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**A former New York Times
Middle East correspondent
looks at America's support
for the Jewish state—and asks:**

What Price Israel?

By Chris Hedges

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About This Issue

What Price Israel?, the title of our issue, is taken from Alfred Lilienthal's 1953 book of the same name. Much has transpired since then. The ensuing half-century has seen an ever more passionate United States involvement with the Jewish state.

To bring us up to date on the cost of that Special Relationship we turn to Chris Hedges. In 2002, Hedges was one of the reporters at The New York Times who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the paper's coverage of global terrorism. He is also the recipient of Amnesty International's Global Award for Human Rights Journalism. His book "War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning" (2002) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction. For movie buffs, it was also the source for the quote used in the opening of the 2009 Academy Award-winning film, *The Hurt Locker*: "The rush of battle is often a potent and lethal addiction, for war is a drug." Currently, Hedges is the F. Ross Johnson-Connaught Distinguished Visitor in American Studies, Centre for the Study of the United States at The University of Toronto.



On page 13 is our interview with Jeff Halper, founder of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, about the organization's website.

Our book review selection, "America's Misadventures in the Middle East" by Chas W. Freeman, is reviewed on page 14 by AMEU board member and former U.S. Ambassador Robert Keeley. This is the first book to be released by a new publishing house, Just World Books, whose proprietor is the well known journalist, author, and blogger Helena Cobban.

Our video selection is on page 15. The order form for the Freeman book and videos is on page 16.

As we enter a new year — AMEU's 44th — please direct your attention to the notice on page 16: "A Legacy Suggestion." We can publish articles like Chris Hedges's, which go out to over 1,000 public, college and university libraries, because over the years supporters have remembered us in their wills. This, together with our regular appeal letters, represents the economic life blood of our efforts. For that support we are most grateful.

— John Mahoney, Executive Director

The United States has interceded on numerous occasions since the creation of the state of Israel to ensure the survival of the Jewish state.

Without U.S. intervention Israel would probably not exist.

The country was threatened during the October 1973 war when Egypt, trained and backed by the Soviet Union, crossed the Suez and the Syrians poured in over the Golan Heights. Huge American military transport planes came to the rescue. They began landing every half-hour to refit the battered Israeli army, which had lost most of its heavy armor. By the time the war was over, the United States had given Israel \$2.2 billion in emergency military aid. The intervention, which enraged the Arab world, triggered the OPEC oil embargo that for a time wreaked havoc on Western economies. This was perhaps the most dramatic example of the sustained life-support system the United States has provided to Israel.

But there have been many, many others. Israel, with Washington's connivance, is treated as if it is above international law and has a divine right to American aid and support even when such support directly contravenes American interests.

Washington's myopic relationship with Israel, too often driven by domestic deference to the powerful Israeli lobby, has repeatedly placed short-term political interests above national security in the Middle East. It has ignored and sacrificed the rights of Palestinians, despite Israel's clear violation of international law, which has fueled widespread disgust and anger with Israel and Washington throughout the Arab world. Washington's spineless acquiescence to Israel, even as Israel openly rejected Barack Obama's calls for a cosmetic three-month freeze on settlement expansion excluding Arab East Jerusalem, is another in a long line of sad capitulations that have turned the United States into the handmaiden of right-wing Israeli policy. Israel, despite its most recent brushing off of Washington's requests for moderation, has at the same time been

rewarded with \$3 billion in aid for fighter jets. And Israel, no matter what it does, can count on the usual blind diplomatic support. Washington will continue to veto any U.N. Security Council actions that attempt to enforce the rule of international law, including a freeze on settlements.

The open disdain for the rule of law by Israel and Washington's steady support for this violation of law has been a public and permanent part of the relationship between Israel and the United States.

The Israeli international jurist Theodor Meron in 1967 advised the Israeli government that building settlements in the newly occupied territories would be a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Gershom Gorenberg writes in "The Accidental Empire" that Meron's conclusion was endorsed by Justice Minister Ya'akov Shimson Shapira, and shortly after by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan. Dayan however, said he would ignore the ruling and informed his fellow ministers, "We must consolidate our hold so that over time we will succeed in 'digesting' Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and merging them with 'little' Israel," meanwhile "dismember(ing) the territorial contiguity" of the West Bank, all under the usual pretense "that the step is necessary for military purposes."

"Settling Israelis in occupied territory contravenes, as is known, international conventions," Dayan stated at the time. "But there is nothing essentially new in that."

