

Spinning Cast Lead

By Jane Adas

"Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit injustices."

Voltaire was writing in 1765 about people who commit atrocities in the name of religion. But governments, acting through politicians and pundits, can rally people to commit injustices, or at least to cheer on those who are sent to do violence in the name of the people. Remember yellowcake from Niger, mobile biological weapons factories, and clandestine meetings in Prague? These were some of the subterfuges intended to link Saddam Hussein to the atrocities of 9/11. Remember Operation Iraqi Freedom? "We have nothing against the people of Iraq"? "The United States does not torture"? Such slogans were designed to keep our consciences and our common sense drowsy.

These kinds of propagandist stratagems have been used from the beginning of the Palestine/Israel situation. Some of the mantras don't work as well as they used to. Who today believes Palestine was a land

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About This Issue

In 2001, Jane Adas spent six weeks with the Christian Peacemaker Teams in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian town of Hebron. What she witnessed there she later recorded in her *Link* article "Inside H2."

Earlier this year, Jane was part of a group that was one of the few allowed into Gaza to see the devastation wrought by Israel's "Operation Cast Lead." How Israeli propagandists have responded to worldwide condemnation of the 22-day assault, including the United Nations' Goldstone Report, is the subject of her latest *Link* article.

Jane Adas serves as vice president on AMEU's board of directors. She also covers the New York-tri-state area for the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*. An accomplished baroque cellist, Dr. Adas teaches music history at Rutgers University.

Our website interview on page 13 is with Ramzy Baroud, editor of *Palestinechronicle.com*.

A listing of our most recent books and videos is found on pp. 14-15.

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John F. Mahoney
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without people or that Israel is a tiny David facing an Arab Goliath? But many are still in vogue, for instance "The IDF (Israel Defense Forces) is the most moral army in the world" and "Israel has repeatedly stretched out its hand to peace, but has never found a partner on the other side."

These days Israel is deploying an array of tactics to neutralize the many critical reports that have come out in the wake of Israel's Operation Cast Lead assault on Gaza last winter, especially the Goldstone Report commissioned by the U.N. Human Rights Council. Israel's reactions, obediently echoed by even the Obama administration, offer a case study in techniques of damage control, in Hebrew "hasbara:" deny, justify, de-contextualize, obfuscate, smear, deflect, make us all forget about it, make us believe absurdities.

Israel has the right to defend itself:

On December 29th, the third day of Israel's Operation Cast Lead, by which time 300 Palestinians and one Israeli had been killed, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg issued a statement that Israel has the "right, in fact an obligation, to defend itself against terrorist attacks." He then rushed to Jerusalem and Sderot for photo-ops demonstrating his solidarity with Israel in its time of need.

From coast to coast, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to Senator Joe Lieberman, too many politicians to list added their voices to the "Israel's right of self-defense" chorus. On the thirteenth (by then 682 Palestinian dead) and fourteenth (another 76 dead) days of the assault, the Senate (by voice vote), and the House of Representatives (390 to 5) passed resolutions "recognizing Israel's right to defend itself against attacks from Gaza."

Did any American politicians or mainstream media pundits mention

that Palestinians also have the right to defend themselves? Did they consider why Palestinians in Gaza might be motivated to fire rockets into Israel? Joseph Massad ("Israel's Right to Defend Itself," 1/20/09) sardonically comments on the context-free certitudes that prevail among our politicians:

The logic goes as follows: Israel has the right to occupy Palestinian land, lay siege to Palestinian populations in Bantustans surrounded by an apartheid wall, starve the population, cut them off from fuel and electricity, uproot their trees and crops, and launch periodic raids and targeted assassinations against them and their elected leadership, and if this population resists these massive Israeli attacks against their lives and the fabric of their society and Israel responds by slaughtering them *en masse*, Israel would simply be "defending" itself as it must and should.

But were Israel's actions in Gaza in fact legitimate self defense? No, according to the International Association of Democratic Lawyers' White Paper on Gaza because, among other arguments, "for an armed attack to give rise to the right of self defense, it must be directed from outside the territory under the control of the defending state." Israel argues that the territories are "disputed" rather than occupied, and that in any case Israel unilaterally redeployed its settlers and troops out of Gaza in 2005. Yet, Israel's army is stationed along Gaza's borders, its navy patrols Gaza's seacoast, and its air force owns Gaza's airspace. Israel decides to the last detail who and what may enter or leave Gaza. The international consensus is, therefore, that Gaza, as well as the West Bank, remain occupied and controlled by Israel.

The White Paper therefore concludes:

First as a matter of law, there is no parity between occupied and occupier. As an occupied people the Palestinians have the right to resist occupation and, although that right is not unlimited and the use of rockets that strike civilian populations are not condoned, the characterization of Israel's bombardment and invasion as legitimate self defense improperly implies a fight between countries of equal status.

Soon after the cease-fire on 18 January, the new Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, opined that Palestinian rocket attacks from Gaza on Israel could not go unanswered, and added, of course, "we support Israel's right to self-defense." Prime Minister Netanyahu, elaborating on the same script, told the U.N. General Assembly on 24 September, "Finally, after eight years of this unremitting

assault (of Hamas rocket attacks), Israel was finally forced to respond," then equated Israel's plight with England's during the Nazi blitz.

"Unanswered," Madame Secretary? "Finally ... finally," Mr. Prime Minister? Netanyahu is known for having a casual relationship with reality, but does Clinton genuinely believe that Israel stoically absorbed thousands of rockets fired into southern Israel before finally being forced to "defend" itself? In writing about the obliviousness of the majority of Israelis to the full context of Israel's assault on Gaza, Larry Derfner ("Rattling the Cage, 9/16/09) graciously, but probably mistakenly, refrains from excluding Americans from non-Israeli humankind:

We don't see what the rest of the world saw – that those thousands and thousands of rockets on Sderot caused a tiny fraction of the death and destruction we caused in Gaza at the same time. In the three years and three months between our disengagement from Gaza and the start of Operation Cast Lead, 28 Israelis were killed by rockets, bombs and bullets from Gaza. In that same period, more than 1,250 Gazans were killed by missiles, tank shells and all sorts of ammunition fired by the IDF.

