

Forbidden Weapons and Israeli War Crimes

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In the period 2008-2014, Zionist settler colonialists launched three aggressive wars against the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip: (1) Dec 2008-Jan 2009, (2) 14 Nov 2012, and (3) July-August 2014. During these aggressive wars, the Israeli military used a number of American-made forbidden weapons: White Phosphorus, GBU-39 Shells, DIME bombs, Flechette Shells, Vacuum bombs, and Scandium 64 Aerosol.

The following research article will explore the first two forbidden weapons. Each one of these two weapons will be investigated, thus revealing their components then showing their hazardous implications on the health of the Gazan civilians. The second four forbidden weapons will be explored in a forthcoming research article.

In addition to that, this research article will explore two phenomena: the 'Cheering Israelis' who gather during wars to "watch, clap and cheer" Israeli bombing and pounding of Gaza Strip civilians and the critical Israelis who are motivated by humane and anti-racist morals, and who criticize the colonial policies of the consecutive Israeli right-wing governments. However, prior to that, this article will begin with an analysis of the systematic policy of killing innocent Palestinian civilians, which is connected with the use of forbidden weapons.

The Killing of Innocent Civilians: Is it a Systematic Policy?

Throughout its aggressive wars against Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, the Israeli army has deliberately and intentionally targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure. This policy has been a declared Zionist plan and it was applied in Lebanon during the 2006 war. According to the Israeli Chief of Staff, in 2008, Major General Gadi Eizenkot,

... trying to hit rocket launchers is "complete nonsense", because "when there are thousands of launchers on the other side, it is impossible to hunt them down." Israel, instead, should focus on deterrence: Every village from which they fire on Israel, we will deploy disproportional force, and cause massive damage and destruction. As far as we are concerned, these are military bases. Eizenkot emphasized that "this is not a recommendation; this is the plan and it has been approved."^[1]

Of course, the implementation of this plan has resulted in numerous civilian casualties. Once the Zionist army regards Arab villages and refugee camps as legitimate "military bases", Zionist weapons and fire are bound to kill civilians.



Palestinian take cover as Israeli forces fire at protesters at the Gaza border on 14 December 2018
[Mohammed Asad/Middle East Monitor]

Few cases of the results of this policy are worth mentioning. During the aggressive war against the Gaza Strip in 2008-2009, the "... Israeli artillery fire reportedly hit near a UN school where hundreds of Gazans had sought refuge, killing an estimated 42 people. Israel said its troops were responding to fire from militants near the school..."[2] Another case happened in the same war. "... Gazans allege Israeli soldiers ordered 110 civilians into a warehouse, then shelled it the next day, killing 30. Israel denies the army targeted the warehouse."[3] Another case was "... the attack on the Al-Dahiyeh family home in the Gaza City neighborhood of Zeitoun, in which 21 members of the same family were killed."[4] These cases are indicative of the existence of a systematic Zionist policy of shoot to kill and cannot be classified as mistakes in targeting or exceptions.

Moreover, an Israeli combat pilot who used to carry out raids against Gazan houses revealed this policy after he was dismissed from the Israeli air-force for refusing to continue the murderous raids. Ex-pilot Roi Maor wrote that: "Israeli policy ... is not intended to maximize civilian casualties. Yet it does intentionally target civilians: it is intended to produce maximal civilian distress, while avoiding mass civilian casualties."[5]

Due to international condemnation, the Israeli army felt pressured and responded by holding fictitious inquiries. "The inquiries were performed by five IDF colonels who were not involved in the fighting in Cast Lead, and examined reports of attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, medical personnel and facilities, United Nations facilities, and also the use of white phosphorous."[6] The result of these inquiries were conveyed by Deputy Israeli army Chief of Staff General Dan Harel who reported "... that in the dozens of cases they examined, they found that throughout Cast Lead the IDF "adhered to international law and maintained a high level of professionalism and morality.""[7]

In response to the results of the inquiries, the Israeli human rights group, B'Tselem,

“...called the military’s investigation flawed. B’Tselem added that it “does not answer the need for an independent inquiry outside the army that would look at the whole range of violations the army is incapable of looking at.”[8]

Despite calling the army investigations as flawed, and following the release of these inquiries, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who is directly responsible for these war crimes, responded by declaring “... the army’s willingness to probe itself “once again proves that the IDF is one of the most moral armies in the world.”[9]

It is worth pointing out that the “one of the most moral armies in the world” has: committed a number of massacres in 1948-1949 in Palestine, carried out ethnic cleansing against the people of Palestine, systematically murdered thousands of Egyptian POWs in 1967, and killed innocent Palestinian civilians in all the wars and incursions that took place inside the Gaza Strip. Moreover, “One of the most moral armies in the world” uses snipers to shoot, kill and wound Palestinian civilians who demonstrate in the Gaza Strip against the suffocating Zionist military siege. Apparently, the moral measure that Barak uses is a settler colonial one based on the outright myth fabricated by an arrogant war criminal.

