OMNI NEWSLETTER NO. 2 on GAZA
BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE AND JUSTICE.
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from david druding, Nov. 16, 2012

Even a single night in jail is enough to give a taste of what it means to be under the total control of some external force. And it hardly takes more than a day in Gaza to begin to appreciate what it must be like to try to survive in the world's largest open-air prison, where a million and a half people, in the most densely populated area of the world, are constantly subject to random and often savage terror and arbitrary punishment, with no purpose other than to humiliate and degrade, and with the further goal of ensuring that Palestinian hopes for a decent future will be crushed and that the overwhelming global support for a diplomatic settlement that will grant these rights will be nullified.

The intensity of this commitment on the part of the Israeli political leadership has been dramatically illustrated just in the past few days, as they warn that they will “go crazy” if Palestinian rights are given limited recognition at the UN. That is not a new departure. The threat to “go crazy” (“nishtagea”) is deeply rooted, back to the Labor governments of the 1950s, along with the related “Samson Complex”: we will bring down the Temple walls if crossed. It was an idle threat then; not today.

The purposeful humiliation is also not new, though it constantly takes new forms. Thirty years ago political leaders, including some of the most noted hawks, submitted to Prime Minister Begin a shocking and detailed account of how settlers regularly abuse Palestinians in the most depraved manner and with total impunity. The prominent military-political analyst Yoram Peri wrote with disgust that the army's task is not to defend the state, but “to demolish the rights of innocent people just because they are Araboushim (“niggers,” “kikes”) living in territories that God promised to us.”

Gazans have been selected for particularly cruel punishment. It is almost miraculous that people can sustain such an existence. How they do so was described thirty years ago in an eloquent memoir by Raja Shehadeh (The Third Way), based on his work as a lawyer engaged in the hopeless task of trying to protect elementary rights within a legal system designed to ensure failure, and his personal experience as a Samid, “a steadfast one,” who watches his home turned into a prison by brutal occupiers and can do nothing but somehow “endure.”

Since Shehadeh wrote, the situation has become much worse. The Oslo agreements, celebrated with much pomp in 1993, determined that Gaza and the West Bank are a single territorial entity. By then the US and Israel had already initiated their program of separating them fully from one another, so as to block a diplomatic settlement and punish the Araboushim in both territories.
Punishment of Gazans became still more severe in January 2006, when they committed a major crime: they voted the “wrong way” in the first free election in the Arab world, electing Hamas. Demonstrating their passionate “yearning for democracy,” the US and Israel, backed by the timid European Union, at once imposed a brutal siege, along with intensive military attacks. The US also turned at once to standard operating procedure when some disobedient population elects the wrong government: prepare a military coup to restore order. Gazans committed a still greater crime a year later by blocking the coup attempt, leading to a sharp escalation of the siege and military attacks. These culminated in winter 2008-9, with Operation Cast Lead, one of the most cowardly and vicious exercises of military force in recent memory, as a defenseless civilian population, trapped with no way to escape, was subjected to relentless attack by one of the world’s most advanced military systems relying on US arms and protected by US diplomacy. An unforgettable eyewitness account of the slaughter — “infanticide” in their words — is given by the two courageous Norwegian doctors who worked at Gaza’s main hospital during the merciless assault, Mads Gilbert and Erik Fosse, in their remarkable book Eyes in Gaza.

President-elect Obama was unable to say a word, apart from reiterating his heartfelt sympathy for children under attack — in the Israeli town Sderot. The carefully planned assault was brought to an end right before his inauguration, so that he could then say that now is the time to look forward, not backward, the standard refuge of criminals.

Of course, there were pretexts — there always are. The usual one, trotted out when needed, is “security”: in this case, home-made rockets from Gaza. As is commonly the case, the pretext lacked any credibility. In 2008 a truce was established between Israel and Hamas. The Israeli government formally recognizes that Hamas observed it fully. Not a single Hamas rocket was fired until Israel broke the truce under cover of the US election on November 4 2008, invading Gaza on ludicrous grounds and killing half a dozen Hamas members. The Israeli government was advised by its highest intelligence officials that the truce could be renewed by easing the criminal blockade and ending military attacks. But the government of Ehud Olmert, reputedly a dove, chose to reject these options, preferring to resort to its huge comparative advantage in violence: Operation Cast Lead. The basic facts are reviewed once again by foreign policy analyst Jerome Slater in the current issue of the Harvard-MIT journal International Security.

The pattern of bombing under Cast Lead was carefully analyzed by the highly informed and internationally respected Gazan human rights advocate Raji Sourani. He points out that the bombing was concentrated in the north, targeting defenseless civilians in the most densely populated areas, with no possible military pretext. The goal, he suggests, may have been to drive the intimidated population to the south, near the Egyptian border. But the Samidin stayed put, despite the avalanche of US-Israeli terror.

A further goal might have been to drive them beyond. Back to the earliest days of the Zionist colonization it was argued across much of the spectrum that Arabs have no real reason to be in Palestine; they can be just as happy somewhere else, and should leave — politely “transferred,” the doves suggested. This is surely no small concern in Egypt, and perhaps a reason why Egypt does not open the border freely to civilians or even to desperately needed materials.

Sourani and other knowledgeable sources observe that the discipline of the Samidin conceals a powder keg, which might explode any time, unexpectedly, as the first Intifada did in Gaza in 1989 after years of miserable repression that elicited no notice or concern.

Merely to mention one of innumerable cases, shortly before the outbreak of the Intifada a Palestinian girl, Intissar al-Atar, was shot and killed in a schoolyard by a resident of a nearby Jewish settlement. He was one of the several thousand Israelis settlers brought to Gaza in
violation of international law and protected by a huge army presence, taking over much of the land and scarce water of the Strip and living “lavishly in twenty-two settlements in the midst of 1.4 million destitute Palestinians,” as the crime is described by Israeli scholar Avi Raz. The murderer of the schoolgirl, Shimon Yifrah, was arrested, but quickly released on bail when the Court determined that “the offense is not severe enough” to warrant detention. The judge commented that Yifrah only intended to shock the girl by firing his gun at her in a schoolyard, not to kill her, so “this is not a case of a criminal person who has to be punished, deterred, and taught a lesson by imprisoning him.” Yifrah was given a 7-month suspended sentence, while settlers in the courtroom broke out in song and dance. And the usual silence reigned. After all, it is routine.

