

US gave Israel Green Light for Sabra, Shatila Massacre

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Global Research, September 19, 2012

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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For three days, between 15 and 18 September, up to 3,500 men, women and children were butchered in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps of West Beirut. Their mutilated, mangled bodies bulldozed into mass graves.

For three days, Lebanese Christian Phalangists under the command of intelligence chief Elie Hobeika returned over and over again to go on an orgy of systematic slaughter in the camps. The massacre would not have been possible only for the collaboration of Israel's Defence Forces, which had months earlier invaded Lebanon and taken control of the camps.

Sabra and Shatila were populated by destitute families of Palestinians that had fled from the pogroms in 1948 carried out by Israel's Haganah death squads. The refugee numbers also burgeoned with Lebanese Shia displaced from the civil war in their country that erupted in 1975.

The United Nations' General Assembly later condemned what happened at Sabra and Shatila as "an act of genocide". A UN commission of inquiry, headed up by Irish statesman Sean MacBride, concluded that the Israeli authorities and their forces were involved and responsible for the deaths. The then head of the IDF was Ariel Sharon who later would hold four ministerial posts before becoming Israeli Prime Minister from 2001 to 2006.

Yet not a single person has ever been prosecuted for the slaughter at Sabra and Shatila. As part of Lebanon's civil war settlement in 1990 an amnesty was afforded to all those who had participated in this and other atrocities. Some would later clear their consciences by confessing publicly to media and tribunals to the most barbaric acts of cruelty one can imagine.

Former Phalangist commander Hobeika was due to give evidence in a Belgian court, which had claimed international jurisdiction for crimes against humanity to prosecute the case. Ahead of the hearings, Hobeika had publicly stated that he was going to testify against Ariel Sharon to implicate him in the operation of the massacre. He never made it to the courtroom. He was assassinated in a car bomb in Beirut in January 2002. At least two other former Lebanese Phalangists who were similarly due to testify were also mysteriously killed. Eventually, the Belgian court was forced to drop the trial under pressure from Washington. Many believe that Israeli agents carried out the assassinations to spare Sharon international ignominy.

Despite the lack of criminal convictions, there is not a shadow of doubt that Israel has blood on its hands over Sabra and Shatila. The Lebanese militia recruited to do the dirty work

were assembled by the Israeli Defence Forces at Beirut International Airport days before the mayhem was unleashed. The 1,5000 or so killers were armed by the Israelis and driven in IDF vehicles to the camps. The Israeli army had surrounded the site with armed guards and checkpoints to ensure that no-one escaped when the slaughter began. Indeed, some reports at the time claimed that Israeli soldiers ordered families trying to flee from the carnage back into camps to face their certain deaths.

Overlooking Sabra and Shatila was the seven-storey Kuwaiti embassy, which had been commandeered by the Israelis. From top floors, the Israeli and Phalangist commanders would have had a clear, uninterrupted view of the unfolding sickening spectacle. Not least because the Israeli forces would fire night flares over the camps as the death squads - fuelled with cocaine and alcohol courtesy of Israel - proceeded from hovel to hovel killing the inhabitants.

One Dutch nurse working in the camps for an international aid organization said that the area was as bright as day because of the constant barrage of flares.

From their vantage point, the Israeli commanders would have witnessed the most grotesque bloodletting carried out by their Phalangist fanatics against women and children. Yet the Israeli commanders did nothing to stop the slaughter. Why should they have? It was all evidently executed according to plan. Later, the Israelis claimed that they had instructed the militias to not injure civilians and to behave with discipline. That self-defence is beneath contempt.

The respected American human rights lawyer Franklin Lamb, based in Beirut, recalled what his late wife witnessed in the hours following the aftermath of Sabra and Shatila. Janet Lee Stevens was in Beirut working as a young journalist and was one of the first internationals on the scene. Here is just an excerpt of what she witnessed:

"I saw dead women in their houses with their skirts up to their waists and their legs spread apart; dozens of young men shot after being lined up against an alley wall; children with their throats slit, a pregnant woman with her stomach chopped open, her eyes still wide open, her blackened face silently screaming in horror; countless babies and toddlers who had been stabbed or ripped apart and who had been thrown into garbage piles."

This week, only days before the 30th anniversary of Sabra and Shatila, Israel's current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was afforded the customary privilege of articulating his noxious views to the American people on various nationwide Sunday television channels. To be sure, Sabra and Shatila were not mentioned. No, instead Netanyahu was spilling his bile about Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions. He also called the worldwide Muslim demonstrations outside American embassies over the latest anti-Islam video "mob rule" and he compared the Iranian government to these "fanatics". In a leap of twisted logic, Netanyahu said: "You can't let such people have atomic bombs."

Such is the twisted world we live in. When will the voices of Sabra and Shatila be given such prominence on Western mainstream media to explain to the world the horror and injustice that they suffered? Maybe if such voices were somehow heard and understood, the American people would stop their governments bankrolling the fanatical, criminal state of Israel that has, and continues to, instigate so much conflict in the world. Washington gives Israel a license for genocide. The American people need to stop that.

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