The systematic killing of Palestinian civilians by the Zionist army has been affirmed by Amnesty International. In its 2009 annual report, Amnesty International reported that “Israeli forces repeatedly breached the laws of war, including by carrying out direct attacks on civilians and civilian buildings and attacks targeting Palestinian militants that caused a disproportionate toll among civilians...”[10] The report stated that 1,400 Palestinians were killed in the offensive – including 300 children – and that 5,000 people were wounded.[11]

Components of White Phosphorus Shells

White Phosphorus is a shell used by armies as an obscurant weapon. It is used, to hide military operations, in training, as well as, in war conditions. White Phosphorus shells are shot by artillery as well as by air power. Once it is shot, WP shell explodes and “... spreads 116 burning wafers over an area between 125 and 250 meters in diameter, depending on the altitude of the burst...”[12]

White phosphorus munitions are weapons which use one of the common [allotropes](#) of the [chemical element phosphorus](#). It is used in [smoke](#), illumination and [incendiary](#) munitions, and is commonly the burning element of [tracer ammunition](#). [13] It is also [pyrophoric](#) (self-ignites on contact with air), burns fiercely, and can ignite cloth, fuel, ammunition, and other combustibles.



Razan al-Najjar, the 21 year old Gaza medic killed by an Israeli sniper on June 1, treating an injured man, undated photo from Palestine Live on twitter.

This weapon is not forbidden, by international law, when it is used in wars against other military personnel, however it is forbidden to be used against civilians. Despite Israeli denials, the Israeli army has used WP against Palestinian civilians living in the densely populated areas of the Gaza Strip. This fact has been confirmed by "... various international human rights organizations..." who have found "... substantial evidence of use of white phosphorus..." by the Israeli army, "...in civilian and residential areas..."[14]

According to a report by 'Human Rights Watch' the Israeli army, during the 2008-2009 aggressive war against the Gaza Strip,

... had deliberately or recklessly used white phosphorus munitions in violation of the laws of war. **First**, the repeated use of air-burst white phosphorus in populated areas until the last days of the operation reveals a pattern or policy of conduct rather than incidental or accidental usage. **Second**, the IDF was well aware of the effects of white phosphorus and the dangers it poses to civilians. **Third**, the IDF failed to use safer available alternatives for smokescreens.[15]

Health Hazards of White Phosphorus

In 17 December 2009, a group of researchers from the **New Weapons Research Group** (NWRG) conducted a mass spectrometry analysis at the Shifa Hospital in the Gaza Strip. They "... found aluminium, titanium, strontium, barium, cobalt and mercury in biopsies taken from white phosphorus wounds of Palestinian wounded..."[16] Moreover, "... Aluminium, barium and mercury have potential for lethal and intoxicating effects, aluminium and mercury can cause chronic pathologies over time, mercury is carcinogenic for humans,

cobalt can cause mutations, and aluminium is fetotoxic i.e. injurious to fetuses...”[17]

It should be pointed out that “White phosphorus ignites on contact with oxygen and continues burning at up to 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit (816 degrees Celsius) until none is left or the oxygen supply is cut. It is often used to produce smoke screens, but can also be used as a weapon, producing extreme burns if it makes contact with skin.” [18]

Finally, the health hazards caused by Phosphorus Shells are severe and could cause death to those affected. It should be pointed out that “... Phosphorus burns carry an increased risk of mortality due to the absorption of phosphorus into the body through the burned area with prolonged contact, which can result in liver, heart and kidney damage, and in some cases [multiple organ failure](#).”[19]

Consequently, white phosphorus particles continue to burn until completely consumed unless deprived of oxygen,[20] a matter that cannot be easily achieved. Only surgical removal of the affected area will put an end to the burning.