And so it is. As Yifrah was freed, the Israeli press reported that an army patrol fired into the yard of a school for boys aged 6 to 12 in a West Bank refugee camp, wounding five children, allegedly intending only “to shock them.” There were no charges, and the event again attracted no attention. It was just another episode in the program of “illiteracy as punishment,” the Israeli press reported, including the closing of schools, use of gas bombs, beating of students with rifle butts, barring of medical aid for victims; and beyond the schools a reign of more severe brutality, becoming even more savage during the Intifada, under the orders of Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, another admired dove.

My initial impression, after a visit of several days, was amazement, not only at the ability to go on with life, but also at the vibrancy and vitality among young people, particularly at the university, where I spent much of my time at an international conference. But there too one can detect signs that the pressure may become too hard to bear. Reports indicate that among young men there is simmering frustration, recognition that under the US-Israeli occupation the future holds nothing for them. There is only so much that caged animals can endure, and there may be an eruption, perhaps taking ugly forms — offering an opportunity for Israeli and western apologists to self-righteously condemn the people who are culturally backward, as Mitt Romney insightfully explained.

Gaza has the look of a typical third world society, with pockets of wealth surrounded by hideous poverty. It is not, however, “undeveloped.” Rather it is “de-developed,” and very systematically so, to borrow the terms of Sara Roy, the leading academic specialist on Gaza. The Gaza Strip could have become a prosperous Mediterranean region, with rich agriculture and a flourishing fishing industry, marvelous beaches and, as discovered a decade ago, good prospects for extensive natural gas supplies within its territorial waters. By coincidence or not, that is when Israel intensified its naval blockade, driving fishing boats toward shore, by now to 3 miles or less.

The favorable prospects were aborted in 1948, when the Strip had to absorb a flood of Palestinian refugees who fled in terror or were forcefully expelled from what became Israel, in some cases expelled months after the formal cease-fire. In fact, they were being expelled even four years later, as reported in Ha’aretz (25.12.2008), in a thoughtful study by Beni Tziper on the history of Israeli Ashkelon back to the Canaanites. In 1953, he reports, there was a “cool calculation that it was necessary to cleanse the region of Arabs.” The original name, Majdal, had already been “Judaized” to today’s Ashkelon, regular practice.

That was in 1953, when there was no hint of military necessity. Tziper himself was born in 1953, and while walking in the remnants of the old Arab sector, he reflects that “it is really difficult for me, really difficult, to realize that while my parents were celebrating my birth, other people were being loaded on trucks and expelled from their homes.” Israel’s 1967 conquests and their aftermath administered further blows. Then came the terrible crimes already mentioned, continuing to the present day.
The signs are easy to see, even on a brief visit. Sitting in a hotel near the shore, one can hear the machine gun fire of Israeli gunboats driving fishermen out of Gaza’s territorial waters and towards shore, so they are compelled to fish in waters that are heavily polluted because of US-Israeli refusal to allow reconstruction of the sewage and power systems that they destroyed.

The Oslo Accords laid plans for two desalination plants, a necessity in this arid region. One, an advanced facility, was built: in Israel. The second one is in Khan Yunis, in the south of Gaza. The engineer in charge of trying to obtain potable water for the population explained that this plant was designed so that it cannot use sea water, but must rely on underground water, a cheaper process, which further degrades the meager aquifer, guaranteeing severe problems in the future. Even with that, water is severely limited. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which cares for refugees (but not other Gazans), recently released a report warning that damage to the aquifer may soon become “irreversible,” and that without remedial action quickly, by 2020 Gaza may not be a “liveable place.” Israel permits concrete to enter for UNRWA projects, but not for Gazans engaged in the huge reconstruction needs. The limited heavy equipment mostly lies idle, since Israel does not permit materials for repair. All of this is part of the general program described by Israeli official Dov Weisglass, an adviser to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, after Palestinians failed to follow orders in the 2006 elections: “The idea,” he said, “is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger.” That would not look good.

And the plan is being scrupulously followed. Sara Roy has provided extensive evidence in her scholarly studies. Recently, after several years of effort, the Israeli human rights organization Gisha succeeded to obtain a court order for the government to release its records detailing plans for the diet, and how they are executed. Israel-based journalist Jonathan Cook summarizes them: “Health officials provided calculations of the minimum number of calories needed by Gaza’s 1.5 million inhabitants to avoid malnutrition. Those figures were then translated into truckloads of food Israel was supposed to allow in each day ... an average of only 67 trucks — much less than half of the minimum requirement — entered Gaza daily. This compared to more than 400 trucks before the blockade began.” And even this estimate is overly generous, UN relief officials report.

The result of imposing the diet, Mideast scholar Juan Cole observes, is that “[a]bout ten percent of Palestinian children in Gaza under 5 have had their growth stunted by malnutrition ... in addition, anemia is widespread, affecting over two-thirds of infants, 58.6 percent of schoolchildren, and over a third of pregnant mothers.” The US and Israel want to ensure that nothing more than bare survival is possible.

“What has to be kept in mind,” observes Raji Sourani, “is that the occupation and the absolute closure is an ongoing attack on the human dignity of the people in Gaza in particular and all Palestinians generally. It is systematic degradation, humiliation, isolation and fragmentation of the Palestinian people.” The conclusion is confirmed by many other sources. In one of the world’s leading medical journals, The Lancet, a visiting Stanford physician, appalled by what he witnessed, describes Gaza as “something of a laboratory for observing an absence of dignity,” a condition that has “devastating” effects on physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

“The constant surveillance from the sky, collective punishment through blockade and isolation, the intrusion into homes and communications, and restrictions on those trying to travel, or marry, or work make it difficult to live a dignified life in Gaza.” The Araboshim must be taught not to raise their heads.