Dayan read Washington correctly. Washington would protest formally and do nothing to punish or pressure Israel to alter its seizure of Palestinian land. The billions in economic and military support would continue to roll in along with the diplomatic cover to protect Israel from international retribution. The rage engendered in the Arab world, which over time would alienate the Arab street from the United States as well as from the secular Arab regimes that cynically tolerated the abuse of the Palestinians, fueled the rise of militant Islamic movements that threaten to now encircle Israel and drive the United States out of the Middle East.

There is built into these policies a form of collective suicide for Israel and Washington in the Middle East. The myopic belief that Israel can continue to flout the rights of the Palestinians as well as the rule of law means that, once the corrupt regimes in the region are replaced, Israel and the United States will become pariahs.

What Cost Israel?

Israel was born at midnight, May 14, 1948. The U.S. recognized the new state 11 minutes later. The two countries have been locked in a deadly embrace ever since.

Today, the Israeli lobby is entrenched within the American political establishment. Its operatives, including diplomats such as Dennis Ross, are given diplomatic positions to further Israeli policy. The generous campaign donations from the Israeli lobby have bought the political elite of the two major parties. The slash-and-burn budget proposals set forth by the Republicans will not affect Israel. Indeed, Eric Cantor, the new majority leader in the House of Representatives, has proposed setting up a special foreign aid account for Israel so that when foreign aid is cut the Jewish state will not be affected.

It was not always such. Washington, at the beginning of the relationship, was able to be a moderating influence. An incensed President Eisenhower demanded and got Israel's withdrawal after the Israelis occupied Gaza in 1956. During the Six-Day War in 1967, Israeli warplanes bombed the U.S.S. Liberty. The ship, flying the U.S. flag and stationed 15 miles off the Israeli coast, was intercepting tactical and strategic communications from both sides. The Israeli strikes killed 34 U.S. sailors and wounded 171. The deliberate attack froze, for a while, Washington's enthusiasm for Israel. But ruptures like this one proved to be only bumps, soon smoothed out by an increasingly sophisticated and well-financed pro-Israel lobby.

Israel has reaped tremendous rewards from this alliance. It has been given more than \$140 billion in U.S. direct economic and military assistance. It

receives about \$3 billion in direct assistance annually, roughly one-fifth of the U.S. foreign aid budget. Although most American foreign aid packages stipulate that related military purchases have to be made in the United States, Israel is allowed to use about 25 percent of the money to subsidize its own growing and profitable defense industry. It is exempt, unlike other nations, from accounting for how it spends the aid money. And funds are routinely siphoned off to build new Jewish settlements, bolster the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories and construct the security barrier, which costs an estimated \$1 million a mile.

The barrier weaves its way through the West Bank, creating isolated pockets of impoverished Palestinians in ringed ghettos. By the time the barrier is finished it will probably in effect seize up to 40 percent of Palestinian land. This is the largest land grab by Israel since the 1967 war. Although the United States officially opposes settlement expansion and the barrier, it also funds them.

The U.S. has provided Israel with nearly \$3 billion to develop weapons systems and given Israel access to some of the most sophisticated items in its own military arsenal, including Blackhawk attack helicopters and F-16 fighter jets. The United States also gives Israel access to intelligence it denies to its NATO allies. When Israel refused to sign the nuclear nonproliferation treaty, the United States stood by without a word of protest as the Israelis built the region's first nuclear weapons program. Washington and Israel's hypocritical stance against Iran's purported development of a nuclear weapon is not lost on Muslim nations. Israel, which never signed the nonproliferation treaty, and built the Middle East's first nuclear arsenal, is exempted from public rebuke or public discussion while Iran, which did sign the treaty, is excoriated.

U.S. foreign policy has now become little more than an extension of Israeli foreign policy.

The United States, since 1982, has vetoed over 40 Security Council resolutions critical of Israel, more than the total number of vetoes cast by all the other

Security Council members. It refuses to enforce the Security Council resolutions it claims to support. These resolutions call on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories.

There is a volcanic anger by Arabs at this blatant favoritism. Few in the Middle East see any distinction between Israeli and American policies, nor should they. And when the Islamic radicals speak of U.S. support of Israel as a prime reason for their hatred of America, we should listen. The consequences of this one-sided relationship are being played out in the disastrous war in Iraq, growing tension with Iran, the war we are losing in Afghanistan and the humanitarian and political crisis in Gaza. It is being played out in Lebanon, where Hezbollah is gearing up for another war with Israel, one most Middle East analysts say is inevitable. The U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East is unraveling. And it is doing so because of this

special relationship. A strike on Iran would usher in a nightmare of catastrophic proportions.

