



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE
MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

"We Have a Death Warrant For Your Home"

No Lights in Gaza

by Eliza Ernshire

Counterpunch
4 August 2006

In Gaza the people have long endured the night-time terror of sonic-booms even before the low-flying, sound-barrier-breaking jets were accompanied by bombs and exploding shells. Now, as the war in Gaza continues unabated, the Israeli forces are tripling their psychological attacks against the already terrified civilians. Everyone can remember waking in the dark of night and calling out for a light. Everyone has heard their own little ones whimpering as they wake from a nightmare and everyone knows that to be soothed and to sooth and comfort, a light is turned on to disperse the shadows from the corners and make lie to the fears of the child.

"No, there is no one behind the door who will harm you my darling."

But there are no lights in Gaza, and flickering candlelight only heightens the fear and anxiety in the face of the mother when she tries to comfort a child. She can not say that no one is behind the door

because there well might be, and if they are there they will harm her child, as the statistics of this conflict shamefully show.

There is no light, there is no fresh water to give the people, there is no sewage system and there is no way that the hospitals will be able to continue functioning. All these factors are frightening. That the 1.3 million people in Gaza will slowly starve to death, or die of some unsanitary disease, is frightening. It is the feeling that one might have in a confined space wondering how long the air will last.

The Israeli Army are now calling residents on their mobile phones them to warn them of an imminent raid on their family home.

Witnesses in Gaza tell of the following messages they have received: "If you want to give shelter to terrorists, we will destroy your house, as we are destroying the houses of Lebanon," and "Name and Surname, here is the IDF, you have just one hour to leave your house and to advise all your neighbors, as after that we will destroy your house. We have a death warrant for your home."

Whether the raid occurs or not, the family are traumatized by the messages that either they received or their neighbors received or that they are afraid they will receive today or tomorrow or in the middle of the next night.

In countless ways a war is being waged against the future social health of the Arab states, where at the very least 50% of the population grow up with missing members of their families due directly to Israeli and American conquest wars and subsequent occupation of territories.

To further discredit the Israeli invasions of recent weeks and add weight to the immorality of Israeli tactics, evidence is slowly mounting about the use of chemical weapons and phosphorous bombs against the population of Gaza and the Lebanese people. Doctors have started testifying in south Lebanon about the condition in which some victims are brought in to be identified. They have reported how many corpses arriving in the hospitals show no signs of bleeding. How the bodies were burnt beyond recognition and how a strange odor emanated from them.

Horribly mutilated bodies are regular sights in the hospitals of Gaza as well where victims have been hit by exploding nail-bombs.

To the relatives of these victims, and to the people who saw them die, nothing will make them ever forget. To the little Hudas of this war who have lost everything and who saw everything, a psychological void is all that will be in front of them.

And this is Israel's psychological war, one directly encouraged and backed and maybe even orchestrated by America: practiced as they are in the means of torture, leaked to the world at Abu Ghraib, and unknown to the world in many other cases.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559.

Everyone knows how *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559*, has been the most quoted resolution of the past month. The numbers *1559* fall off the tongues of politicians, journalists and Israeli citizens alike. Hezbollah must be disarmed, and by invading Lebanon and razing its cities, Israeli politicians are expecting to have their backs patted by the world for being the ones upholding the United Nations Security Resolution.

Two days ago an Italian Parliamentarian made a very good speech about the hypocrisy of the current situation in Lebanon and Israel in regards to this UN Resolution.

"For this one resolution that Israel is "upholding" they are daily violating a hell-of-a-lot more."

Such as protecting civilians in wartime.

Not to mention the articles on the expected treatment of political prisoners, and of their families.

I hardly even dare to remark on the Israeli soldiers captured by Hamas

and Hezbollah fighters in June and July this year; actions which in some way were the catalyst of this conflict, or at least an excuse. However I feel bound to keep banging away at the prisons' Iron Gate which holds inside it utter disregard for any form of justice.

The situation for political prisoners inside Israel can only be likened to the conditions suffered by political prisoners of America held in Iraqi prisons and in Guantanamo Bay.