There were hopes that the new Morsi government in Egypt, less in thrall to Israel than the western-backed Mubarak dictatorship, might open the Rafah crossing, the sole access to the outside for trapped Gazans that is not subject to direct Israeli control. There has been slight
opening, but not much. Journalist Laila el-Haddad writes that the re-opening under Morsi, “is simply a return to status quo of years past: only Palestinians carrying an Israeli-approved Gaza ID card can use Rafah Crossing,” excluding a great many Palestinians, including el-Haddad’s family, where only one spouse has a card.

Furthermore, she continues, “the crossing does not lead to the West Bank, nor does it allow for the passage of goods, which are restricted to the Israeli-controlled crossings and subject to prohibitions on construction materials and export.” The restricted Rafah crossing does not change the fact that “Gaza remains under tight maritime and aerial siege, and continues to be closed off to the Palestinians’ cultural, economic, and academic capitals in the rest of the [occupied territories], in violation of US-Israeli obligations under the Oslo Accords.”

The effects are painfully evident. In the Khan Yunis hospital, the director, who is also chief of surgery, describes with anger and passion how even medicines are lacking for relief of suffering patients, as well as simple surgical equipment, leaving doctors helpless and patients in agony. Personal stories add vivid texture to the general disgust one feels at the obscenity of the harsh occupation. One example is the testimony of a young woman who despaired that her father, who would have been proud that she was the first woman in the refugee camp to gain an advanced degree, had “passed away after 6 months of fighting cancer aged 60 years. Israeli occupation denied him a permit to go to Israeli hospitals for treatment. I had to suspend my study, work and life and go to set next to his bed. We all sat including my brother the physician and my sister the pharmacist, all powerless and hopeless watching his suffering. He died during the inhumane blockade of Gaza in summer 2006 with very little access to health service. I think feeling powerless and hopeless is the most killing feeling that human can ever have. It kills the spirit and breaks the heart. You can fight occupation but you cannot fight your feeling of being powerless. You can't even dissolve that feeling.”

Disgust at the obscenity, compounded with guilt: it is within our power to bring the suffering to an end and allow the Samidin to enjoy the lives of peace and dignity that they deserve.

Noam Chomsky visited the Gaza Strip

GAZA HISTORY THROUGH RAFAH

Joe Sacco, Footnotes in Gaza (2009). Rev. The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (March 2010). A graphic journalistic account of the tragedies that have happened to Rafah since the 1950s.

SUPPORT FOR THE FREEDOM FLOTILLAS

GAZA FREEDOM FLOTILLA 2010

Robert Naiman, Just Foreign Policy naiman@justforeignpolicy.org to jbennet

Dear Dick,

Take Action:
1. Follow us on Twitter and Facebook
2. Read and share my article on NYT coverage of Flotilla
3. Read and share our Flotilla FAQ. I’m back from Athens, where I attempted to set sail to Gaza as a passenger on The Audacity of Hope. After just 20 minutes at sea, Greek commandos forced our boat back to port, where it continues to be held by Greek authorities
with six passengers still on board. While The Audacity of Hope hasn't reached Gaza, we did reach major media outlets in the United States and around the world, which put the collective punishment of 1.6 million human beings in the headlines for weeks. Just Foreign Policy was featured in CNN, The Christian Science Monitor, Al Jazeera, The Nation, The Chicago Sun-Times, and dozens of other media outlets around the world reporting on my participation in the flotilla. Our press release on the members of Congress who asked Secretary Clinton to "ensure the safety of all American citizens on board The Audacity of Hope" was reported by the Jerusalem Post. [1]

We have also provided resources to counter common misconceptions about the flotilla in our “Flotilla FAQ”. [2] A recent article of mine explains how the New York Times couldn't grasp that the Gaza Freedom Flotilla is about freedom, not aid. [3] To build on the momentum the flotilla generated to bring about a complete end to the blockade, we need you to help us spread the word and counter the spin on the flotilla. Will you help Just Foreign Policy counter media spin and expand our action network to end the blockade of Gaza? Here are three things you can do:

1. Follow us on Twitter and Facebook
2. Read and share my article on New York Times coverage of the Flotilla
3. Read and share JFP's Flotilla FAQ

To take action, simply follow the links above, or go to:
http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/act/audacityofhope/followup

The flotilla even won a change in Israeli policy worth celebrating—even if it was small relative to the need. The morning after the participants on The Audacity of Hope arrived in Greece, Israel authorized the long-awaited entry of construction materials into Gaza for 1,200 new homes and 18 schools. [4]

Whether you donated to make Just Foreign Policy’s participation in The Audacity of Hope possible, signed our petition to Secretary Clinton, helped take over the State Department’s Facebook page, or called the State Department to ask that the U.S. government press for the Greek authorities to release the U.S. Boat, [5] it’s supporters like you who have, as our friends at Truthout put it, “bent that long arc of the universe just a little bit tighter towards justice for the people of Gaza—and us all.” [6]

Thanks for all you do to end the blockade on Gaza,
Robert Naiman
Just Foreign Policy
http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/donate

References:
1) Round up of JFP news coverage throughout the flotilla can be found at http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/news/media
2) “Flotilla FAQ: 10 Q and A's on the U.S. Boat to Gaza and JFP's work to end the Blockade,” Just Foreign Policy, http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/flotillafaq
Dear shalom-pursuer,

In my letter yesterday, I looked at two movements of the last half-century that are very different in some ways and yet very similar in one. The US Sit-in / Freedom Ride movement and the Israeli settler movement both brought about major social change by embodying the future they envisioned in the present actuality.

Today I want to look at some contemporary “future-in-the-present” efforts of a different sort, aimed at affecting the Palestinian-Israeli relationship.