Israel only reacts to provocations:

Zeev Maoz, in *Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel's Security and Foreign Policy* (2006), asserts that Israel has at times used limited force in order to provoke a reaction from whoever is the current enemy, which can then be used as a pretext to attack. For examples he cites Chief-of-Staff Moshe Dayan's 1955-56 "doctrine of deterioration" as designed to incite a reaction from Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser (it didn't work because "the Egyptians would not play the game"); Prime Minister Begin and Defense Minister Sharon's several attempts in 1981-82 to create a pretext for war (they didn't work: the PLO adhered to the U.S.-brokered cease-fire and Israel instead exploited an Abu Nidal group's botched assassination attempt on Israel's ambassador to Great Britain, Shlomo Argov on 3 June 1982 as its pretext to launch an invasion of Lebanon); and targeted assassinations during the Al Aqsa intifada, which began in September, 2000.

"On four separate occasions Israel violated an implicit cease-fire that the Palestinians imposed upon themselves by assassinations that caused escalation" (p. 287): Dr. Ahmed Thabet in Tulkarm, December 2000; Ra'ed Carmi in Tulkarm, January 2002; Salah Shehada in Gaza, July 2002; and a wave of assassinations during Mahmoud Abbas' attempt to form a moderate government in June 2003. Unfortunately for the majority of Palestinians who are not militants, these did work. Each was followed by a wave of

suicide bombings that provided excuses for the Israeli military to enter and retake control of Palestinian cities and refugee camps.

Maoz completed his book about the time Israel was arranging to leave Gaza. Since disengagement was completed on 12 September 2005, Israel has carried out ten military operations in the Strip. It is worth examining events preceding three of the biggest offensives in light of Maoz's discussion of Israel's tactical use of provocations. Given that a stated aim of all three operations was to stop rocket attacks, it is interesting to note that, as is consistent with earlier examples Maoz mentions, the number of rocket attacks into Israel intensified during and/or immediately after the operations, making them obviously counterproductive.

Operations Summer Rains and Autumn Clouds: 28 June 2006 - 26 November 2006

In February 2005, seven months before Israel's redeployment and nearly a year before Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections, Hamas began a self-imposed cease-fire. On 9 June 2006, a blast on a Gaza beach killed seven members of the Ghalia family and injured 30 other Palestinian civilians. Hamas called off its 16-month-long truce and resumed firing rockets. Four days later an Israeli missile strike on a major road in Gaza killed two militants and nine civilian bystanders. On 24 June Israeli commandos kidnapped two brothers, Osama Muamar, a medical doctor, and Mustafa Muamar, a law student. The following day Hamas soldiers carried out a raid on an Israeli military camp just over the border, killing two Israeli soldiers and capturing Corporal Gilad Shalit. On 27 July Israel bombed Gaza's only power station, reducing by 40 percent the available electricity. The next day Israel launched Operation Summer Rains and simultaneously took prisoner one-third of the Palestinian cabinet and more than two dozen elected Palestinian legislators, all associated with Hamas.

By the time Summer Rains had segued into Operation Autumn Clouds in November, seven Israelis and some four hundred Palestinians had been killed.

Operation Hot Winter: 28 February - 3 March 2008

Summer rains and autumn clouds failed to topple Hamas. David Rose ("The Gaza Bombshell," *Vanity Fair*, April 2008) reveals the important story of how further covert American attempts to destroy Hamas were frustrated, first by President Mahmoud Abbas' agreement to a unity government in February 2007 along with Hamas' offer of a long-term ceasefire, and then four months later by what

even Vice President Dick Cheney's neoconservative Middle East adviser David Wurmser describes as "an attempted coup by Fatah that was pre-empted before it could happen." The latter is more commonly described in the mainstream media as "Hamas' violent and bloody takeover of the Gaza Strip." The CIA's pre-empted coup was to have been carried out by CIA-trained and financed forces led by Fatah strongman from Gaza, Mohammed Dahlan, who was at the time in Egypt recovering from knee surgery. It took Hamas only five days to rout the more numerous and better-armed, but less motivated Fatah forces. (Dahlan laid low for a while, but in August was elected to Fatah's elite Central Committee.)

Israel responded to the new reality by tightening its blockade of Gaza, allowing in, according to Sara Roy, only 30 to 40 of 4,000 previously admitted commodities ("The Peril of Forgetting Gaza," 6/2/09) and, in September, labeling Gaza a "hostile entity." After weeks of almost daily Israeli air strikes and military incursions, Israel conducted a major raid on 15 January 2008, killing 17 and wounding 55. After that, for the first time since June, Hamas joined the militants who were firing rockets over the border. Then, on 17 January 2008, Israel completely sealed off the Gaza Strip, barring all imports, including fuel, food, and medicine. The World Food Program and UNRWA expected to run out of supplies within days.

The intolerable pressure was relieved on 23 January when Hamas set off explosions at 17 points along the 7-mile-long Rafah border wall. Tens of thousands of Palestinians streamed through the destroyed sections of the barrier to buy provisions in al-Arish, Egypt. Israel responded with air strikes on Rafah and demanded that Egypt reseal the border, but President Mubarak refused, saying Egypt would not be a party to the starving of Palestinians. Hamas and Egypt then agreed to cooperate in controlling the border, which was re-closed on 3 February. During those eleven days of relative freedom of passage, the U.N. estimated that 200,000 Gazans crossed into Egypt and spent \$250 million on food, medicine, and other supplies. Israel, however, feared that Hamas had brought in longer-range missiles as well.

On the morning of 27 February, an Israeli air strike assassinated five Hamas members. In response Hamas fired rockets at Sderot, killing one Israeli and wounding two. Further Israeli air strikes killed six more, including a six-month old baby. The following day, 28 February, Israel launched operation Hot Winter. (On the 29th, Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai caused an uproar within Israeli society by saying the Palestinians "are bringing upon themselves a greater 'Shoah.'") After two days of air strikes, ground troops invaded the northern part of the Strip, but met unexpected resistance resulting in the

deaths of two soldiers. The number of rockets fired from Gaza into Israel reached a new high, and the IDF accused Hamas of firing Grad missiles for the first time. Then on 3 March, Israel announced it was suspending the operation due to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit the following day.

The five-day operation left three Israelis and 112 Palestinians dead. More than half of the latter were civilians, including 24 children. Immediately after Israel withdrew, the House of Representatives voted 404 to 1 to condemn Hamas rocket attacks and support Israel's right to defend itself, a statement echoed by presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama.

