

A Genocide is Engulfing the People of Gaza

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Looking to the Side, From Belsen to Gaza

A genocide is engulfing the people of Gaza while a silence engulfs its bystanders. "Some 1.4 million people, mostly children, are piled up in one of the most densely populated regions of the world, with no freedom of movement, no place to run and no space to hide," wrote the senior UN relief official, Jan Egeland, and Jan Eliasson, then Swedish foreign minister, in *Le Figaro*. They described people "living in a cage," cut off by land, sea and air, with no reliable power and little water and tortured by hunger and disease and incessant attacks by Israeli troops and planes.

Egeland and Eliasson wrote this four months ago as an attempt to break the silence in Europe whose obedient alliance with the United States and Israel has sought to reverse the democratic result that brought Hamas to power in last year's Palestinian elections. The horror in Gaza has since been compounded; a family of 18 has died beneath a 500-pound American/Israeli bomb; unarmed women have been mown down at point-blank range. Dr. David Halpin, one of the few Britons to break what he calls "this medieval siege", reported the killing of 57 children by artillery, rockets and small arms and was shown evidence that civilians are Israel's true targets, as in Lebanon last summer. A friend in Gaza, Dr. Mona El-Farra, e-mailed: "I see the effects of the relentless sonic booms [a collective punishment by the Israeli air force] and artillery on my 13-year-old daughter. At night, she shivers with fear. Then both of us end up crouching on the floor. I try to make her feel safe, but when the bombs sound I flinch and scream..."

When I was last in Gaza, Dr. Khalid Dahlan, a psychiatrist, showed me the results of a remarkable survey. "The statistic I personally find unbearable," he said, "is that 99.4 per cent of the children we studied suffer trauma. Once you look at the rates of exposure to trauma you see why: 99.2 per cent of their homes were bombarded; 97.5 per cent were exposed to tear gas; 96.6 per cent witnessed shootings; 95.8 per cent witnessed bombardment and funerals; almost a quarter saw family members injured or killed." Dr. Dahlan invited me to sit in on one of his clinics. There were 30 children, all of them traumatized. He gave each pencil and paper and asked them to draw. They drew pictures of grotesque acts of terror and of women streaming tears.

The excuse for the latest Israeli terror was the capture last June of an Israeli soldier, a member of an illegal occupation, by the Palestinian resistance. This was news. The kidnapping a few days earlier by Israel of two Palestinians — two of thousands taken over the years — was not news. An historian and two foreign journalists have reported the truth about Gaza. All three are Israelis. They are frequently called traitors. The historian Ilan Pappé has documented that "the genocidal policy [in Gaza] is not formulated in a vacuum"

but part of Zionism's deliberate, historic ethnic cleansing. Gideon Levy and Amira Hass are reporters on the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz. In November, Levy described how the people of Gaza were beginning to starve to death . . . "there are thousands of wounded, disabled and shell-shocked people unable to receive any treatment . . . the shadows of human beings roam the ruin... they only know the [Israeli army] will return and what this will mean for them: more imprisonment in their homes for weeks, more death and destruction in monstrous proportions."

Amira Hass, who has lived in Gaza, describes it as a prison that shames her people. She recalls how her mother, Hannah, was being marched from a cattle-train to the Nazi concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen on a summer's day in 1944. "[She] saw these German women looking at the prisoners, just looking," she wrote. "This image became very formative in my upbringing, this despicable 'looking from the side'."

"Looking from the side" is what those of us do who are cowed into silence by the threat of being called anti-Semitic. Looking from the side is what too many western Jews do, while those Jews who honor the humane traditions of Judaism and say, "Not in our name!" are abused as "self-despising". Looking from the side is what almost the entire US Congress does, in thrall to or intimidated by a vicious Zionist "lobby". Looking from the side is what "even-handed" journalists do as they excuse the lawlessness that is the source of Israeli atrocities and suppress the historic shifts in the Palestinian resistance, such as the implicit recognition of Israel by Hamas. The people of Gaza cry out for better.

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