These protests have grown very much bigger in the last year, but they began earlier. Some writers have argued that the Palestinian “failure” to use nonviolent resistance has radically weakened their case against Israeli domination. But in fact Palestinians have used nonviolence, specially in the “sit-in” form of enacting the imagined future in the present — to little avail.

Best known among these little-known campaigns is that of the West Bank village of Bilin, which was cut apart from its own farmland by where the Israeli government chose to build its “Separation Wall.” For years, the citizens of Bilin and some supporters from Israel and Europe nonviolently walked every Friday toward their sequestered farms. The Israeli Army met them with tear gas, rubber-coated metal bullets, and sometimes live ammunition. Many were wounded; a few were killed.

Appeals to the Israeli High Court followed, and in 2007 the Court ruled that placement of the Wall was illegitimately done not in defense of Israeli security but in an attempt to make Bilin unliveable.

It took four years before the Army actually moved the Wall. Not till a few weeks ago did it obey a clear Court order.

More famous as a “future-in-the-present” nonviolent campaign of civil disobedience have been two flotillas of small ships carrying Israeli, European, American, and Middle Eastern crews and passengers. These flotillas intended to carry various supplies and letters to the shores of Gaza, despite Israeli blockades against that Palestinian region. The future these activists envision is one in which civilian goods can flow freely into and out of Gaza; they acted to make this real in the present.

The flotillas announced a commitment to the use of nonviolent resistance in attempting to disobey the Israeli blockade. But during the first flotilla, the Israeli government claimed that some members of the crew and passengers aboard a Turkish ship used violence against Israeli Navy personnel attempting to board the ship during the night on the high seas, and nine of the flotillists were killed in the process. Disputes rage over which “side” may have used violence first. On other ships in both flotillas, there was strict adherence to nonviolence as the ships were stopped and boarded by Israeli forces.
In regard to the other major dimension of the sit-in movement’s approach that distinguished it from the settler movement -- its inclusion of many groups beyond the Southern Black community -- the flotillas are clearly multifaceted.

As I write, the ships of the second flotilla have been held in the Greek ports from which they intended to sail to Gaza. Two of the ships were sabotaged by unknown perpetrators, and the rest are being held by orders of the Greek government. The Israeli government, the US government, and several US Jewish-establishment organizations (including the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Council on Public Affairs), have applauded the Greek government’s action.

Many of the flotillists and their supporters responded with classic nonviolent tactics: e.g. a fast by some Americans held in Athens; a sit-in by Spanish flotillists in the Spanish Embassy in Athens, demanding action by their government to insist that the Greek Government permit the ships to depart; demonstrations in Tel Aviv by some Israelis who support the flotilla and oppose their government’s blockade of Gaza are; a vigil at the Greek consulate in Chicago by some American Jews.

After the first flotilla and before the second, there was an almost entirely nonviolent (with some stone-throwing) “walk-in” by thousands of Palestinians toward the borders with Israel, on two separate days in the last months. On both occasions, the Israeli Army fired on the demonstrators and killed several of them, when they refused to turn back at what Israel considers the borders. (In the Golan Heights, Palestinians and Syrians deny the legitimacy of post-1967 Israeli “annexation” of part of the Heights. From that standpoint, the protest never reached the pre-1967 boundaries.)

As Rabbi Leah Novick has pointed out, some creative response by the Israeli government could have avoided these deaths and the additional anger at Israel they evoked from many people. For instance, she suggested, Israel could have issued one-day visitors’ visa to the Palestinians, searched them for weapons, and escorted them on tourist buses to see the country under surveillance.

The “cost” to the Israeli government would have been undermining its own military mind-set and the mind-set this inculcates in large parts of Israeli society, and undermining the atmosphere in which many Israelis see Palestinians only as inveterate and violent enemies, by treating them instead as complex human beings.

Coverage of these events by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency has acknowledged that – for example -- while the flotillas failed to deliver their physical cargo to Gaza, they twice succeeded in putting the Israeli blockade on front pages around the world.

And veteran Israeli peace activist Uri Avneri has ridiculed the government’s response to the flotillas, arguing that treating visits by weaponless authors, artists, professors, and peace activists as a threat to Israeli security has actually undermined international respect for Israel and thereby, in the long run, undermined Israel’s security. To read his essay, click here.

Some supporters of Israeli government policy have argued that the Flotillas are ways of supporting Hamas, the de facto governing party in Gaza, labeled by the Israeli and US governments as “terrorists.” But in fact, the flotillas have focused on humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza, and Hamas has acted with considerable distance, verging on hostility, to flotillist behavior that bypasses Hamas’ authority.
My own view is that we should encourage nonviolent efforts to embody in the present the future of a free Palestine living peacefully alongside Israel. What would make such efforts fully nonviolent in the Gandhian/Kingian sense would be their explicit action to embody as well the future of a secure and peaceful Israel.

Finally, let me say that not all nonviolent resistance is a perfect model of embodying the future in the present. The gatherings in Tahrir Square (including those still continuing), in their embodiment of a free and vibrant self-determining and self-protecting Egyptian community of open discussion -- words, art, music, dance -- may have been a crystal of that expression -- but general strikes, boycotts, etc., are usually more "against" than they are "for." They may still be life-giving and worthwhile -- or not. The call from Bill McKibben and others for weeks of nonviolent civil action at the White House this August to oppose any Presidential OK for a Tar Sands oil pipeline from Canada to Texas is an example of a life-giving "against." More about it next week.