Many in the American foreign policy establishment and State Department saw this situation coming. The decision to throw our lot in with Israel in the Middle East was not initially a popular one with an array of foreign policy experts, including President Harry Truman's secretary of state, Gen. George Marshall. They warned there would be a backlash. They knew the cost the United States would pay in the oil-rich region for this decision, which they feared would be one of the greatest strategic blunders of the postwar era. And they were right. The decision has jeopardized American and Israeli security and created the kindling for a regional conflagration.

The alliance, which makes no sense in geopolitical terms, does make sense when seen through the lens of domestic politics. The Israel lobby has become a

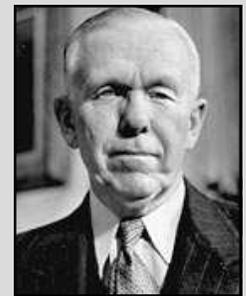
The Standoff

By the fall of 1947, in his bid for reelection, Harry Truman was running 5 to 15 percent behind Gov. Thomas Dewey. Clark Clifford, the president's domestic affairs advisor, in consultation with the Jewish Agency, told him that recognition of the Jewish state could make a difference in the delegate-rich states of New York, Pennsylvania and California.



Pres. Harry Truman

On May 12, 1948, Truman met with his top foreign policy advisors, led by Secretary of State George Marshall. Also present was Clifford, who argued that the Balfour Declaration, the Holocaust, and having a democratic state in the Middle East justified recognition. Marshall erupted: "Mr. President, I thought this meeting was called to consider an important and complicated problem in foreign policy. I don't even know why Clifford is here." Truman replied: "Well, General, he's here because I asked him to be here." Marshall shot back: "If you follow Clifford's advice and if I were to vote in the election, I would vote against you."



George Marshall

Three days later, the U. S. recognized the Jewish state.

On Nov. 2, 1948, in an upset victory, Truman defeated Dewey. Later, speaking to a group of U.S. diplomats, he explained why he had disregarded the recommendations of his advisors: "I am sorry, gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism. I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents." — *Ed.*

potent force in the American political system. No major candidate, Democrat or Republican, dares to challenge it. The lobby successfully purged the State Department of Arab experts who challenged the notion that Israeli and American interests were identical. Backers of Israel have doled out hundreds of millions of dollars to support U.S. political candidates deemed favorable to Israel. They have brutally punished those who strayed, including the first President Bush, who they said was not vigorous enough in his defense of Israeli interests. This was a lesson the son did not forget. George W. Bush did not want to be a one-term president like his father. And neither does Barak Obama.

Israel advocated removing Saddam Hussein from power and currently advocates striking Iran to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons. Direct Israeli involvement in American military operations in the Middle East is impossible. It would reignite a war between Arab states and Israel. The United States, which during the Cold War avoided direct military involvement in the region, now does the direct bidding of Israel while Israel watches from the sidelines. During the 1991 Gulf War, Israel was a spectator, just as it is in the war with Iraq.

Washington diplomats have publicly held Israel up as a model for what they would like Iraq to become. Imagine how this idea plays out on the Arab street, which views Israel as the Algerians viewed the French colonizers during the war of liberation.

Americans are increasingly isolated and reviled in the world. They remain blissfully ignorant of their own culpability for this isolation. U.S. "spin" paints the rest of the world as unreasonable, but Israel, Americans are assured, will always be on our side.

Israel is meanwhile reaping economic as well as political rewards from its lock-down apartheid state. In the "gated community" market it has begun to sell systems and techniques that allow the nation to cope with terrorism. Israel exports \$3.4 billion in defense products. This is well over a billion dollars

more than it receives in American military aid. Israel has grown into the fourth largest arms dealer in the world. Most of this growth has come in the so-called homeland security sector.

"The key products and services," as Naomi Klein wrote in *The Nation*, "are hi-tech fences, unmanned drones, biometric IDs, video and audio surveillance gear, air passenger profiling and prisoner interrogation systems—precisely the tools and technologies Israel has used to lock in the occupied territories. And that is why the chaos in Gaza and the rest of the region doesn't threaten the bottom line in Tel Aviv, and may actually boost it. Israel has learned to turn endless war into a brand asset, pitching its uprooting, occupation and containment of the Palestinian people as a half-century head start in the 'global war on terror.' "

The United States, at least officially, does not support the occupation and calls for a viable Palestinian state. It is a global player, with interests that stretch well beyond the boundaries of the Middle East, and the equation that Israel's enemies are our enemies is not that simple.

"Terrorism is not a single adversary," John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt wrote in *The London Review of Books*, "but a tactic employed by a wide array of political groups. The terrorist organizations that threaten Israel do not threaten the United States, except when it intervenes against them (as in Lebanon in 1982). Moreover, Palestinian terrorism is not random violence directed against Israel or 'the West'; it is largely a response to Israel's prolonged campaign to colonize the West Bank and Gaza Strip. More important, saying that Israel and the U.S. are united by a shared terrorist threat has the causal relationship backwards: the U.S. has a terrorism problem in good part because it is so closely allied with Israel, not the other way around."

