

And Israel Shall be Safe Again

"International community" turns blind eye to extensive crimes against humanity

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The June 25 Palestinian fighters' raid on an Israeli military post near the Gaza-Egypt border has sent Israel "scrambling to defend itself," the voice of a BBC news reporter declared on the evening news.

The report was followed by an unchallenging interview with a spokesman for the Israeli foreign ministry, then another with an Israeli daily newspaper reporter in Washington. No Palestinian voice was heard for days. The two Israelis communicated the same, tired, albeit ominous discourse that seems to understand, thus convey any event based on the misguided assumption that only Israeli lives matter.

There was hardly any international news source in English – including those originating from Middle Eastern Arab countries – that accepted the Palestinian predawn attack on the Israeli military base as a clear act of retaliation and a dignified one at that. After all, Israel has murdered scores of Palestinian civilians in the last few weeks, while Palestinians have refrained from following the same course, instead targeting the same Israeli soldiers who have inflicted untold hurt on the residents of Gaza.

Could it be possible that Middle East arms of major news media have mistakenly overlooked what has been happening in the Gaza Strip since the supposed Israeli withdrawal in September 2005?

It all started with extremely loud sonic booms, mock bombardments and Israeli fighter jets flying low over the overpopulated and impoverished Gaza Strip. Palestinians called on the international community to interfere to stop Israeli provocations. Their calls, as usual, fell on deaf ears

With such scare tactics, Israel wished to convey to Palestinians a loud and clear message: there is nothing for you to celebrate; were still the masters of your destiny, and unlike the South Lebanon 2000 withdrawal, we are leaving Gaza triumphantly, and possibly just temporarily.

Soon, Israel's mock attacks became more genuine, while the international community continued to turn a blind eye to what would soon become another routine in 'liberated' Gaza. As far the media was concerned, there was hardly much to report, since Hamas, along with other Palestinian factions refused to respond to the provocations with violent retaliation, confining themselves to a unilateral ceasefire they'd reached with PA President Mahmoud Abbas in Cairo earlier.

Fed up the with the Palestinian response – or lack thereof – Israeli officials coupled their scare tactics with menacing, specific threats, with a bottom line that no Palestinian was immune from Israeli targeted assassinations. Indeed, they lived up to their words.

In an interesting turn of events, Hamas won the parliamentary elections in January 2006 in an astounding display of transparency and democratic process. John Hughes of the Christian Science Monitor echoed the mainstream media line that something went horribly wrong in the Middle East and that the “Hamas victory is a setback” to whatever imaginary peace process Hughes knows of.

Comforted by the unconditional support of the US government, Israel’s violent intimidation and scare tactics became much more abound. This time however, the Israeli war on the Palestinians became an extension of an international one, led by the United States along with the ever-compliant United Nations and European Union. While Western donors held back their aid to the point of creating a humanitarian catastrophe in the Occupied Territories, the US led a campaign of political coercion – in a rare display of unity between Democrats and Republicans and all of “Israel’s friends” in the media.

Western media quickly coined various mantras to justify why ordinary Palestinians must suffer for choosing a parliament in a democratic election: because Hamas refuses to recognize Israel and renounces violence, among other pretexts that seem to fit so well in Israel’s political agenda. Top Israeli government advisor Dov Weissglas, optimistic as he had always been, wished to see the humor in starving Palestinians. (The economic siege) “is like an appointment with a dietician. The Palestinians will get a lot thinner, but they won’t starve to death.”

Apparently Israel was enjoying the show: getting the world to punish an occupied nation while completely losing sight of Israel’s colonial expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is the most fitting manifestation of the proverbial dream come true. Of course, Israel can never be content with such limited roles. It was time to turn up the heat one more notch; the sporadic violence was about to be upgraded to intense violence, reaching Palestinian civilians of all ages. In the matter of seven weeks, ending on June 21 with the killing of a pregnant woman, her unborn child and her brother and injuring 14 of the same family – Israel had killed 90 Palestinians, the great majority of whom were civilians. They included the killing of seven members of the same family while picnicking at a beach near the small Gaza town of Beit Lahia on June 9.

Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz justified the wanton killing of civilians, along with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert as an unintended mistake, vowing to continue to fight ‘terrorists’ who fire homemade rockets against the neighboring Israeli town of Sderot. In the same period in which 90 Palestinians were killed and hundreds more maimed and wounded, Israeli army radio reported one injury resulting from rocket fire. No other source has confirmed the lone injury claim.

However, Western media, including the BBC, is incessantly determined to equate blowing up Palestinian families with Israeli allegations of Palestinian rocket attacks: it’s a tit for tat, or so it seems. It’s equally valid, according to ignorant media dictates, to starve a nation because their government’s refuses to recognize its military occupier.

The US administration defended the June 9 murder of a Gaza family as an Israeli right to defend itself. BBC International refused to see the Palestinian attack on an Israeli military

installation on June 25, as a Palestinian right to self-defense. To the contrary, it was Israel who once again went “scrambling to defend itself”. It’s unclear how many Palestinians must die before Israel delivers a convincing “blow” to its unruly neighbors, and before life goes back to the way it was intended to be: Palestinians being starved, humiliated and slaughtered at the hands of Israel in their dissolute Gaza ghettos. Only then, shall Israel be safe once more.

-Ramzy Baroud’s latest book: The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronology of a People’s Struggle (Pluto Press, London) is now available at Amazon.com.

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