The list of violations carried out against the thousands of Palestinian men, women and children, currently being interrogated and held in detention and made to serve ridiculously long sentences, is endless and it is difficult to know which aspect to highlight in an article not specifically dealing with this issue.

Should we speak about the confessions that 14-16 year old youths are forced to sign, written in Hebrew, after sometimes 20 days of interrogation and isolation? Or should we speak about the women, three of whom in the past year have been forced to bear their children inside the barred prison?

Or of the beatings that have left many with broken bones and sightless eyes?

Should we speak of the military court, conducted entirely in Hebrew, where young Palestinians are sentenced to 20 or 30 years in prison for crimes they are never told about because they are contained in a "closed file"?

Or about the impossibility of lawyers to visit their clients due to movement restrictions which do not allow them to leave the West Bank, although the majority of prisoners are held within Israel?

Or about the personal heartbreaking stories of the family visits to the prison where the prisoners are only allowed 45 mins to see mother and sisters and brothers (if they are not between 14-45 years) behind a glass window and wire mesh and cannot even touch their hands?

Or maybe that is enough for the moment.

There are times when it is easier to be objective and to try and understand the roots of this conflict from a perspective not tainted by the propaganda that is rife on both sides of the Wall. But as the days pass and the bombing continues and the civilians of Gaza are being more and more forgotten, it is hard to talk about balance and equal wrong or right in this conflict. The plain facts are that both Ismail Haniyeh the Palestinian Prime minister and member of Hamas, and Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, have called for a cease-fire on humanitarian grounds and both have been rejected by Israel and America on political grounds.

The cease-fire is still a far-off dream. The ground invasion gathers momentum and the relief - aid so desperately needed by civilians in the war zone - is unable to reach them while relief workers are unable to offer them any form of help. There is outcry here and in many parts of the world.

People are horrified by the blood-shed; people are horrified by the plight of the children and by the sight of their little tortured bodies being dragged out of the rubble.

But nothing has changed. Israel is not going to be deterred at this stage of its operation while it has the backing of the US and Britain.

Here, in the West Bank, people are tired of hearing the leaders of Israel and the US continuing to spout reasons for the necessity to continue military action against Lebanon and Palestine. Reasons are cited that are synonymous with policies that World Leaders have used on countless occasions over the past hundred years of conflict to justify military actions that cripple an "enemy" country and cause innumerable civilian casualties. Such as "Bombing to Save Lives" or "Ending the Terrorist Threat by Destroying the Resistance" or "Upholding International Resolutions".

The real policy is to continue endless war: To keep national politics in a state of "emergency" and "security-priority" and hence unquestionable to the population, while pursuing a relentless expansion into the oil-rich regions of the Middle East.

On a political level there has never been a need to justify the useless slaughter of human beings when there is a specific agenda that needs to be fulfilled.

If a population becomes a little angry at their government's war-tactics then the justification of "kill to save lives" is usually accepted. During the WWII bombings of Germany, Sir Arthur Travers Harris, the British air marshal and commander in chief of the Royal Air Force wrote:

"..Attacks on German cities are strategically justified in so far as they tend to shorten the war and preserve the lives of Allied soldiers"

He also added:

"..I do not personally regard the whole of the remaining cities of Germany as worth the bones of one British Grenadier."

Or a "captured" Israeli soldier?

In 1917 Hermann Hesse wrote to a German Minister to the effect that if only he could see the reality of the Western Front and hear the cries of the dying soldiers and the wailing of the women he would "lock himself in his room and cry." And in the morning he would call on the Leaders to end the war.

But now the Ministers *do* hear the crying and *do* see the wounded and the killed and still fail to act.

What has changed since Hermann Hesse's impassioned plea to his Minister in 1917?

The age of television and computer imagery has taken over the world and the human senses have suffered most. People have become desensitized. They have become accepting of images of war and killing and torturing because unconsciously they can distance themselves from the reality, as they are accustomed to do when they sit down to a TV dinner and a 'good horror movie'.