Middle Eastern policy is shaped in the United States by those with very close ties to the Israel lobby. Those who attempt to counter the virulent Israeli position are ruthlessly slapped down. Former

Secretary of State Colin Powell, for example, clashed repeatedly with the neocons around Vice President Cheney: "Scooter" Libby, Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith, all with close ties to Israel. Powell caustically referred to Feith's coterie as the "Gestapo." In Powell's eyes many in the group, who had worked for the Israeli lobby and held dual American and Israeli citizenships, were fabricating evidence to justify an invasion of Iraq, a fabrication he feared was being done for Israeli not American interests. Powell's criticism saw him pushed aside and doomed his chance to remain secretary of state for the second half of the Bush administration.

This alliance is as true with the Democrats, with its array of Israel-first Middle East experts, including special Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk, the former deputy director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), one of the most powerful pro-Israel lobbying groups in Washington, as it is with the Republicans.

Washington was once willing to stay Israel's hand. It intervened to thwart some of its most extreme violations of human rights. But the Israeli lobby is now so powerful that every administration since Bill Clinton has signed on for every disastrous Israeli blunder, from building the security barrier in the West Bank, to sealing off Gaza and triggering a humanitarian crisis, to the ruinous invasion and saturation bombing of Lebanon.

The few tepid attempts to criticize Israeli actions have all ended in hasty and humiliating retreats in face of pressure from domestic pro-Israel groups.

When the Israel Defense Forces in April 2002 reoccupied the West Bank, President Bush called on then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to "halt the incursions and begin withdrawal." It never happened. After a week of heavy pressure from the Israel lobby and Israel's allies in Congress, meaning just about everyone in Congress, the president gave up, calling Sharon "a man of peace." It was a humiliating moment for the United States, a clear sign of who pulls the strings.

But it was business as usual. In March 2010 Israel announced plans, during a visit by Vice-President Joe Biden, to build 1,600 homes for Jews in an area of the West Bank annexed by Israel. The announcement, a public humiliation of Biden and the Obama administration, led Washington to announce that it damaged its efforts to revive the Middle East peace process. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the project an insult. Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu said he was blindsided by planning bureaucrats and apologized. And for several weeks Barack Obama, attempting to bite back, ostracized the Israeli Prime Minister until the White House backed down and invited Netanyahu for a meeting and accepted the 1,600 new homes as a *fait accompli*.

There were several reasons for the war in Iraq. The desire for American control of oil, the belief that Washington could build puppet states in the region, and a real, if misplaced, fear of Saddam Hussein played a part in the current disaster. But it was also strongly shaped by the notion that what is good for Israel is good for the United States. Israel wanted Iraq neutralized. Israeli intelligence, in the lead-up to the war, gave faulty information to the U.S. about Iraq's alleged arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. When Baghdad was taken in April 2003, the Israeli government immediately began to push for an attack on Syria. The lust for this attack has waned, in no small part because the Americans don't have enough troops to hang on in Iraq, much less launch a new occupation.

Israel is currently lobbying the United States to launch aerial strikes on Iran in order to forcibly prevent a nuclear Iran—and it probably will succeed. The efforts to halt nuclear development through diplomatic means have failed. It does not matter that Iran poses no threat to the United States. It does not matter that it does not even pose a threat to Israel, which has several hundred nuclear weapons in its arsenal. It matters only that Israel demands total military domination of the Middle East.

The alliance between Israel and the United States has now culminated in direct U.S. military involvement in the Middle East. This involvement, which is not furthering American interests, is unleashing a geopolitical nightmare. American soldiers and Marines are dying in droves in a useless war. The impotence of the United States in the face of Israeli pressure is complete. The White House and the Congress have become, for perhaps the first time, a direct extension of Israeli interests. There is no longer any debate within the United States. This is evidenced by the obsequious nods to Israel by all the mainstream presidential candidates. The political cost for those who challenge Israel is too high.

This means there will be no peaceful resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It means the incidents of Islamic terrorism against the U.S. and Israel will grow. It means that American power and prestige are on a steep, irreversible decline. And I fear it also means the ultimate end of the Jewish experiment in the Middle East.