Shalom, salaam, peace -- Arthur Waskow, Shalom Center

SUPPORT FOR THE 2ND FREEDOM FLOTILLA


ALICE WALKER FOR THE GAZA FLOTILLA JUNE 2011

Friday, July 1, 2011
Veterans For Peace Supports Gaza Flotilla, Condemns Israeli Naval Blockade
Passengers on the U.S. boat include VFP members, Colonel Ann Wright (ret.); Ray McGovern (former CIA analyst); Major, Ken Mayers (retired Marine Corps); Nic Abramson and Hedy Epstein, an Honorary VFP member and 87 year-old Holocaust survivor. Other U.S. passengers include Alice Walker, and two time Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Kathy Kelly. About 25% of the passengers are Jewish. <Full Story> http://www.veteransforpeace.org/news_detail.php?idx=86

An American Jew writes in Haaretz why he is joining the freedom flotilla

An ex Jew (now Pagan) Starhawk writes brilliantly on the Gaza flotilla
http://starhawksblog.org/?p=546
ANN WRIGHT’S ARTICLES ON GAZA
Here are some of the articles I have written about Gaza:
[Dick: I think Ann sent this list to me in 2010, so there are probably more. Ann is from Bentonville, and OMNI sponsored her speaking visits to Fayetteville and Bentonville.]

Ann Wright, ”Breaking the Siege of Gaza: Government Refuse While Citizens Act,” Commondreams, July 1, 2009
http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/07/01-0

Ann Wright, “President Carter and Citizen Activists Witness Destruction in Gaza,” Commondreams, June 18, 2009
http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/06/18-3


Ann Wright’s February 9 interview on Gaza on Grit TV, “Israel’s Crimes”
http://lauraflanders.firedoglake.com/2009/02/10/israels-crimes/

Ann Wright’s article “The Israeli Smashing of Gaza and International Silence”
http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/02/13-7

Ann’s article “Under Siege Again, But Gaza Will Not Die”
http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/02/11-11

Ann’s article “Can Gaza Be Rebuilt Through Tunnels?”
http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/02/24

Ann Wright’s article “With The Women of Gaza On International Women’s Day: We Will Not Be Silent! (March 9, 2009)
http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/03/09-1

BOOKS

2010 IN PRAISE OF GAZANS

This book not only provides a detailed account and illustration of Israeli war crimes in Gaza but equally important it provides a comprehensive analysis of the reasons why more and more people are recognizing that the US Congress and White House are Zionized occupied territory.

FROM THE PREFACE
Published by the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, and better known by the name of its head, as the “Goldstone Report” was a major breakthrough in three senses. In the first place the Report was the most systematic, detailed study of Israeli violations of international law in its wars against the Palestinian people. Secondly it caught the attention of the broadest sections of world opinion and ignited a firestorm of disapproval of Israel from almost all of the world’s leaders.

On the negative side the publication of the Report and the vehement rejection by all of the mainstream American Jewish Organizations, revealed their utterly craven disregard for human rights on the one hand and their absolute power and control over Washington’s policy toward the Middle East on the other. The US Congress voted by a margin of over ten to one to denounce the Report and instead support Israeli war crimes, as did the White House. The texts and illustrations in this book provide graphic accounts and visual evidence of why Israel has provoked a worldwide ‘Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions’ campaign by human rights activists, trade unions and a multitude of other groups, including individuals in Israel and Jewish organizations in Europe and North America. The Goldstone Report is an in depth case study of Israel’s war crimes in Gaza, including the blockade of such essential goods, as food and medicine, the systematic and deliberate targeting and destruction of civilian targets, including the murder of civilians in homes, schools and UN facilities; the use of weapons designed to inflict maximum pain and death to civilians (white phosphorous bombs); the gratuitous destruction of the foundations of civilian life including food production, water installations and sewage treatment facilities.

The Report concludes that the actions of the Israeli Government could lead to a “competent court finding that crimes against humanity have been committed.” The Report was approved by a vast majority in the United Nations General Assembly … While it was beyond the mandate of the UN to discuss other Israeli war crimes, the Goldstone Report did give fleeting reference to Israel’s use of the same methods during its invasion of Lebanon in 2006.

What the Goldstone Report described with regard to Israel’s savaging of Gaza has a long and ignoble history, which needs to be addressed, especially in light of what some liberal Zionists
charge as “picking on” Israel. Most critics especially on the Left condemn all brutal acts of war and torture whenever they are committed, so this charge is a phony cover-up of Israel’s especially brutal conduct from the founding of the state. Israel holds ‘world records’ in the number of towns and villages ethnically cleansed (over 500 and counting); number of refugees deported (4 million and counting); number of homes demolished (60 thousand and continuing); and has imprisoned more civilians per capita than any other country (250,000 and growing). Israel is the country with the highest number of protective US Security Council vetoes (over 100) preventing the world body from condemning Israeli war crimes.

Here is the great political and moral challenge. How do we explain the US governments’ sustained complicity with Israeli war crimes in the face of worldwide reprobation? How do we explain the utterly depraved conduct of the Obama White House and nearly 90% of the US Congress in denouncing the Goldstone Report?

These and other related questions are addressed in the chapters discussing the political, economic and cultural power of the Presidents of the Major American Jewish organizations, including but not confined to AIPAC. Even as I write these lines, April 25, 2010, the news from Washington is that Congress has passed a new war-sanctions act, by a 95% majority imposing a virtual blockade of Iran, authored by AIPAC and backed by all the major Americans Jewish organizations. With the exception of a handful of writers and anti-Zionist Jewish activists, the vast majority of the progressive leftist, Marxist, anti-war and Palestinian organizations and intellectuals, even those critical of the Congressional vote, in fear and cowardice, refuse to name the intellectual authors and political promoters of this vile act of Congress.

The Goldstone Report energized many, especially young Jews who were reticent to criticize Israel, to speak out against Israeli war crimes. A few cracks appeared in the Zionist monolith, as liberal lobbyists like J Street, condemned the Jewish State’s excesses in Gaza. Hopeful signs, alas which were, in great part, dashed when it came time to raise a hue and cry about AIPAC and mainstream Jewish-organized backing for the war-sanctions act against Iran. The silence was deafening. The saying that the Jewish left’s opposition to Israel war policies ends when a war begins, applies to the present war-sanctions bill. The terrible power of the Zionist Power Configuration has run amok: the Jewish Congressional lobby, the liberals, progressives and neo-cons all together signed and promoted an act of Congress signed by over 330 Congress people rebuking Obama for publicly disagreeing with Netanyahu over the land grab in Arab Jerusalem.