Operation Cast Lead:
27 December 2008 – 17 January 2009

On 19 June 2008 an Egyptian-brokered *tahdiya* (lull) between Israel and Hamas went into effect whereby Hamas would enforce an end to rocket attacks and Israel would ease its blockade of Gaza. Israel raised the number of truck shipments allowed into Gaza from 70 to 90 per day, an improvement, although far short of the pre-2005 levels of 500-600 trucks daily, but continued to prevent any exports from Gaza. Rocket fire immediately decreased 98 percent and by September almost stopped completely, with only one that month and one the next. Then on 4 November, just when Hamas had demonstrated that it could control the rocket fire despite Israel's refusal to end the siege, and on the very day when Americans would be sure to be absorbed by the presidential election, Israel broke the truce by conducting a raid inside Gaza followed by an air strike, killing six members of Hamas. The cease-fire came to an end.

On 14 December a high-level Hamas delegation met Egyptian Minister of Intelligence Omar Suleiman in Cairo with an offer to return to the original Hamas-Israel cease-fire agreement. Israel either rejected the proposal or refused to respond to Suleiman. That same day President Jimmy Carter and Professor Robert Pastor of American University met in Damascus with Khaled Meshal, chairman of the Hamas political bureau, who made the same offer. Pastor passed on Meshal's proposal to a senior official in the IDF the following day, again with no response. According to Y-net News Agency, Yuval Diskin, head of Shin Bet, told an Israeli cabinet meeting on 21 December, "Make no mistake, Hamas is interested in maintaining the truce" [Gareth Porter, "Israel Rejected Hamas Ceasefire Offer in December," 1/9/09].

Israel was offered a peaceful means of protecting its citizens in Sderot from rocket attacks. Instead Israel launched Operation Cast Lead, apparently with some ur-

gency in order to complete the long-planned, large-scale operation while President George W. Bush was still in office.

Gideon Levy ("Disgrace in The Hague," 9/17/09) wrote, "Cast Lead was an unrestrained assault on a besieged totally unprotected civilian population, which showed almost no signs of resistance during this operation." During its twenty-two days, more than one thousand four hundred Palestinians, three Israeli civilians and ten soldiers were killed, four of the latter by friendly fire.

The cost to Israel of its bait-and-bomb policy towards the Palestinians in Gaza has fallen almost exclusively on the residents of Sderot. To be sure, their suffering due to Qassam rocket attacks is not anywhere near the suffering of Gazans from Israeli air strikes, bombardments, incursions, snipers, siege, hunger, joblessness. But Sderot, which lies about half a mile from the Gazan town of Beit Hanoun, has been hit by thousands of rockets, 13 of its residents have been killed and many more wounded. By 2008 Sderot's population had declined by perhaps as much as 20 percent as those who could afford it moved elsewhere. In recognition of the distress of those who remain, Israel's national airline El Al named its first two Boeing 777 passenger planes "Sderot" and "Kiryat Shmona," the latter a town on Israel's northern border that has played a similar role in Israel's wars against Lebanon and Hizbullah.

In the early 1950s, as part of the "Sharon plan" (after Arie the architect, not Ariel the general) to distribute its population over the whole of the land, the new state of Israel rapidly built "development towns" in its peripheral areas. Kiryat Shmona and Sderot were two such towns. The government placed newly arrived immigrants, mostly from North Africa and Arab countries and in the '90s from former Soviet states, in development towns. From the beginning, these communities have borne the brunt of Israel's border problems. Maoz writes of "newly arrived immigrants who had been settled in small villages and new development towns that the government had established along the borders. This population was struggling both economically and culturally, trying to assimilate into the new state under difficult conditions. On top of that, they had to deal with the threat of Arab sabotage" (p. 234).

The residents of Sderot, at least some of them, are aware of the role their government has assigned them. Julia Chaitain, a lecturer at Sapir Academic College near Sderot, in an op-ed entitled "Darkness in Qassam-Land" (Washington Post, 12/31/08) wrote, "We will know peace only when our leaders stop considering our lives cheap and expendable . . ." Hundreds of residents of Sderot signed a petition saying how important the period of calm

had been: "Another round of escalation may break our already brittle spirit. . . . You must be aware of that, if you indeed care about the residents of this area." The government, the petition continues, should have used the tahdiya for beginning negotiations, "as well as for fortifying the houses of residents as promised," but evidently not yet delivered.

There is, however, a public relations campaign—sderotmedia.org.il—whose mission is "to generate global awareness and empathy with the residents of Sderot." It struck a PR jackpot when presidential candidate Barack Obama visited in July 2008 and uttered the much-quoted words, "If missiles were falling where my two daughters sleep, I would do everything in order to stop that." Presumably he would have felt the same about the phosphorous bombs that fell on sleeping children in Gaza five months later, but has kept it to himself.

President Obama has yet to mention Operation Cast Lead in public, not even in his Cairo speech on 4 June, less than five months and 200 miles from what some call a massacre, though he did admonish Palestinians for blowing up old women on a bus, something that had not happened in almost five years.

Sderot's obvious vulnerability seems at odds with Israel's reputation as a world leader in and exporter of homeland security technology. As Naomi Klein pointed out in an interview on Alternet (9/1/09), global fear of terrorism, especially Muslim terrorism, has done wonders for Israel's economy and image: "It is because of the effectiveness of the homeland security sector that it's possible to come to cities like Tel Aviv and be almost completely oblivious to what is happening in Ramallah, in Gaza. This state is like a giant gated community. It has perfected the art of constructing a security bubble, and that is, in a sense, its brand."

Israel lives in a rough neighborhood

Israel has to be a fortress-state, David Harris, Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee contends in "Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Brief Guide for the Perplexed," because it is "a tiny country no larger than New Jersey, in a tumultuous, heavily armed neighborhood." This is apparently some sort of selling point for young Diaspora Jews, as evidenced by Jane Tarfin's online pamphlet, "How to Volunteer with the Israel Defense Forces." You commit to two or three weeks, then get yourself to Tel Aviv where you will be met and taken to a base, not one in the occupied territories, where you will be given a green army uniform. "Remember," she enthuses, "Israel is a tough little country in a rough neighborhood. . . . Have a (sic) open mind, and you will have the time of

your life."

Might it not be the tough little country that has made the neighborhood rough? Throughout history, European Jews fleeing persecution did not find it rough; rather they found safety and opportunity in the Arab world. Until European colonial powers brought their rivalries to the region, the Levantine area of the Ottoman Empire was prosperous and peaceful. It seems entirely predictable that the insertion of an aggressive, ethnic, settler-colonial state, whose people brought with them an arrogant contempt for the other that they themselves had been subjected to in the old country, would roughen up any neighborhood.