The weakening of the United States, economically and militarily, is giving rise to new centers of power. The U.S. economy, mismanaged and drained by the Iraq and Afghan wars, is increasingly dependent on Chinese trade imports and on Chinese holdings of U.S. Treasury securities. China holds dollar reserves worth \$825 billion. If Beijing decides to abandon the U.S. bond market, even in part, it would cause a free fall of the dollar. It would lead to the collapse of the \$7-trillion U.S. real estate market. There would be a wave of U.S. bank failures and huge unemployment. The growing dependence on China has been accompanied by aggressive work by the Chinese to build alliances with many of the world's exporters of oil, such as Iran, Nigeria, Sudan and Venezuela. The Chinese are preparing for the looming worldwide clash over dwindling resources.

What Cost Racism?

The future is ominous. Not only do Israel's foreign policy objectives not coincide with American interests, they actively hurt them. Israel's growing

belligerence in the Middle East, the calls for an attack against Iran, the collapse of the imperial project in Iraq have all given an opening, where there was none before, to America's rivals. It is not in Israel's interests to ignite a regional conflict. It is not in ours. But those who have their hands on the wheel seem determined, in the name of freedom and democracy, to keep the American ship of state headed at breakneck speed into the cliffs before us.

Israel has during its long embrace with the United States reconfigured itself into an ugly, racist and openly apartheid state. It was unthinkable, when I was based as a correspondent in Jerusalem two decades ago, that an Israeli politician who openly advocated ethnically cleansing the Palestinians from Israeli-controlled territory, as well as forcing Arabs in Israel to take loyalty oaths or be forcibly relocated to the West Bank, could sit on the cabinet. The racist tirades of Jewish proto-fascists like Meir Kahane stood outside the law, were vigorously condemned by most Israelis and prosecuted. Kahane's repugnant Kach party, labeled by the United States, Canada and the European Union as a terrorist organization, was outlawed by the Israeli government in 1988 for inciting racism.

Israel has changed. The racist virus spread by Kahane, whose thugs were charged with the murders and beatings of dozens of unarmed Palestinians and whose members held rallies in Jerusalem where they chanted "Death to Arabs!" has returned to Israel in the figure of Israel's powerful new foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman. Lieberman openly calls for an "araberrein" Israel—an Israel free of Arabs.

It has been a steady decline from the days of the socialist Labor Party, which founded Israel in 1948 and held within its ranks many leaders, such as Yitzhak Rabin, who sought peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians. The moral squalor of Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu and Lieberman reflect the country's degeneration. Labor, like Israel, is a shell of its old self. Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu Party, with 15 seats in the Knesset, is strong enough to bring down the



Avigor Lieberman MP

Netanyahu government the moment Lieberman feels his power base is robust enough to move him into the prime minister's office. He is the new face of the Jewish state.

Lieberman, a former nightclub bouncer who was a member of the Kach Party, was found guilty in 2001 of beating a 12-year-old boy and fined by an Israeli court. He is being investigated for multi-million-dollar fraud and money laundering and is rumored to have close ties with the Russian mafia. He lives, in defiance of international law, in the Jewish settlement of Nokdim on occupied Palestinian land.

Lieberman, like his mentor Kahane, calls for the eradication of Palestinians from Israel and the territories it occupies.

During the massive Israeli bombardment of Gaza in December and January he said that Israel should fight Hamas the way the United States fought the Japanese in World War II. He noted that the actual occupation of Japan was unnecessary to achieve victory, alluding to the dropping of the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

When he assumed his position as foreign minister he announced that the 2007 Annapolis peace agreement was dead.

He said in 2004 that 90 percent of Israel's Palestinian citizens "have no place here. They can take their bundles and get lost." This statement was especially galling since Lieberman, unlike most of the Palestinians who can trace their ancestry back generations, immigrated to Israel in 1978 from Moldova and retains a heavy Russian accent.

Lieberman, from the floor of the Knesset, openly fantasized three years ago about executing the handful of Palestinian Knesset members.

"We requested that in the government guidelines it would say explicitly that all the inciters and collaborators with terrorism that sit in this house should bear the brunt of the penalty for those actions," Lieberman said from the Knesset plenum in May of 2006. "All those who continue to meet freely with Hamas and Hizbollah—who go on monthly visits to Lebanon. Those who declared Israel's Independence Day to be 'Nakba' [Arabic for 'catastrophe'] Day and raised black flags..."

"World War Two ended with the Nuremberg Trials. The heads of the Nazi party went to be executed—but not just them, also those who collaborated with them. Just like [prime minister of Vichy France during WWII Pierre] La Valle was later executed, I hope that this is the fate of the collaborators in this house."

He has suggested bombing Egypt's Aswan Dam, an act that would lead to a massive loss of Egyptian lives. And recently he told the President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, one of Israel's few Arab allies, to "go to hell."

As Ariel Sharon's Minister of Transportation he offered to bus several hundred Palestinian prisoners to the sea and drown them.