Components of GBU-39 Shells

Depleted Uranium (DU) is the radioactive waste that accumulates inside nuclear reactors. American Pentagon scientists at the military laboratories of Los Alamos discovered that when mixing DU with steel they can manufacture a shell called GBU-39 that is extremely hard and dense. According to Japanese researcher Yagasaki Katsuma, these shells are guided weapons in the form of bombs and cruise missiles designed to break through concrete hardened bunkers and other targets. They are loaded with DU penetrators, each of which weighing several tons...[21]

Moreover,

DU shells are called armor-piercing firebombs, because they not only break through a steel armor but also burn up intensely. As armor-piercing rounds, they would punch out the bulky iron plate of tanks, invade their interior, and bounce around inside killing the combat crew, destroying tank facilities and burn them out. They would hit the target with their enormous momentum and pierce a hole with their kinetic energy...[22]

In Addition to that “...the bomb can penetrate deep into the earth, into an apartment building or into a bunker, through reinforced concrete and other multiple resistant obstacles...”[23] According to information provided by a group called **Action of Citizens for the total Dismantling of Nukes** (ACDN),

...The explosive in the GBU-39s is said to be a new formula of perchlorate (a highly carcinogenic product) with the addition of micromolecular carbon powder (in place of aluminium) and of a “booster” based on DU powder. The role of this powerful explosive is to ensure great velocity for these “metal shards” which ignite because they contain pyrophoric DU, but only after the friction of impact with their “targets” raises their temperature sufficiently.[24]

Upon impact, “... these weapons ... unleash “a hellish fire” of nearly 1200°C. The occupants of a tank hit by a DU shell are not torn to bits but burnt to a cinder...”[25] This is due to the

fact that "... the bomb explodes in seconds or minutes after contact with the target, whatever the nature of the target. This means that the material is sure to disappear when used. No remains will be found of a GBU-39, either intact or in fragments. Only a little black powder."[26]

These shells contain uranium "... They explode and ignite, spreading around them a cloud of smoke comprising billions of radioactive nanoparticles which oxidize and either fall to rest nearby after contaminating the exploded rubble and earth or else mingle with the dust which the wind carries off and thus become part of the air we breathe."[27]

Health Hazards of GBU-39 Munition

According to a report prepared by **Citizens Action to Dismantle Nuclear Weapons Completely**, the quantity of Depleted Uranium dropped on the Gaza Strip during the Dec. 2008-Jan. 2009 war "... may amount to no less than 75 tons found in the soil and subsoil in the Gaza Strip..."[28] Analysis by a team of researchers showed that "... the presence of particles of the cesium, a radioactive and carcinogenic dust which includes asbestos, a carcinogenic, in addition to volatile organic compounds and fine particles that pose health risks, especially children's health, those living with asthma and the elderly."[29]

According to the report of the ACND, which was issued in January 2009 at the end of the war, the Gaza Strip civilians who were bombarded with the GBU-39 weapons were forced to face the following health hazards. "The extremely tiny radioactive particles pass through all types of barriers, including gas-masks. They travel on the air, contaminate the atmosphere and enter organisms via respiration, ingestion or wounds of any size.[30] "... the greater part of the uranium remains as invisible uranium oxide in the atmosphere which the populations breathe, while another fraction contaminates the soil, the subsoil and the groundwater."[31]

The impact of DU particles on the health situation of the Palestinian civilians has been recorded through its accumulation "... in the bone, kidney, reproductive system, brain and lung. It is carcinogenic, toxic to the kidneys, damaging to cellular DNA and causes malformations to an embryo or fetus."[32] It should be pointed out that the "... birth defects included incomplete hearts and malformations of the brain..."[33]

Finally, it should be pointed out that the radioactive half-life[34] of the depleted uranium used in the Gaza Strip is 4.5 billion years, the age of our solar system[35], a fact that means a very long period of suffering from its health hazards by the Gazan civilian population. Radioactive particles will continue to: damage human cells, split the chromosomes, and alter the DNA. The consequences of these health hazards are cancers, leukemias, lymphomas, diabetes, sterility, and fetal malformations and these hazards are irreversible and cannot be treated inside the Gaza Strip.[36] Consequently, "... high intake of DU over a long period of time will impair or cause failure of organ functions such as kidney, liver, heart and brain leading to death."[37]

Cheering Israelis under the Travelling Radioactive Dust

It should be emphasized "... that atmospheric movements don't stop at the borders of Gaza..."[38], so the radioactive carcinogenic dust particles will continue to move by air. "...By bombing Gaza with DU devices, Israel is inevitably contaminating its own food production, its own exports, its own soldiers and its own population."[39]

More specifically, Israeli soldiers who "... are handling with no precautions all the material to be loaded (artillery shells, gear to attach the missiles under aircraft wings, transfer of missile heads into the weapons holds of tanks, loading the machine-guns on board the planes...)[40] are carrying out these military functions "... as if they were handling conventional materials." [41]