Beyond Israel's self-imposed bubble, in addition to development towns intended to serve as "terrorist" bait, the barbarians are kept at bay with buffer zones and security barriers. The strange thing is that these are almost always beyond what would be Israel's borders if Israel were ever to declare its borders. That is to say, the buffers and barriers are on the property of Israel's neighbors. Even odder, the world lets Israel get away with it. This Israel that goes where it pleases with zero respect for the independence of its neighbors is the same Israel that has never allowed any U.N. or international peacekeeping troops within its borders, wherever it considers those borders to be at the time, because that would compromise Israel's sovereignty.

Israel maintained a "security zone" in southern Lebanon from 1978 until 2000 with the stated purpose of protecting residents in border towns like Kiryat Shmona, population 22,000. The zone expanded and contracted over the years, but at a minimum Israel's army occupied 125 Lebanese villages and carried out low-level warfare against any resistance to its presence, with occasional intensifications such as Israel's 1993 Operation Accountability and 1996 Operation Grapes of Wrath. U.N. Security Council Resolution 425 of 1978 was the first of many calling on Israel to withdraw from Lebanese territory. It took Israel 22 years to comply. After Israel again bombed and invaded Lebanon in 2006, it again threatened to re-establish a security zone inside Lebanon.

The Gaza Strip is small, only 139 square miles, and crowded, with a population of a million and half making it perhaps the most densely populated place on earth. Until Israel's 2005 disengagement from Gaza, some 8,000 Israeli settlers and the soldiers guarding them controlled 35 - 40 percent of the area. Their departure is an improvement, but also allows the Israeli military to bomb away without fear of endangering Jewish citizens, as was made obvious during Operation Cast Lead.

Israel, for its own security, is shrinking the land and sea accessible to Palestinian farmers and fishermen in

Gaza, jeopardizing their sources of livelihood. When Israel quit Gaza, it declared the area along the northern border of Gaza that used to be the northern Israeli settlement block a “no-go zone,” restricting the movement of Palestinians in or out of the area. Then last May Israel designated 300 meters along Gaza’s entire border as a buffer zone, off-limits to Palestinians. This is some of Gaza’s most fertile farmland, comprising 50 percent of its animal production. Is there any reason the buffer zone should not be on the Israeli side of the border? Would it not be as effective there for Israel’s alleged security purposes?

Although the Palestinian fishing zone should be up to 20 nautical miles, Israel has not allowed boats beyond 12 miles. In October 2008 Israel reduced that limit to six miles, then in January during Cast Lead to three. In addition, Israel has designated no fishing areas at either end of the coastline that take up an additional 2.8 nautical miles of Gazan territorial water. Israeli naval boats are free to patrol wherever they please, even within the constricted waters allowed to Palestinian fishermen, where Israelis routinely shell the fishing boats and the shore, kidnap the crews and confiscate their boats. Presumably all of this is to enforce Israel’s blockade of Gaza, which in itself may be considered an act of war.

Israel seems to be attempting to bring the Palestinian population density in the West Bank up to Gaza levels by making less and less land available to the two and a half million Palestinians living there. Israel is pulling this off both from within the territory through metastasizing settlements and on the western and eastern sides through a kind of corseting effect, making the whole area a lot thinner, turning it into the West Bank Strip.

One method of expanding the area Israeli colonies control is via buffer zones. To protect the illegal residents in their heavily subsidized housing units, settlers and their private security guards clear a swath of area surrounding the colony. This usually entails razing Palestinian agricultural land. Next, the colony builds something on the cleared ground—a chicken coop, a shed, whatever. Having thus expanded into the swath, the settlers then need a new buffer zone. The process repeats indefinitely, inexorably. The colonists hardly notice farmers objecting to losing more and more of their land because the Israeli army keeps the locals well away and under control during the clearing processes.

Israel has ignored the July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which states, “The Court finds that the construction by Israel of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and its associated regime are contrary to international law.” The U.S. has, of course, ensured that the Security Council will not address the issue.

It is no secret that Israel’s separation/apartheid—wall/fence/barrier has been a great hardship for Palestinians—confiscating yet more land; separating farmers from their land, families from each other, students from their schools, patients from their doctors; entrapping tens of thousands of Palestinians in the “seam zone” between the Green Line and the wall in an area probably intended for annexation to Israel; further depressing the economy.

Israel’s justification for this is its own improved security. While there have been only two suicide bombers inside Israel in the last three years, this may be due more to tactical decisions within Hamas than any deterrent effect of the wall. Veteran Israeli reporter Danny Rubenstein told an Americans for Peace Now audience (New York, 9/9/08) he had it on very good authority that, despite the security barrier, 50,000 Palestinian workers enter Israel from the West Bank without permission every day.

Israel is subtracting even more land the whole length of the eastern West Bank. According to a 2006 B’Tselem report, “Israel has de facto annexed the Jordan Valley.” After international criticism of the wall, Israel abandoned its plans to build an eastern barrier dividing the Jordan Valley from the rest of the West Bank. Israel then found it could achieve the same aims through a regime of permits and harsh restrictions on movement. The result for the 7,500 Palestinian residents of the valley is “almost identical to that of the ‘seam zone.’” Just as with the separation barrier, farmers who live outside the valley are no longer able to access their farmland inside the valley; they have lost their source of livelihood.

All this brings to mind a prophetic voice I heard back in the days when there was still some hope attached to the Oslo process. I was teaching an honors seminar at Rutgers on the U.S.’s role in the Israel-Palestine conflict. We were discussing various possibilities that had been proposed for sharing Jerusalem. A student with dual U.S./Israeli nationality objected to every one of them because it would “make Israelis feel insecure.” Finally a young black woman blurted out, “Why should you feel secure? Why should thieves feel safe?” The class was frozen in stunned silence. Then small nods spread around the seminar room.

Unlike Hamas, Israel does not target civilians:

In the two and a half week period between the explosion on a Gaza beach that killed seven Palestinians and Israel’s launching of Operation Summer Rains, then Prime Minister Ehud Olmert announced, “The IDF is the most moral army in the world. It does not and never had (sic) made a policy of targeting civilians.” President Shimon Peres, visiting wounded Israeli soldiers during Cast Lead, told them the army had achieved both a military and

moral victory. In September Israeli ambassador to the U.S., American-born Michael Oren, told PBS's Gwen Ifill:

Israel does its utmost to avoid inflicting civilian casualties during military operations. This contrasts us (Israelis) very fundamentally, profoundly with Hamas and Gaza, which does its utmost to maximize civilian casualties on the Israeli side and exults in civilian casualties on its own side, declaring them martyrs.