And, along with Netanyahu, he advocates massive air strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Hamas, the Iranian government, and the Taliban have been condemned by Washington for advocating policies that mirror those expressed on the floor of the Knesset by Lieberman towards Palestinians. Ahmed Tibi, an Arab deputy in the Knesset, has called on the international community to boycott Israel as it did Austria when far-right leader Jorg Haider joined that country's government.

This seems a fair request. But I expect the hypocrisy and double standards that characterize our relations with the Middle East, along with our obsequious catering to the Israeli lobby, will prevail. Racism, as long as it is directed towards Arabs, does little to perturb our conscience or hinder our support of Israel.

The Israeli leadership, following the assassination of Rabin by a Jewish extremist with ties to Kach, never again sought a viable settlement with the Palestinians. Successive Israeli prime ministers talked the language of peace and negotiations, largely to placate the international community and Washington, while they vigorously expanded Jewish settlements on Palestinian land, seized huge tracts of the West Bank, including most of the aquifers, and imposed a brutal collective punishment on the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza.

Palestinians have become, by Israeli design, impoverished, reduced to a level of bare subsistence and dependent on the United Nations for food assistance. They live ringed by Israeli troops in a series of pod-like ghettos in the West Bank and Gaza, which is a massive, fetid, open air prison. When these little Bantustans become restive Israel swiftly turns off the delivery of basic food and supplies or uses F-16 fighter jets or heavy artillery to bomb the squalid concrete hovels.

The public embrace by a senior Israeli official of a policy of ethnic cleansing, however, is ominous. It signals a further evolution of the Israeli state from one that at least paid lip service to equality to one that increasingly resembles the apartheid regime in South Africa. Racism, once practiced in private and condemned in public, has become to many Israelis acceptable.

What Cost Gaza?

Israel's twenty-two day siege of Gaza, largely unseen by the outside world because of Jerusalem's refusal to allow humanitarian aid workers, reporters and photographers access to Gaza, rivals the most egregious crimes carried out at the height of apartheid by the South African regime. It comes close to the horrors visited on Sarajevo by the Bosnian Serbs. It has disturbing echoes of the Nazi ghettos of Lodz and Warsaw.

"This is a stain on what is left of Israeli morality," I was told by Richard N. Veits, the former U.S. ambassador to Jordan who led a delegation from the

U.S. Council for the National Interest Foundation to Gaza to meet Hamas leaders. "I am almost breathless discussing this subject. It is so myopic. Washington, of course, is a handmaiden to all this. The Israeli manipulation of a population in this manner is comparable to some of the crimes that took place against civilian populations fifty years ago."

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

Falk, while condemning the rocket attacks by the militant group Hamas, which he points out are also criminal violations of international law, goes on to say that "such Palestinian behavior does not legalize Israel's imposition of a collective punishment of a life- and health-threatening character on the people of Gaza, and should not distract the U.N. or international society from discharging their fundamental moral and legal duty to render protection to the Palestinian people."

"It is an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe that each day poses the entire 1.5 million Gazans to an unspeakable ordeal, to a struggle to survive in terms of their health," Falk said when I reached him by phone in California shortly before he left for Israel. "This is an increasingly precarious condition. A recent study reports that 46 percent of all Gazan children suffer from acute anemia. There are reports that the sonic booms associated with Israeli overflights have caused widespread deafness, especially among children. Gazan children need



Chris Hedges (Image from video shot by Cheryl Biren)

When I lived in Jerusalem I had a friend who confided in me that as a college student in the United States she attended events like these, wrote up reports and submitted them to the Israel consulate for money. It would be naive to assume this Israeli practice has ended. So, I want first tonight to address that person, or those persons, who may have come to this event for the purpose of reporting on it to the Israeli government.

I would like to remind them that it is they who hide in darkness. It is we who stand in the light. It is they who deceive. It is we who openly proclaim our compassion and demand justice for those who suffer in Gaza. We are not afraid to name our names. We are not afraid to name our beliefs. And we know something you perhaps sense with a kind of dread. As Martin Luther King said, the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice, and that arc is descending with a righteous fury that is thundering down upon the Israeli government.—*Excerpt from talk given by Chris Hedges, Aug. 5, 2010, in New York City, at a UStoGaza.org fundraiser.*

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

Gaza now spends 12 hours a day without power, which can be a death sentence to the severely ill in hospitals.

There are few drugs and little medicine, including no cancer or cystic fibrosis medication.

Hospitals have generators but often lack fuel. Medical equipment, including one of Gaza’s three CT scanners, has been destroyed by power surges and fluctuations. Medical staff cannot control the temperature of incubators for newborns.