But the reality on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank and in Lebanon is not just a horror movie. So as compensation to those who have made the step away from a TV War and who are asking about the loss of civilians in the conflict so far, the political movers use the cliché justification of "The killing is to stop more killing" to silence their questions.

When America dropped the two bombs on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, they were acting supposedly to save a "possible one million lives of American service men" the estimated cost of a ground land invasion of Japan.

Berlin was reduced to absolute ruins in 1944-1945 in an attempt to "destroy the foundation of Nazism" and thus save Allied lives; but the allied leaders refused directly to deal with the Moltke Circle of Resisters working in very influential circles of the army and government who had a very specific way to end Nazism and hence also stop unnecessary deaths in Germany and among the Allies, without reducing the country into a state of physical and psychological poverty.

While the bombing of Berlin is "justified", the bombing of Dresden, where the allied forces bombing with incendiary bombs killed somewhere between 35,000 and 135,000 civilians, is conveniently taken out of many history books, as the bombing of Qana will be too.

The idea of "destroying resistance" to Israel is too fluid a one to accept. What resistance is Israel actually speaking about? And Resistance to what? The obvious military ones of capturing Israeli soldiers and firing Qassam rockets and Katyusha rockets is only a fraction of the resistance movement that Israel and America are bent on destroying. The more sinister program behind Israel's destruction of resistance can be seen in their determined attempt to attack the very basis of life in this region. By pounding the civilians of Lebanon and Gaza into the ground and grinding away at the quality of life in all regions of the Palestinian territories, Israeli politicians are revealing a long-term goal of reducing the Arab states into areas of such acute poverty and desperation that the Western World will accept a propaganda campaign that says a total and absolute occupation of the

region will be the only way to save the Arabs from themselves is to occupy their lands.

The use of psychological means to reach these ends is quite terrifying.

There are too many examples of the way in which the state of Israel and the US are undermining their Middle Eastern "enemies" through psychologically terrifying them.

"If they only fought us with weapons they know they would be finished," an ex-prisoner of 12 years told me the other night. "But instead they torture us so that only the strongest manage to survive."

The Israeli Army uses specific methods of psychological warfare in combat zones and more subtle forms of it in non-combat but occupied zones; yet all methods add up to the frightening reality that Israel and the US are bent on inflicting long-term effects on the Arab world that will turn them into the desperate and maddened people that the Western media has long since portrayed them as.

In an unprecedented incident, an Israeli artillery officer has refused to bomb Lebanese villages.

Israeli press sources have stated that Corporal 'Umri Zaid, from the Israeli city of Safad, who serves as an artillery soldier in the occupied Golan Heights, had refused orders to launch more than 150 shells onto the Lebanese village of Al-Jdairah.

The sources have reported that the soldier told his comrades that he wasn't ready to serve in an army that is professional in shelling civilians in their villages and cities. He packed his belongings and headed to his home. The first refusal since the invasion of Lebanon has aroused discussion among other soldiers.

The deputy head of the artillery brigade has announced that he will take the soldier to court.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health reported that Israeli soldiers have killed 176 residents, including 40 children, and injured 872, including

272 children, since Israel declared its "Summer Rains" offensive in the Gaza Strip on June 27.

During the period between June 27 and July 31, Israeli soldiers also shot and injured 172 residents in West Bank and 520 in Gaza.

Geneva Convention IV

Art. 16. The wounded and sick, as well as the infirm, and expectant mothers, shall be the object of particular protection and respect; and:

Art. 18. Civilian hospitals organized to give care to the wounded and sick, the infirm and maternity cases, may in no circumstances be the object of attack but shall at all times be respected and protected by the Parties to the conflict; and:

Art. 19. The fact that sick or wounded members of the armed forces are nursed in these hospitals, or the presence of small arms and ammunition taken from such combatants which have not yet been handed to the proper service, shall not be considered to be acts harmful to the enemy; and:

Art. 20. Persons regularly and solely engaged in the operation and administration of civilian hospitals, including the personnel engaged in the search for, removal and transporting of and caring for wounded and sick civilians, the infirm and maternity cases shall be respected and protected.

Web link

<http://www.counterpunch.org/ernshire08042006.html>