Our own congressional leaders, House Minority Whip Eric Cantor and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, couldn't agree more. As quoted in Philip Giraldi's "The Best Congress AIPAC Can Buy" (9/2/09), the bipartisan duo wrote an op-ed during Cast Lead affirming the obviousness of Israel's high moral standards because, "While Israel targets military combatants, Hamas aims to kill as many civilians as possible." Harvard professor Alan Dershowitz, self-appointed defense attorney for anything Israel does, wrote, "There are many things wrong with the Goldstone report, which accuses Israel of deliberately targeting civilians in order to punish the people of Gaza. First, its primary conclusions are entirely false as a matter of demonstrable fact" ("Report is a Barrier to Peace," 9/22/09).

Dershowitz, however, does not actually offer any facts, demonstrable or otherwise. So let us turn to the 9/9/09 report of fatality figures from Operation Cast Lead published by B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories: Israeli security forces killed 1,387 Palestinians, 330 of whom took part in the hostilities. Thus, 24 percent of Palestinian fatalities were combatants and 76 percent non-combatants. Of the non-combatant deaths, 320 were minors under age 18, 109 women over the age of 18, and 248 Palestinian police officers and cadets most of whom were killed on the first day of Cast Lead. Palestinians killed 6 Israeli soldiers (66.6 percent) and 3 Israeli civilians (33.3 percent) during the operation. In addition 4 Israeli soldiers were killed by friendly fire.

Israel is the region's superpower. Its military is loaded with the most up-to-date precision equipment, much of it courtesy of U.S. taxpayers. Some of Israel's munitions are beyond up-to-date, being still in the experimental stages. These have the excellent selling point of being "field-tested" in Lebanon and Gaza. If indeed Israel does not target civilians, the fact that its military kills more than three times as many non-combatants as combatants suggests the IDF is utterly incompetent. On the other hand, President Shimon Peres proudly told an American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) mission in Jerusalem on 14 January, three days before the cease-fires, that implementation

of the current operation had gone 90 percent according to plan (Jerusalem Post, 1/14/09). So the IDF is competent and planned to kill so many civilians?

Hamas has mostly primitive, homemade rockets. They must "smuggle" anything more sophisticated through the tunnels on the Egyptian border. Israel and the U.S claim that Iran is providing Palestinian armed groups with military equipment and munitions, but "Amnesty International has not seen any evidence to verify these allegations" ("Fueling Conflict," 2/21/09). If indeed Hamas deliberately targets civilians, it must be due to their inferior weapons that they killed twice as many soldiers as civilians during Cast Lead.

B'Tselem's figures are slightly more conservative than other documented reports on fatal casualties in Cast Lead. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, for example, found that of the 1,415 Palestinian fatalities, 1,190 were civilians, including 319 minors under the age of 18, making the proportion of civilian deaths 85 percent of the total.

Both reports and others as well differ from the Israeli government's, which claims that only 295 among the 1,166 Palestinian fatalities acknowledged by the IDF were not involved in the fighting, comprising 25 percent of the total. The discrepancy between the two sets of figures is partly due to the IDF's definition of who is a combatant. According to Israeli officials' definition, "anyone involved with Hamas should consider himself a target." Israeli soldiers might therefore assume that no civilians at all live in the Gaza Strip, only militants in civilian clothing. On the other hand, Ambassador Oren's comment to Gwen Ifill, "Israel had no choice but to summon its civilian army ... to defend ourselves here, Gwen," suggests that Oren would have us believe Israeli soldiers are really just civilians in uniform.

It may be no accident that the proportion of civilian to total fatalities during Operation Cast Lead nearly replicates the figures for the second Lebanon War of July 2006: 80 percent of Lebanese fatalities were civilian, while only 26.6 percent of Israeli fatal casualties were civilian. Rather, this may reflect new regulations for fighting non-state organizations such as Hizbullah and Hamas. In 2005, Professor Asa Kasher, author of the IDF's Code of Conduct (Gideon Levy, "It's all kosher for Kasher, 10/5/09), co-wrote an article entitled "Military Ethics of Fighting Terror: An Israeli Perspective." He argues that "... an anti-terror squad will often be right in assuming that almost all the persons it encounters during a mission do not support it since they endorse activities of terror and are not its victims." Contrary to the customary laws of war, for Kasher the victims of terrorist acts may be exclusively combatants, Israeli soldiers for instance. Moreover, this new ethical code places greater value on protecting the lives of its sol-

diers than on the lives of enemy civilians (Muhammad Ali Khalidi, "The Most Moral Army in the World," 5/17/09).

According to Zeev Sternhell ("A Permanent Moral Stain," 9/25/09), the moral doctrine undergirding Israel's decision "to conduct a campaign to punish Gaza with no Israeli losses ... is known today in everyday Israeli language as 'a license to kill.'" Israel released a 160-page report on 30 July intended to counter the accumulating accusations of war crimes. It claims "international law is violated only when there is an intention to target civilians and Israel had no such intention in contrast to Hamas targeting Israeli civilians with its rockets." Sternhell elaborates, "The army did not intend to kill civilians with malice aforethought—it just bombed, eliminated and flattened anything that seemed necessary for purposes of reconnaissance."

Fatalities are not the whole story. Israel, in Operation Cast Lead, targeted the very fabric of civilian life, as though trying to effect a conclusion, a *finis* to the project, already in place with the ongoing blockade and escalating isolation, of utterly demoralizing Palestinians in Gaza. As George Bisharat wrote in the Los Angeles Times (9/18/09):

Israeli troops killed civilians without justification, wantonly destroyed civilian infrastructure and private homes, and used weapons illegally. Israeli troops targeted and destroyed Gaza's last functioning flour mill. Israeli armored bulldozers razed the chicken farm that provided 10 percent of Gaza's eggs, burying 31,000 chickens in the rubble. Israeli gunners bombed a raw sewage lagoon, releasing 200,000 cubic meters of filth into neighboring farmland. Repeated pinpoint strikes on a water-well complex destroyed all of its essential machinery.