This book not only provides a detailed account and illustration of Israeli war crimes in Gaza but equally important it provides a comprehensive analysis of the reasons why more and more people are recognizing that the US Congress and White House are zionized occupied territory.

AUTHOR

James Petras is a Bartle Professor (Emeritus) of Sociology at Binghamton University, New York. He is the author of 64 books published in 29 languages, and over 560 articles in professional journals, including the American Sociological Review, British Journal of Sociology, Social Research, Journal of Contemporary Asia, and Journal of Peasant Studies. He has published over 2000 articles in nonprofessional journals such as the New York Times, the Guardian, the Nation, Christian Science Monitor, Foreign Policy, New Left Review, Partisan Review, Temps

This Time We Went Too Far: Truth & Consequences of the Gaza Invasion by Norman Finkelstein; OR Books, 2010.


Norman Finkelstein is back with another book. ‘This Time We Went Too Far’: Truth & Consequences of the Gaza Invasion. The title comes from Gideon Levy, an Israeli columnist who penned the words in response to the twenty-two days of aggression Israel waged against the Palestinian people in late December 2008 and early January 2009.

Z readers are likely to be familiar, to the 16th decimal or more, with the facts and history of not only Israel’s actions in the occupied territories and the region more widely, but the dubious circumstances in which the state of Israel came into existence as well. Finkelstein does touch on all of this, though briefly. This Time We Went Too Far does, as the title suggests, focus on the truth and consequences of the most recent Israeli invasion largely thanks to American support – political, economic and military.

Finkelstein draws heavily from human rights groups like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and B’Tselem, as well as the candidness of Israeli policy makers, Israeli soldiers, and of course, Richard Goldstone’s infamous United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza conflict. One of the most important aspects of This Time We Went Too Far are the notes. They are the foundation in which Finkelstein debunks such claims that Israel was defending itself, that the high civilian Palestinian civilian casualties was due to Hamas using Palestinians as human shields, or that those who spoke out against the invasion were, wait for it, anti-Semites.

The book, however, is less reactionary to apologist accusations than I may be
presenting, and more on why the invasion happened, how public opinion has been growing more favorable of the Palestinians among young Jewish people in North America and Europe, and what lessons we might draw from Gandhi in seeing truth and justice through. Finkelstein also delivers his trademark quips loaded with sarcasm and a piercing shot to the heart of the matter.

When Israeli officials claim to going to pains to differentiate between military and non-military targets but attacked a chicken farm that was an important part of the Palestinian diet, and which killed more than 60,000 chickens, Finkelstein retorts, "If the world only knew what was in those chickens..."

Or when the IDF makes such hyperbolic claims to have done more than any army in the history of warfare to protect the lives of civilians – and keep in mind 80% of their 1,400 victims were civilians whereas 33% of the 9 Israelis Palestinians were killed were civilian – Finkelstein shoots back, “Pity the civilian population in [Israel's] theater of operation.”

One more: when Lawrence Wright of the New Yorker absurdly claims that Palestinians identify with Gilad Shilat, the Israeli soldier abducted by Hamas, Norman writes, “This resolves the mystery as to why one Gazan family after another has christened their newborn Gilad...”

As I read the book I could hear Norman’s voice (I don’t know why, but I have always liked his accent and found him a pleasure to listen to). In This Time We Went Too Far he captures his speaking style in a prose that keeps you reading. While the book is not very big it is thorough. Norman Finkelstein manages to overcome something that plagues many writers: a tendency of being verbose. He packs in a lot of information without overwhelming you or making it difficult to keep up. And again, the notes! It’s not Chomsky’s Understanding Power but there are a lot of notes here. If you consider it a chapter in and of itself it’s the longest chapter in the book. Anyone who wants a detailed list of sources on the Israeli invasion, whether just for the sake of knowledge or as ammo to refute apologists for Israeli aggression, will find that this book gives you more than you could ask for.

The book begins as a dedication to Carol and Noam Chomsky “for being there” for him and ends with a relieving sense of optimism. Another welcoming aspect of the book is that it is not anti-Zionist. He stresses that the point of the Palestinian struggle is human freedom and dignity – something that is beyond ideology. Finkelstein points to Richard Goldstone, a self-proclaimed Zionist, and says, “A criterion of membership that would exclude a Richard Goldstone from our ranks is transparently counterproductive.” The tide is turning. Norman talks about a button he was given from a sponsor at one of his speeches. It said, “I ♥ GAZA.” He notes how he later received positive and unexpected feedback about the button from random people.
The hearts and minds of the world over are finding a cause to struggle for in solidarity: justice for Palestine. Students, especially young Jewish ones, did not stay silent when Israel attacked Gaza. In Europe many schools were occupied in protest. Contingencies of aid have tried to be delivered, and international marches trying to break the blockade have been tried as well. While these attempts have yet to succeed, it is a step forward that they were attempted at all. One of the main reasons for this is due to the (growing) many people who refuse to sit back and do nothing, and who are dedicating themselves to truth, peace and justice. In this respect, Norman Finkelstein’s *This Time We Went Too Far* continues that trend.

*Michael McGehee is an independent writer and working-class family man from Kennedale, Texas. He is also a member of the Dallas/Fort Worth Project for a Participatory Society. He can be reached at michael.mcgehee7@gmail.com*


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**Is There Really a Goldstone 'Retraction'?**

04/05/2011 by Peter Hart  
[http://www.fair.org/blog/2011/04/05/is-there-really-a-goldstone-retraction/](http://www.fair.org/blog/2011/04/05/is-there-really-a-goldstone-retraction/)

The big Israel-Palestine news of the week is Richard Goldstone's op-ed in the *Washington Post* on Sunday (4/3/11). The short version you pick up from the media is that Goldstone has "retracted" his UN-sponsored report on war crimes during Israel's Operation Cast Lead war in Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009.