Israel has revoked most exit visas, meaning some of those who need specialized care, including cancer patients and those in need of kidney dialysis, have died.

Of the 230 Gazans estimated to have died last year because they were denied proper medical care,

several spent their final hours at Israeli crossing points where they were refused entry into Israel.

The statistics gathered on children—half of Gaza’s population is under the age of 17—are increasingly grim. About 45 percent of children in Gaza have iron deficiency from a lack of fruit and vegetables, and 18 percent have stunted growth.

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

“There is no structure of an occupation that endured for decades and involved this kind of oppressive circumstances,” the rapporteur added. “The magnitude, the deliberateness, the violations of international humanitarian law, the impact on the health, lives and survival and the overall conditions warrant the characterization of a crime against humanity. This occupation is the direct intention by the Israeli military and civilian authorities. They are responsible and should be held accountable.”

The point of this Israeli siege, ostensibly, is to break Hamas, the radical Islamic group that was elected to power in 2006. But Hamas has repeatedly

proposed long-term truces with Israel and offered to negotiate a permanent truce. During the last ceasefire, established through Egyptian intermediaries in July 2008, Hamas upheld the truce although Israel refused to ease the blockade. It was Israel that, on Nov. 4, initiated an armed attack that violated the truce and killed six Palestinians. It was only then that Hamas resumed firing rockets at Israel. Palestinians have launched more than 200 rockets on Israel since the latest round of violence began. There have been no Israeli casualties.

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

Israel seeks to break the will of the Palestinians to resist. The Israeli government has demonstrated little interest in diplomacy or a peaceful solution. The rapid expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank is an effort to thwart the possibility of a two-state solution by gobbling up vast tracts of Palestinian real estate.

Israel also appears to want to thrust the impoverished Gaza Strip onto Egypt. There are now dozens of tunnels, the principal means for food and goods, connecting Gaza to Egypt. Israel permits the tunnels to operate, most likely as part of an effort to further cut Gaza off from Israel.

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

What Cost to Next Generation?

The use of terror and hunger to break a hostile population is one of the oldest forms of warfare. I

watched the Bosnian Serbs employ the same tactic in Sarajevo. Those who orchestrate such sieges do not grasp the terrible rage born of long humiliation, indiscriminate violence and abuse.

A father or a mother whose child dies because of a lack of vaccines or proper medical care does not forget. A boy whose ill grandmother dies while detained at an Israel checkpoint does not forget. All who endure humiliation, abuse and the murder of family members do not forget.

This rage becomes a virus within those who, eventually, stumble out into the daylight. Is it any wonder that 71 percent of children interviewed at a school in Gaza recently said they wanted to be a “martyr”?

The Israelis in Gaza, like the American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, are foolishly breeding the next generation of militants and Islamic radicals.

Jihadists, enraged by the injustices done by Israel and the United States, seek to carry out reciprocal acts of savagery, even at the cost of their own lives.

The violence unleashed on Palestinian children will, one day, be the violence unleashed on Israeli children.

This is the tragedy of Gaza.

This is the tragedy of Israel.

This is the tragedy of the misguided policies of the United States in the modern Middle East. ■

Biographical Note:

Chris Hedges spent seven years in the Middle East, most of that time as the Middle East Bureau Chief for the New York Times. During the First Gulf War he was captured by the Iraqi Republican Guard and held for a week. His public criticism of the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to a rebuke by the Times. As a result, Hedges left the Times to serve as a senior fellow at the Nation Institute. He currently writes a weekly column at truthdig.com. — Ed.

From **The Link's** Links

<http://www.icahd.org>



Jeff Halper co-founded and directs the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD). He is the author of our 2002 September-October Link "A Most UnGenerous Offer." In 2006 he was a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. This interview was conducted by AMEU Executive Director John Mahoney.

Q: Your work has generated worldwide interest since ICAHD's founding in 1997. Since then, according to your website, thousands of Palestinian homes have been demolished. That must be achingly frustrating. Between 1967-1997, Israel demolished about 9,000 Palestinian homes in the Occupied Territories. Since then, another 15,000 have been destroyed. More than frustrating, this is achingly tragic and heart-breaking. It is impossible to convey the trauma Palestinian families endure when their houses are demolished, usually on top of most of their belongings. What we have been able to do is humanize the Occupation by telling the families' stories and exposing how the Occupation works. Israel tries to convince the world that their actions are merely responses to terrorism. Yet security has been a factor in less than 3% of all demolitions.