According to the 9/15/09 U.N. Press Release, the Goldstone Report describes "a deliberate and systematic policy" of destroying food supply installations, water sanitation systems, concrete factories and residential houses, and "concludes that the Israeli military operation was directed at the people of Gaza as a whole." This is corroborated by Shimon Peres, who told the AIPAC delegation during the war that Israel's aim "was to provide a strong blow to the people of Gaza so that they would lose their appetite for shooting at Israel."

The Goldstone Report, however, warns that:

... Israeli acts that deprive Palestinians in the Gaza Strip of their means of subsistence, employment, housing and water, that deny their freedom of movement and their right to leave and enter their

own country, that limit their rights to access a court of law and an effective remedy, could lead a competent court to find that the crime of persecution, a crime against humanity, has been committed.

As Jonathan Cook points out in "Israel's 'Dahiya Doctrine' comes to Gaza" (1/20/09), Israel's heavy targeting of Gaza's civilian infrastructure "followed a blueprint laid down during the Lebanon war." Dahiya is the name of a suburb south of Beirut that Israel nearly leveled during its 2006 assault on Lebanon. Dan Halutz, then Israel's chief of staff, said the intention was to turn back Lebanon's clock 20 years. Two years on, Yoav Galant, the commanding officer for the south of Israel, parroted Halutz: the aim was "to send Gaza decades into the past."

Cook cites an article by Col. Gabriel Siboni, published two months before Operation Cast Lead, describing Israel's new security concept for dealing with sub-national resistance movements with deep roots in the local population: the goal is to use "disproportionate force" thereby "inflicting damage and meting out punishment to an extent" that the enemy will be left "floundering in expensive, long-term processes of reconstruction." Which is further delayed because Israel will not allow materials necessary for reconstruction into Gaza.

Hasbara

Hasbara literally means "explanation" and is often translated as "public diplomacy," but can perhaps best be thought of as problem solving through marketing techniques, like rebranding (Israel as the victim of Hamas' aggression), product placement (hide the Goldstone Report in the darkest, least-frequented corner of the shop), and promotional lingo ("The side that seems to want peace more will win..." from *The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary*).

Having identified the problem to be solved concerning Israel's 2006 invasion of Lebanon as Israel's failure to explain its case, Netanyahu, soon after assuming office in February 2008, formed a National Information Directorate within the Prime Minister's Office tasked with planning the media campaign for the Gaza operation and headed by "hasbara czar" Yarden Vatikay. Two months before Cast Lead, the Directorate set up exercises in which "the international media were directed to a press center set up by the Foreign Ministry in Sderot itself so that foreign reporters would spend as much time as possible in the main civilian area affected by Hamas rockets" (Anshel Pfeffer, "Israel Claims success in the PR War," 12/31/08). Israel augmented the desired effect by not allowing reporters into Gaza. While Cast Lead was underway, the Israeli For-

eign Ministry organized volunteers from around the world to flood news websites with pro-Israeli comments (Richard Silverstein, "Hasbara Spam Alert," 1/9/09).

The PR campaign succeeded on the home front. Peres "declared national solidarity behind the military operation to be Israel's finest hour... the people had never been so united." Israeli polls certainly showed that a solid 95 percent of Israeli Jews supported Israel's assault on Gaza. Yet Israeli political and military officials obviously knew their actions in Gaza would result in international condemnation. On 25 January, within a week of withdrawing from Gaza, the Knesset passed a bill entitled "Strengthening the IDF's Hand after Operation Cast Lead." The purpose of the bill is to aid and support IDF officers in cases where they face lawsuits for alleged war crimes committed in Gaza. When the anticipated critical reports began appearing from Israeli, Palestinian, and international human rights groups, hasbara went into overdrive.

On 19 March the left-leaning Haaretz and right-leaning Ma'ariv Israeli newspapers published the transcript of nine soldiers discussing their experiences in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead, including "shoot to kill" orders of Palestinian civilians and vandalizing their property. The nine were graduates of the Yitzhak Rabin Military Preparatory Academy at Oranim College who had been invited to a meeting on 13 February by its director, Dany Zamir. Zamir first sent the transcripts to army headquarters. When that failed to get a response, he published them in the academy's newsletter, which was then picked up by the two newspapers.

In the "few bad apples" defense, the left blamed soldiers from fundamentalist yeshivas and the right blamed soldiers from kibbutzim who were intent on undermining Israeli morale. The latter view got more traction internationally, as in conservative British columnist Melanie Phillips blog post, "The Ha'aretz Blood Libel." Next, the press attacked the messenger, Zamir, accusing him of deliberately leaking the transcript to the newspapers and of smearing the IDF and aiding and abetting the nation's enemies. To further discredit him as a patriot, the IDF revealed that Zamir had been briefly imprisoned in the 1990s for refusing to guard a settler group holding a provocative ceremony at Joseph's tomb in Nablus.

Zamir defended himself in The Jerusalem Post on 7 April, saying the media were so eager to find a reason to criticize the IDF that they seized on a private discussion to draw unjustified conclusions. He asserted that Cast Lead was entirely justified because Hamas "seeks the killing of Jews for being Jews and the actual elimination of the State of Israel." New York Times correspondent Ethan Bronner pitched in, writing on 27 March, "officers are stepping for-

ward, some at the urging of the top command others on their own, offering numerous accounts of having held their fire out of concern for civilians, helping Palestinians in need and punishing improper soldier behavior."

The IDF conducted a brief investigation in which it dismissed the soldiers' accounts as hearsay and determined that no war crimes had been committed in Gaza. The army's chief prosecutor, Brigadier General Avichai Mendelblit, said, "It will be difficult to evaluate the damage done to the image and morals of the Israel Defense Forces and its soldiers ... in Israel and the world." A coalition of nine Israeli human rights groups called on Attorney General Menachem Mazuz to reconsider his refusal to establish an independent, non-military investigative body to examine the military's actions. Around the same time IDF reservists asked Mazuz to launch a criminal investigation against Haaretz for publishing the soldiers' transcript.

As the reports from human rights organizations accumulated, the Netanyahu government decided to mount a counterattack. A notice from the Prime Minister's office warned, "Jerusalem would begin waging a more aggressive battle against NGOs (non-governmental organizations) it deems biased against Israel." On 15 July Breaking the Silence, an Israeli group of active and reserve soldiers, released testimonies and videos describing the IDF's use of Gazans as human shields and the firing of white phosphorous shells over civilian areas. In the Jerusalem Post the next day Netanyahu's policy director Ron Dermer declared, "We are going to dedicate time and manpower to combating these groups; we are not going to be sitting ducks in a pond for the human rights groups to shoot at us with impunity.... The NGOs are blaming the firefighter, not the arsonists." The principle target of the campaign was not Breaking the Silence or B'Tselem, though both came under harsh criticism, but Human Rights Watch (HRW).