The "retraction" language is fairly common--as in the *New York Times* headline (4/4/11), "Israel Grapples With Retraction on UN Report."

But is there any real retraction?

Goldstone, a retired South African judge, chaired a four-person fact-finding commission investigating crimes committed by both sides. As he explains in his *Post* column, the Israelis refused to cooperate, which obviously affected the report's findings:

The allegations of intentionality by Israel were based on the deaths of and injuries to civilians in situations where our fact-finding mission had no evidence on which to draw any other reasonable conclusion.

Goldstone writes that he now believes that "civilians were not intentionally targeted as a matter of policy." He sides with a follow-up report from the UN, which credits Israel for launching some investigations of their Gaza war--though he added:

I share the concerns reflected in the McGowan Davis report that few of Israel's inquiries have been
concluded and believe that the proceedings should have been held in a public forum. Although the Israeli evidence that has emerged since publication of our report doesn't negate the tragic loss of civilian life, I regret that our fact-finding mission did not have such evidence explaining the circumstances in which we said civilians in Gaza were targeted, because it probably would have influenced our findings about intentionality and war crimes.

At CounterPunch, Jonathan Cook notes (4/5/11):

Israel would certainly like observers to interpret Goldstone's latest comments as an exoneration. In reality, however, he offered far less consolation to Israel than its supporters claim.

The report's original accusation that Israeli soldiers committed war crimes still stands, as does criticism of Israel's use of unconventional weapons such as white phosphorus, the destruction of property on a massive scale and the taking of civilians as human shields.

Cook adds that some observers see this as a mostly misdirected debate over intentionality--whether Israeli forces meant to kill civilians, or merely disregarded the fact that their actions would kill civilians. As Kenneth Roth of Human Rights Watch put it at the Guardian (4/5/11):

Goldstone has not retreated from the report's allegation that Israel engaged in large-scale attacks in violation of the laws of war. These attacks included Israel's indiscriminate use of heavy artillery and white phosphorus in densely populated areas, and its massive and deliberate destruction of civilian buildings and infrastructure without a lawful military reason. This misconduct was so widespread and systematic that it clearly reflected Israeli policy.

Roth also tweeted some criticism of the New York Times' coverage:

NYTimes wrong on Goldstone oped. He said intentional killing wasn't policy. No retraction on indiscriminate warfare.

And: NYT wrong again. Goldstone says Israel didn't intend to kill but its policy was still crime of indiscriminate warfare

So what has happened then? Goldstone--who has been under tremendous pressure to distance himself from the report that bears his name--now says that there may have been cases where the Israeli military was not behaving with intent to kill civilians. Left unchallenged is the fact that many civilians were actually killed in attacks where little was done to prevent such killing.

But those details may not matter, if Richard Cohen's column in the Washington Post today (4/5/11) is any indication. Cohen writes that it was "shocking" that "Israel was accused of deliberately targeting civilians during its brutal 2008-09 war with Hamas." But now comes vindication:

Goldstone has retracted his findings. He no longer believes that Israel intentionally targeted civilians during the Gaza war (although he still believes Hamas did) and says that any deaths were inadvertent--the usual fog of war, the usual panicked decision.

The report focused on Israeli actions that were "either reckless, disproportionate or deliberate." There is nothing to suggest that most of the report's findings are in serious dispute. But to Cohen, it's now all "the usual fog of war." Cohen also claims:

As Goldstone acknowledges, Israel has looked into every charge of war crimes--incident by incident. Some soldiers have indeed been punished because some awful things happened.

It is not clear where Goldstone says or implies this in his brief op-ed. As Roth and other writers have pointed out, the Israeli investigations have yielded few indictments.

Cohen closes by writing:
Those who gleefully embraced the Goldstone report have to ask themselves why. They may hate the answer.

One might assume that he's suggesting anti-Semitism on the part of Goldstone's "gleeful" champions. Ironically in a piece admonishing those who rush to judgment, Cohen recalls that a West Bank settler family of five was recently murdered in their home by what are universally thought to be Palestinians. This, too, has put Israel on edge.

As I noted before, there is plenty of speculation that a Palestinian committed those murders--but no evidence to date to that effect. Apparently speculation is enough for Richard Cohen. He should ask himself why. He may hate the answer.

Tags: Goldstone Report, Richard Cohen

The Anti-Empire Report
by William Blum, June 10th, 2010
www.killinghope.org

The worst thing that ever happened to the Jewish people is the Holocaust. The second worst thing that ever happened to the Jewish people is the state of Israel.

Things internationally are so dispiriting there's nothing left to do but fantasize. I picture Turkey, as a member of NATO, demanding that the alliance come to its defense after being attacked by Israel. Under Article 5 of the NATO charter an armed attack on one member is deemed to constitute an armed attack on all members. That is the ostensible reason NATO is fighting in Afghanistan — the attack against the United States on September 11, 2001 is regarded as an attack on all NATO members (disregarding the awkward fact that Afghanistan as a country had nothing to do with the attack). The Israeli attack on a Turkish-flagged ship, operated by a Turkish humanitarian organization, killing nine Turkish nationals and wounding many more can certainly constitute an attack upon a NATO member. . . .

MORE Anti-Empire Report, June 10, 2010
http://www.killinghope.org/bblum6/aer82.html

Noam Chomsky, “The Betrayal of Gaza” 08 November 2010

The US is vocal about its commitment to peace in Israel and the Palestinian territories — but its actions suggest otherwise.

Palestinian children play near a tent in Ezbet Abed Rabbo area, that was heavily destroyed during Israel's 22-day offensive on the Gaza Strip. Photograph: Getty Images.

That the Israel-Palestine conflict grinds on without resolution might appear to be rather strange. For many of the world's conflicts, it is difficult even to conjure up a feasible settlement. In this case, not only is it possible, but there is near-universal agreement on its
basic contours: a two-state settlement along the internationally recognised (pre-June 1967) borders - with "minor and mutual modifications", to adopt official US terminology before Washington departed from the international community in the mid-1970s.