In other words, the health hazards caused by DU munition that affect the Palestinian civilians will definitely affect both the Israeli civilians and the Israeli military personnel. Both "... will be scarred for life in their lungs, their blood or their genes, as a result of these perverse weapons? Remember: no mask can give protection against the nanoparticles of DU." [42]

Due to complicit Zionist official media and incorrect political decisions by the Israeli Ministry of Health, these health hazards in the making are being covered up and kept hidden away from honest public scrutiny. A good proof for this is the strange social behavior of some Israeli residents of settlements adjacent to the Gaza Strip, who gather during wars to "watch, clap and cheer" Israeli bombing and pounding of Gaza Strip civilians. This irresponsible and ignorant behavior was reported by numerous Western journalists among them: Charles Levinson of the Wall Street Journal, Robert Mackey of the New York Times, and Harriet Sherwood of The Guardian. [43]

British journalist Harriet Sherwood has eloquently described this strange Israeli social phenomenon in the following terms. "As the sun begins to sink over the Mediterranean, groups of Israelis gather each evening on hilltops close to the Gaza border to cheer, whoop and whistle as bombs rain down on people in a hellish warzone a few miles away." [44]

Apparently, Zionist propaganda machine, some complicit Israeli academicians, complacent Members of Parliament and engrained racism, have combined together in creating the groups of acquiescent and dehumanized "Cheering Ignorants".

Critical Israelis

In addition to complicit, racist, right-wing and narrow-minded Israelis that "watch, clap and cheer" Israeli bombing and pounding of Gaza Strip civilians, there are Israeli citizens who are motivated by humane and anti-racist morals. These Israelis express their critical positions whenever they can. The following are two examples, a civilian and a military.

Yonathan Shapira is a former Blackhawk pilot, who refused to serve in the colonized Palestinian territories.[45] In 2003, Yonathan Shapira, initiated a letter that was signed by 30 Israeli pilots. In this letter these pilots expressed their refusal to serve in the colonized Palestinian territories. Among other things these pilots wrote the following[46]:

We, veteran pilots and active pilots together, who served and still serve the State of Israel during long weeks each year, object to perform illegal and immoral orders of attacks that the State of Israel performs in the territories.

We, who were raised to love the State of Israel and to contribute to the Zionist enterprise, refuse to take part in the attacks of the air force in concentrations of civilian population.

We, for whom the IDF and the air force are inseparable parts of us, refuse to continue and harm innocent civilians.

In addition to those 30 pilots, a group of "... 567 reserve army officers and soldiers have declared publicly that they will no longer serve in the Palestinian territories, and hundreds of others have quietly asked their commanders for reassignment, according to military lawyers and Israeli military experts." [47]

Another critical Israeli is the late Shulamit Aloni, a former Meretz member of Knesset and cabinet minister. After the High Court of Justice sanctioned the use of Flachettes shells in the Gaza Strip, Shulamit Aloni wrote an article in which she openly accused the High Court of Justice of providing the army with a license to kill.

"In its decision of April 27, Israel's highest court has essentially issued a license to kill civilians by determining that the use of flechette shells fired from tanks is not prohibited by international law. The court has thereby done its duty by the occupation army, which uses flechette rounds in densely populated areas. The High Court of Justice (?) knows that the killing of civilians is banned by international law and every other human law; that, evidently, didn't bother the court." [48]

Aloni added that "...In the name of the war against terror, acts of terror, acts of intolerable piracy and humiliation, are being committed..." [49]

These critical Israelis are not alone. It is hopeful that their number will continue to grow to a point where they will become influential and thus will stop the right-wing Israeli camp from using the Israeli army to commit war crimes in the name of the entire Israeli people.

Concluding Remarks

- Zionist Israel uses forbidden weapons in the Gaza Strip in order to terrorize the civilian Palestinian population and force them to give up resistance to its colonial policies;
- Zionist Israel uses the slogan of "fighting terrorism" as a coverup for its colonial plunder of Palestinian land and water resources;
- US imperialism protects Israel from the Security Council that could be a tool to condemn and prevent Israeli war crimes;
- Most Israelis are complicit and support right-wing policies but a minority are motivated by a humane, progressive and liberal orientations. They are often ready to voice their critical views whenever they can;
- Due to lack of public scrutiny and scientific information among a great part of the Israeli public, the health hazards of DU radioactivity remain unknown to the Israeli people.

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