The same day that HRW issued its White Flag Deaths report, the prime minister's spokesman Mark Regev and the IDF accused HRW of "relying on the testimony from people who are not free to speak out against the Hamas regime." Regev further claimed "HRW's fundraising activities in Saudi Arabia ... raises important questions as to that organization's objectivity, professionalism, integrity, and credibility." HRW easily defended itself against these charges. Then came a smear campaign.

An article by Ben-Dror Yemini in Ma'ariv, a translation of which appeared the same day in Commentary (8/16/09), accused Joe Stork, the deputy director of HRW's Middle East and North Africa programs, of approving the murder of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, of being a friend of Saddam and "a fanatical

supporter of the elimination of Israel.... This should be the final verdict on a cretinous organization's already tattered credibility." Boston-based pro-Israel media watchdog CAMERA proudly takes credit for the "exposé" as based on research by CAMERA's own Alex Safian. Next CAMERA researchers revealed that Mark Garlasco, senior military analyst for HRW, has a hobby of collecting Nazi memorabilia and therefore must be an anti-Semitic Nazi-phile. In "Responding to Accusations" (9/11/09), Garlasco wrote, "I work to expose war crimes and the Nazis were the worst war criminals of all time.... I spend my days doing what I can to ensure that such horrors are never allowed to happen again." After initially defending him, on 14 September HRW buckled and suspended Garlasco "pending an investigation."

The following day, 15 September, the U.N. Human Rights Commission released the Goldstone report. It would be awkward for the guardians of Israel's "purity of arms" to use the anti-Semitic charge against a man of Goldstone's stature, a South African who was the chief prosecutor at U.N. war crimes tribunals for Rwanda and Serbia and a long-time Zionist who served on the board of directors at Hebrew University. Only Melanie Phillips (see above) accused Goldstone of "perpetrating a blood libel against Israel."

Savvier defenders attacked the Human Rights Commission for including among its members countries like Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan that should have been disqualified, according to Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, for insisting "that the operation was not one of self-defense, but an Israeli aggressive action." Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yigal Palmor said the fact-finding mission was "established in sin," which was reason enough for Israel not to cooperate with it, even to obstruct the commission's work. To Netanyahu the commission is a "kangaroo court" and to Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman a pre-determined "attempt to deface Israel." Shimon Peres decried the report "for failing to distinguish between the aggressor and a state exercising its right for self-defense."

To rally key international support, Israel is pushing the argument that if the issue were to be taken to the International Criminal Court, other countries, like certain permanent members of the Security Council fighting their own "wars on terror" in places like Afghanistan and Chechnya, might be subjected to similar investigative reports. Ron Ben-Yishai ("Grave blow for Israel," 9/16/09) frets that the Goldstone report "does not only limit the IDF, but also American forces and Western allies operating against Global Jihad terror." As reported in the Jerusalem Post (9/16/09):

Ayalon said that Israel would now focus its energy on "making the report dissipate" and that Jerusalem was in contact with the US over the findings, emphasizing that the report could have repercussions for American troops fighting in Iran (SIC!) and Afghanistan.

On the day after the publication of the report, Ayalon met in New York with heads of major Jewish organizations, urging them to activate their cadres to lobby against the report. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) called the report "deeply flawed" and applauded "members of Congress who have spoken out in rejection of this biased 'investigation' of Israel's defensive actions against Hamas terrorists attacking its citizens from the Gaza Strip" (9/18). Ayalon met on the 17th with U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice. On the 18th, Rice dutifully expressed "grave reservations" with the recommendations of the report and its mandate, "which we viewed as unbalanced, one-sided and basically unacceptable." About the latter, Rice was either unaware or chose to ignore the fact that Goldstone had insisted that the mandate be balanced before accepting it.

In view of the Obama administration's determination to bring the Palestine-Israel issue in from the cold, a second line of Israel's attack on the Goldstone report has the whiff of blackmail: Israeli ambassador to the U.N. Gabriela Shalev said the U.N. report would "hamper Middle East peace efforts." Not to put too fine a point on it, Prime Minister Netanyahu, the day before the Human Rights Council's vote on the report, said a U.N. endorsement would "strike a fatal blow to the peace process." While such an outcome might be a relief to the majority of Palestinians, given how detrimental nearly two decades of peace process have been for them, it would undermine Mahmoud Abbas and the PA. This may explain why on October 1st the PA acceded to pressure from the Obama administration to drop its endorsement of the Goldstone report, then tried to backpedal in the wake of enormous public outrage.

Another avoidance tactic is to deflect, to insist that a different issue needs more urgent attention, say, mad mullahs with nukes. Never mind that, unlike Israel, Iran has no nukes and has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Never mind that Iran, unlike Israel, has not threatened a neighbor in several centuries. Never mind that Israel, to quote Moshe Dayan, "must be like a mad dog, too dangerous to bother" and that after "Lebanon, and now Gaza— Israel's 'mad dog' credentials are beyond dispute" (Stuart Littlewood, "Still patting the Mad Dog?" 2/10/09). As Professor Haggai Ram of Ben Gurion University points out ("Israel and the Iranian Threat,"



Link author Jane Adas visited Gaza's Life Makers Center on May 26, 2009. One part of the Center's after-school program is to comfort traumatized children whose homes along the Gaza border were demolished by Israeli bulldozers.

9/29/09), "The Jewish state has time and again (ab)used the specter of the 'Iranian threat' in order to cover up, and divert attention away from, both domestic oversights and the continuing apartheid regime in the Palestinian territories."

You could hear it in Netanyahu's speech at the U.N.: "The greatest threat facing the world today is the marriage between religious fundamentalism and the weapons of mass destruction." He was talking, of course, about Iran, but Israeli ex-pat jazz performer Gilad Atzmon ("Netanyahu's UN Speech: The Pathology of Evil") has a different interpretation:

In fact, no one could describe the danger posed by the Jewish state and Zionism any better. Israel is indeed a deadly marriage between Old Testament gross genocidal barbarism, Zionist fanaticism and a huge arsenal of WMD, chemical, biological and nuclear that has already been partially put into action.

