuss the root causes of any given problem almost guarantees its perpetuation. To do so for myopic political advantage is, at the very least, reckless.

Prominent among Harper's Canadian supporters is Conservative senator Linda Frum, sister to neoconservative writer David Frum. When asked about Canadian Jewish support for the Harper government, Senator Frum was quoted in *Maclean's* magazine as saying that Canadian Jews had simply grown tired of the "...notion that, when Israelis and Palestinians quarrel, Canada should consider the grievances of both sides equally."¹⁵ In the current climate, Senator Frum can rest easy in that regard.

Canada signed the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement in 1997 for political and economic reasons. "In an implicit recognition of the occupation, Canada's free trade accord with Israel includes the West Bank as a place where the country's customs laws apply. Canada's trade agreement is based on the areas Israel maintains territorial control over, not on internationally-recognized borders."¹⁶

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Considering these facts, it's safe to assume that Canada would have applied the same standard to Israel settlements in Gaza, had the territory not been abandoned. In stark contrast, Engler notes that "The European Union's trade agreement with Israel...explicitly excludes products from territory Israel captured in the 1967 war and occupies against international law."

Media Abuse of Holocaust Memory in Gaza Coverage

Sun Media columnist Ezra Levant, in a July 28, 2014, *Toronto Sun* article on Gaza and the goals of Hamas, begged this query for rhetorical discussion: "Serious question: If Hamas terrorists in Gaza were to build Auschwitz-style ovens to burn Jews like the Nazis did, would the world still demand that Israel stop attacking them?" Employing the horror of the Nazi Holocaust is a classic fallacy of reason whereby someone seeks to discredit their opponents by employing a distracting appeal to emotion and guilt. Were Friedrich Nietzsche alive today he might well consider Levant a man who "...throw[s] a bit of their personality after their bad arguments, as if that might straighten their paths and turn them into right and good arguments – just as a man in a bowling alley, after he has let go of the ball, still tries to direct it with gestures."¹⁷

The validity of this observation on Levant's crude tactic highlights the misleading presence of fallacious reasoning on the pages of publications that routinely ignore the conventions of reasoned discourse.

The Evacuation of Gaza's Gush Katif Jewish Settlement: Inventing a National Trauma

The IDF's July 2005 mass evacuation of over ten thousand Jewish settlers from Gaza's Gush Katif settlement became the subject of a 2010 study by a group of Israeli psychologists called *The Mental Preparation for the Disengagement and Its Aftermath in the IDF*. According to *Brainwashed* author Rachel Ginsberg: "How was the IDF transformed into an army of expul-

sion, where 40,000 soldiers and 20,000 police were able to carry out with clockwork precision the most morally controversial and painful mission it ever faced, without flinching."¹⁸ Perhaps Ginsberg forgets that there was no need to transform the IDF into an army of expulsion since the force has specialized in mass expulsions of Palestinians since 1948. Beyond that, might she apply the same moral standards to those IDF soldiers who participated in the brutal 2008-09, 2012 and 2014 attacks on Gaza?

It is likely that the Israeli government of 2005 was aware that a mass evacuation of Jewish settlers from Gaza would be very unpopular with IDF soldiers. However, soldiers throughout history have routinely undergone desensitization training to facilitate the completion of unpleasant missions. The evacuation of Gush Katif by all accounts was a peaceful operation although the mass exit from Gaza was stridently opposed by Israeli expansionists determined to create more "facts on the ground."

Instead of carrying out the operation straightforwardly; as would have been easy enough, the government decided to stage a national trauma... which meant in practice: we cannot abandon an inch of the Palestinian territories that we want to take in violation of international law. This farce played well in the West but was ridiculed by more astute Israeli commentators...¹⁹

Unfortunately, Ginsberg's article refers to Gaza's Palestinians only as "the enemy"; a faceless horde to be feared and hated. She actually likens the IDF's Gush Katif evacuation tactics to World War Two Nazism and declares all Israelis the victims of government persecution. I must ask, though, if the IDF can indoctrinate its soldiers to peacefully evacuate Jewish settlements in Gaza, surely they could replicate their efforts in the West Bank and East Jerusalem?

Military Dissent in Israel

In spite of vehement condemnations and denials by the Netanyahu government, mem-

bers of elite IDF military formations, including forty-three members of Intelligence Unit 8200, refused in 2014 to serve in Gaza and the West Bank. Members of this special unit sent a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu saying they refused to “take part in actions against Palestinians” and “continue serving as tools in cementing the military’s control over the Occupied Territories.” The letter...singled out the unit’s surveillance of Palestinians and accused it of collecting information that is “used for political persecution” and “harms innocent people.”²⁰

Netanyahu, a former commando and noted militarist, later tempered his harsh criticism of Unit 8200 and praised it along with other elite IDF units. While the military protest movement is still relatively small, there exists a growing consensus, particularly among reservists, that the IDF is harming both its international reputation and morale by using military force to oppress Palestinian civilians.

Solutions

Nothing significant will happen for the Palestinians until the United States decides to withdraw its military, diplomatic and economic support for Israel: the factors that permit the Jewish state to behave with unjust impunity.

Concerning Canada’s role, the Harper government recently announced \$66 million in aid to the Palestinian Authority in stark contrast to their former threats to cut all funding if the Palestinian Authority pursued the modest goal of securing observer status at the UN. Rather than donate Canadian tax dollars, Harper would do better by encouraging the Israelis to relinquish control of Gaza’s borders, air space and coastal zones, thereby empowering the Palestinians to fully profit from agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, tourism and the extraction of offshore natural gas reserves. The profits from these industries would largely solve Gaza’s financial woes and restore dignified independence to her people. Beyond that, a free and secure Gaza would provide a positive example for other groups struggling for peace and autonomy. •

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