Q: Do you know where most of your internet traffic comes from? ICAHD's website is well visited and we've gotten compliments on both the clarity of our analysis and the comprehensiveness of our coverage of issues in Israel/Palestine. It is difficult to know exactly from where our internet traffic originates. Our website is mainly in English, although we have most of the materials translated into other languages. But it seems to be a major source of information for all

those interested in a just peace. We also have branches in the U.S. and Britain, each with its own website linked to ours: www.icahdusa.org and www.icahd.uk.org.

Q: ICAHD was one of the first Israeli organizations to endorse the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel's occupation policies and its structural discrimination against its Arab-Palestinian citizens. What role does your website play in this campaign? ICAHD was the first Israeli organization to endorse the BDS campaign. We issued our statement in January 2005, supporting (1) sanctions on Israel (especially in the sale of arms); (2) divestment from companies profiting from the Occupation; and (3) boycotts against Israeli products, not only settlement products but all products, since Israel itself is the body responsible for perpetuating the Occupation. The ICAHD website plays an important part in this campaign. We publish ongoing reports of what is happening "on the ground" in the Occupied Territories, as well as inside Israel, so as to provide up-to-date information for all activists, including those engaged in the BDS campaign. We also support the other websites dedicated to BDS: Who Profits of the Israeli Women's Coalition for Peace, that of the Palestinian BDS movement, and others.

Q: You have put your body where your digital words are, having been imprisoned more than once for non-violently resisting home demolitions. Have there been any attempts to shut down your website? Our website has never been hacked or attacked, although my Facebook page has. I also enjoy a certain privilege in Israel, which is genuinely a democracy – if you are Jewish. So we Jewish Israeli activists do have a certain protected sphere in which to work, although new laws being enacted by the Knesset and increased pressures on us by the Shin Bet are endangering that.

Q: Where are you found on Facebook? There are both an ICAHD and an ICAHD USA group page on Facebook.

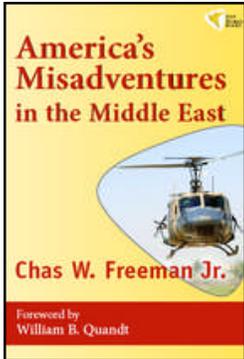
Q: If a *Link* reader wished to contact you, what is the best e-mail address to use? My personal e-mail is jeff@icahd.org.

BOOK REVIEW

AMERICA'S MISADVENTURES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FORWARD BY WILLIAM B. QUANDT

By Chas W. Freeman, Jr.



Just World Books, 2010

List: \$21.95, paperback

AMEU price, including postage: \$18:50

Reviewed by
Robert V. Keeley

Ambassador Freeman is one of America's most seasoned and thoughtful diplomatists. In March 2009, he became briefly famous when pro-Israel activists raised a furor about President Obama's decision to invite him to head the National Intelligence Council (NIC). Seeking to save the President from embarrassment, Freeman withdrew his name from consideration. Now, with the publication of this book, Freeman has pulled together most of his previous writings about the part of the world that got him into so much controversy in 2009.

America's Misadventures in the Middle East leads off with Freeman's detailed and previously unpublished reflection on President George H. W. Bush's handling of the Iraq-Kuwait crisis of 1990-91. He was U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia at the time; he was thus uniquely placed to see and understand what Washington and key allies were doing in those fateful months. In this chapter, and the one that follows, he reflects on "the American way of war," and in particular on Washington's failure in recent decades to plan for a stable and satisfactory political end-state for the wars it wages. These chapters act as an instructive jumping-off point for the rest of the book, which focuses on Washington's continued pursuit of "the American way of war" in the Middle East of the 2000's.

Parts II and III of the book contain many examples of a fine strategic mind at work. Freeman somberly reflects on the failures at many levels that pulled President George W. Bush into the disastrous decision to invade Iraq. And he stresses, repeatedly, the deleterious impact that Washington's failure to hold Israel accountable for the violent policies it pursued toward its neighbors throughout the 2000's has had on America's interests in the Middle East and much further afield.



Author Chas Freeman

In Part IV he assesses the impact that America's policy failings in the Middle East have had on its ability to continue leading the world in the same way it did in the half-century following the end of World War II. "Why not try diplomacy?" is the title of one chapter there. But it could be seen as the *leitmotif* of the whole of Part IV, or indeed, the whole book.

Freeman was U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm (1990-91), and in Part V, he gives us four deeply informed chapters about Saudi Arabia, placing the Kingdom's often misunderstood situation in its own historical context as well as in the context of its relationship with Western and other world powers.

As Professor Quandt notes in his foreword:

There is much to learn about 'old-style' diplomacy here and much to regret that Freeman's views seem so 'radical' from the perspective of today's politicized discourse. Readers of this volume will learn a great deal and will appreciate the style as well as the content of these essays... We are fortunate to have these records of his thoughts. ■

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