In an interview with Yedioth Ahronoth (9/17/09) Defense Minister Ehud Barak broke ranks by declaring, "Iran does not constitute an existential threat to Israel's existence." President Obama strongly supports nuclear non-proliferation. Why, then, did the United States object to the U.N. Nuclear Assembly's vote on 18 September urging

Israel to accede to the NPT and place all atomic sites under U.N. inspections? Ariel Cohen, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, provides a clue ("Obama puts Israel at Risk," 5/13/09): "The U.S. had committed in a bilateral agreement not to tamper with the Israeli nuclear shield."

The deal seems to be, has always been, the U.S. will insist on Iran's strict compliance with whatever the International Atomic Energy Agency asks of it, but will be mum about Israel's refusal to sign the NPT; the U.S. will go to war with a country like Iraq that invades its neighbor, but keep mum when Israel does the same thing; the U.S. will provide billions in loan guarantees so that Israel can absorb a million immigrants from the former Soviet Union, but not even acknowledge that Syria has had to cope with one and a half million Iraqi refugees; U.S. politicians will go to Sderot to demonstrate their solidarity with the victims of rocket attacks from Gaza, but will not enter Gaza to do the same for victims of U.S.-supplied high-tech weapons; and on and on and on.

Clearly, the U.S. government and media have swallowed all the absurdities. Why, then, should we be surprised or indignant when others find us complicit in injustices? ■

How To Spin Like a Pro

In a Newsweek web exclusive, Dan Efron describes a "leaked" copy of *The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary*: "The 18 chapters offer a fascinating look at the way Israel and its supporters try to shape the public debate in their favor."

Efron notes that, "The settlement issue has been the single biggest source of friction between the United States and Israel since Benjamin Netanyahu became Israel's prime minister in March. President Obama has said he wants to see a complete halt to housing construction in Jewish communities of the West Bank."

In testing various messages on focus groups, the manual's author, Frank Lutz, concludes that "public opinion is hostile to the settlements," even among supporters of Israel. Arguments that should not be used, according to the Dictionary, include quoting the Bible ("Even your Jewish audiences will recoil at an attempt to use Biblical passages to justify the settlements."), and "disputed" vs. "occupied" ("if we correct Palestinians using the words 'disputed territory' when they say 'occupied territory,' we have to accept that the settlements are disputed territory as well.").

The 117-page manual is available on the Newsweek website at http://www.newsweek.com/media/70/tip_report.pdf.

From **The Link's** Links

<http://www.palestinechronicle.com>

Ramzy Baroud is editor of Palestine Chronicle. AMEU Executive Director John Mahoney conducted this interview.

Noam Chomsky has given your website a high recommendation, noting its wide range of sources, including many that are otherwise inaccessible to the concerned public. Can you give some examples? Over the past 10 years Palestine Chronicle has assembled nearly 100 contributors from diverse backgrounds, mostly academics and journalists, but also artists, bloggers, citizen journalists and activists. This, I believe, is what Professor Chomsky was referring to.

One of your contributors is Jonathan Cook, the British journalist who lives with his Palestinian wife in Israel and who writes about the status of Palestinians in Israel. Why is their situation so important? The first prime minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion, once said of the Palestinians who were forced out of their land in 1948, "The old will die and the young will forget." For over 60 years Israeli policy has been to fragment the Palestinian national identity both geographically ("Israeli Arabs," Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and those scattered around the Middle East and throughout the world) and politically (Fatah vs. Hamas, moderates vs. extremists). Our challenge today is to maintain our national identity wherever we are. Courageous journalists like Jonathan Cook who remind us of the second and third class citizenship of Palestinians inside Israel are vital to maintaining our national identity amid incessant attempts at undermining it.

Speaking of the Catastrophe of 1948, your website features a picture of a family trudging along a dirt road with the caption "Neither parent had answers to the children's incessant question, "Where are we going?" It's a powerful picture. Can you tell us something about it? The families in this picture represent the estimated 800,000 Palestinians, including my own grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, who were forcefully removed from their towns and villages in historic Palestine. Many such pictures are available in history books and on-line. The caption to the one on our website comes from my new book, "My Father Was a Freedom Fighter."

Your family ended up in Gaza where family members remain to this day. How are they doing? My father was 10 when he arrived in Gaza, along with 200,000 refugees. He stood at fences and extended his hand for a crumb of bread. A proud nation was collectively humiliated, humilia-

tion that is yet to end. My father died last year, being denied access to a properly equipped hospital.

You have written that the ordinary people of Gaza are major players in the struggle against Israeli occupation. How so? Sadly our Palestinian political elite can, at times, be corruptible. The people are not. In my book, I document every popular struggle in Gaza, as early as the Egyptian administration of the Strip, until today. Every Israeli attempt at pacifying and subduing us has failed, because of ordinary Gazans. I quietly stood as men dug graves in the Martyrs Graveyard adjacent to our house for ordinary men and women who faced the soldiers with nothing but flags and chants, refusing to compromise on their freedom and rights. It's those martyrs, the ordinary people of Gaza, who have made Gaza what it is today: a "Castle of Resistance" as we call it. Were it not for their struggle and sacrifice the spirit of Gaza would have been defeated long ago.

This interview will appear in our December issue on how Israel has spun its "Operation Cast Lead." Is there one justification that particularly riles you? What I found most upsetting is not the spin but the fact that such irrational spins were hardly challenged by the media, mostly in the U.S. When Israeli Prime Minister Tzipi Livni said Israel warned civilians before the bombings, no one questioned what she meant: that random calls were made to Gazan households urging them to leave before the bombings started. The idea was not to save lives but to instill fear and panic. Bombs were falling everywhere, hospitals, schools, shelters. Nine hundred civilians were killed, more than a third of them children. Gaza is so small, people had nowhere to hide, literally. But somehow, Livni's comments seemed rational and, to some, more than convincing.

Journalist Ramzy Baroud has taught mass communication at Australia's Curtin University of Technology and is a former Al-Jazeera producer. His work has been published in hundreds of newspapers and journals worldwide, including The Washington Post, The International Herald Tribune, The Christian Science Monitor, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Seattle Times, The Miami Herald, The Japan Times and Al-Ahram Weekly. Baroud has been a guest on numerous television programs including CNN International, BBC, ABC Australia, National Public Radio, and Al-Jazeera. His 2002 book, "Searching Jenin: Eyewitness Accounts of the Israeli Invasion," has received international recognition.



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