The basic principles have been accepted by virtually the entire world, including the Arab states (which call for the full normalisation . . . . .

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GAZA FREEDOM MARCH

From: CODEPINK <codepink@mail.democracyinaction.org>

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Date: Tue, Dec 28, 2010 at 11:06 AM

Subject: What happened two years ago?  To: jbennet@uark.edu

December 28, 2010

Dear Dick,

Two years ago, on December 27, the Israeli military began a 22-day assault on the people living inside Gaza. This brutal attack that used white phosphorous and other deadly weapons to blatantly target innocent civilians, including school children and hospital patients, resulted in the death of over 1,400 Palestinians. One year ago at this time we were in Egypt for the Gaza Freedom March, a massive effort that brought nearly 1,400 people from over 40 countries together to march for an end to the siege of Gaza. People like you did solidarity actions in over 150 cities.

We want to share with you what happened on that march in a new video just released in time for the anniversary. Please take a moment to watch it now.

Members of the Gaza Freedom March returned home determined to continue their activism. Holocaust survivor Hedy Epstein, 86 years old, has done just that, from speaking up during the UC Berkeley campus divestment hearings, to joining the Gaza flotilla that was shot at by the Israelis, to participating in a flashmob dance to boycott Motorola.

So, too, CODEPINK has kept up the pressure this year, demonstrating in Congress and at the White House, protesting the pro-occupation lobby AIPAC, boycotting Ahava, helping to raise funds for the next flotilla and taking two more delegations to Gaza. You can join us on our next delegation on January 30 to February 6 where, at the invitation of the United Nations, we will be focusing on the plight of children.

The situation in Gaza remains dire. A new report called Dashed Hopes: Continuation of the Gaza Blockade says that little has changed since Israel’s June 2010 announcement that it would ease the restrictions. It found that 80 percent of the population remains dependent on international aid, businesses still don’t have the raw materials they need to reopen, and residents are still denied access to their friends, relatives and educational opportunities in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and abroad.

As the new year approaches, we hope you will renew your commitment to taking action for a more just and peaceful world.

Onwards to lift the siege,
JEWISH SUPPORT OF GAZA: ANOTHER BOAT TO GAZA BLOCKED BY ISRAEL
http://jewishboattogaza.org/

Passengers of Jewish Aid Boat to Gaza Allege Israeli Mistreatment
Passengers of a Jewish aid boat prevented from reaching Gaza are accusing the Israeli military of excessive force in seizing their ship. On Tuesday, eight of the nine activists aboard the Jewish Boat to Gaza ship Irene were released after being apprehended miles off the Gaza coast. They were attempting to deliver a symbolic load of humanitarian aid to break the Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip. Israeli activist and former Israel Air Force pilot Yonatan Shapira said he was beaten and shocked with a taser gun.

Yonatan Shapira: "The soldiers were very brutal to us, they didn’t kill us like they killed other Palestinians and Muslims, but they were very brutal. I got shot with a tazer shock gun, electric and was brutally treated just like my brother Itamar. We were detained pretty violently and later, now, we were released and they blame us, they accuse us of attacking the soldiers and threatening the soldiers and of course everything is upside down, it’s a complete lie."

Other passengers included the eighty-two-year-old Holocaust survivor and Israeli resident Reuven Moskovitz, who lived under Nazi occupation as a child in Romania.

Reuven Moskovitz: "We are talking about one and half million people, 800,000 children. When I was a child, I was imprisoned for five years and I can’t forget it. I cannot sleep at night, I have nightmares that have haunted me all my life. Do you know what we are doing to these people (in Gaza), and what we are doing to our own soldiers?"

Aid Convoy Arrives in Turkey En Route to Gaza
The Jewish Boat to Gaza was the latest attempt to break the blockade since Israel’s deadly attack on an aid flotilla in May. Meanwhile, a convoy of some 45 vehicles carrying aid has arrived in Turkey on its way to Gaza from Europe. The convoy, dubbed Viva Palestina, will attempt to reach Gaza next month. British activist Patrick Audai said Israel’s attack on the flotilla motivated him to take part.

Patrick Audai: "When I saw what those Israeli terrorists did to those innocent activists on board of Mavi Marmara, and those people who died, they are the heroes, they are the conscience of the world. That’s when I decided that I must make a stand and that I must come to Gaza and take medical aid to relieve the people there from their terrible suffering."

UN: Israel Denies Palestinians Access to Land and Sea
A new United Nations report says Israel forcibly denies Palestinians access to nearly one-fifth of Gaza
Strip land and 85 percent of its naval territory. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the restrictions deprive some 178,000 Palestinians of their livelihoods. The restrictions come on top of Israel’s complete siege and blockade of Gaza, which confines the 1.3 million Palestinians there to one of the world’s most densely populated areas. From *Democracy Now* (8-20-10).

NEW BOOK AND FILM

**Book:**  *My Son Tom: The Life and Tragic Death of Tom Hurndall* by Jocelyn Hurndall.

**Publication Date:** **5 May 2008.**

In April 2003, twenty-one-year-old English photojournalism student Tom Hurndall was shot in the head as he was rescuing a Palestinian child in the town of Rafah in the Gaza Strip. Here is Tom’s mother’s account of his courageous quest, its tragic end and a devastated family's struggle for justice in a case that made legal history. It is an elegy for a son, full of loss but also of hope. Written with honesty, dignity and insight, this moving story of a remarkable young man, a mother's love, and a devoted family gives a human face to a conflict that, directly and indirectly, affects us all.

**Film:**  *Defy the Stars: The Life and Tragic Death of Tom Hurndal*  A mother’s account of her son shot while helping to save some children in Gaza.

Related:  *Let Me Stand Alone: The Journals of Rachel Corrie* by Rachel Corrie

Dispatched from and sold by  *Amazon.co.uk.*

The  *Shooting of Thomas Hurndall* (2008) (TV)


END GAZA NEWSLETTER #2

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Dick Bennett
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