

Gaza: Death in the Eagle's Shadow

Friday 5 September 2014, by [LOEWENSTEIN Jennifer](#) (Date first published: 1 September 2014).

ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 9th at approximately 1:20 in the afternoon, Israeli military forces killed Anwar Za'aneen. They fired a missile at a water maintenance crew at work in Beit Hanoun, Gaza. Anwar, a resident of the town, had stood watching the crew as it attempted to reconnect the water supply to his home.

The U.S.-made Israeli drone wounded two crew members moderately, but critically wounded Anwar. An emergency medical team rushed him to Shifa hospital, the main hospital in Gaza City, where he was immediately put in the Intensive Care Unit but where, later that day, he succumbed to his wounds.

His five children are now fatherless; his wife is a widow; and his mother has lost her son. The small town of Beit Hanoun lost a neighbor and a friend to many people. That same afternoon, Israel fired more missiles into the town, killing another man and three children.

Israel gave no apparent reason for these attacks. The standard response of its government spokesmen would almost certainly be that they had fired at suspected "militants" in "self-defense."

Anwar's family had been displaced for weeks, living in the Jabalia refugee camp in an office building of the Mezan Center for Human Rights where he worked during the day as an administrative assistant. Anwar and his family, displaced since July 17th, had escaped to Jabalia under fire during the humanitarian cease-fire, called initially for 72 hours on Tuesday, August 5th at 8:00 am.

The cease-fire was not extended; however, the Israeli army withdrew from Gaza and the intensity of the attacks decreased. On the day he was killed, Anwar had seen many people returning to Beit Hanoun to check on their homes and bring essential items back with them to wherever they were displaced.

Anwar went home to feed his livestock and gather up a few things he could carry back. On his way out, he ran into a water maintenance team and asked if they could re-attach a pipeline to his house for running water. While speaking to the crew, he was hit by an Israeli drone.

Meeting Anwar

I met Anwar in 2002, on the first day of my job at Al-Mezan (<http://www.mezan.org/en/>). Of all those I met that first week, Anwar was the person who made me feel most at ease. He wore a friendly smile, offering me tea or juice if I was thirsty, showing me around the office building, and bantering with me about anything and everything.

After a few weeks, Anwar and his family invited me to dinner at their place in Beit Hanoun, a few miles north of Gaza City.

I was touched that this family had invited a foreign woman they barely knew to a veritable feast, most certainly seeing that I would get the best of their food even if that left them without as much as they might have liked for the next week or so; and yet this was one of the things so striking about the people I met in Gaza.

Most were exceedingly generous, welcoming and hospitable regardless of the fact that I was from the United States, the country that supplies Israel each year with billions of dollars in foreign assistance and state-of-art weaponry despite its illegal occupation of Palestinian land.

The walk to Anwar's place was a delight. We took a shortcut through a grove of oranges that perfumed the air with their blossoms. Dirt paths eventually led us to his home where children, neighbors, and extended family members scrambled eagerly to see this foreign woman.

I was overwhelmed with curious questions: Was I married? Did I have children? What job did I have? What did I think of their children? (laughingly asked); and so on. Anwar's wife kept bringing out more and more dishes of food — to my dismay by the end of the meal because I was so stuffed.

I returned home exhausted but nevertheless humbled by how welcomed I had been. Even more shocking to me was the near absence of political conversation — quite unusual in a land controlled by politics discussed by almost everyone each day.

Everyone was aware of the military giant west of Gaza and eager to show its might under the slightest pretext, and sometimes without a pretext at all. At dinner, my attempt to discuss their political situation was met only with sincere comments that, somehow, the Oslo Accords would be revived and bring peace.

By then, most people recognized that the utterly failed Oslo Accords, insincerely and stupidly negotiated by Israel and the Palestinians respectively, had led only to an intensified state of perpetual strife.

Anwar's family claimed that Israel would soon see that they only wanted peace. I couldn't help wondering whether this was said out of desperation or naivete.

Today, Anwar is dead. The orange trees that perfumed the air around his home have long since been uprooted, having served, we have been told, as camouflage for "terrorists" (now called "militants" in a relatively recent change of euphemisms).

"Operation Protective Edge" is tentatively "over." Anwar, essentially non-political, had nothing to do with guns or militancy. He liked working where he did because it allowed him to provide for his family, for which he was solely responsible. He hated the terror that the sound of F-16s, tracer flares, drones and helicopter gunships caused his children.

Roots of Dehumanization

Anwar's story is but one among thousands that we will never hear. His name is one on the never-ending list of the daily dead, a list that began long before the latest assault and that will continue long after it. His death means nothing to the killers who fire their missiles from above or blast them from gunboats stationed in the Mediterranean.

Anwar's life has no value because his people have been systematically dehumanized over the decades of ignorance and prejudice from a complacent West. His status as a refugee was long ago dismissed by the settlers of a colonial state impervious to the suffering of any other people. For many, he does not exist because "there are no Palestinians" according to former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and countless others.

If we knew the stories, recognized the names, or saw the faces of all the women and men, children and elderly lying frozen in the morgues or waiting for burial by grieving and stunned families; by mothers hysterical with pain from the loss of their babies and preschoolers, school children and

youth maturing into adulthood in such a difficult land, perhaps people living in the countries responsible for these outrages would finally wake up and demand a halt to this butchery.

How bitterly ironic it has become that a people so persecuted in the madness of fascist Europe would become oppressors of people uninvolved in and far away from their suffering. Why have so many descendants of this scourge become the frighteningly tangible mimickers of their murderers?

The trauma that many Jews experienced firsthand may have been passed down through later generations who remained psychologically scarred. Another explanation may be that Zionism began and developed in an atmosphere of national chauvinism, militarism and racial theories combined with eugenics and xenophobia, and finally, the age of European colonialism.

All these are possible reasons for the behavior of Israel toward outsiders, particularly Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East — the region in which Israel was born.

These causes alone, however, do not explain how a 21st century Israel continues to carry out the barbaric policies of a state that considers itself “exceptional” and above the law, especially international law.

A critical answer, too often overlooked, is that Israel has seized and internalized the scourge of racial, economic, and political hatred, expanding it with impunity, because its political and ideological overlord is the United States.

An imperial umbilical cord sustains the colonial settler state of Israel. Israel has grown up to copy and impress its historical master and contemporary twin. As the reservations of the Native Americans ooze like open wounds across the face of America, so the shrinking islands of misery in Israel and its occupied Palestinian territories have acquired the putrid stink of curdled Milk and petrified Honey.

In each assault on shattered and fragmented Palestinian land, Israel tests the United States’ newly minted, sophisticated weapons of destruction designed, perfected and provided to its client state. The United States uses these same weapons on its own global targets in a far more widespread fashion.

As Palestinian resistance grew and solidified, Israel’s dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims accelerated. Under-the-radar killing operations increased where media attention threatened closer scrutiny or caused uninitiated (unindoctrinated) bystanders to voice disapproval. Israel has copied, and often designed, the mechanisms of the advanced U.S. surveillance state. Israel is also gradually whittling away the civil liberties not only of its Palestinian citizens, but of Israeli Jews themselves.

Organized resistance brought Israel to arrange leadership “decapitation” projects and a calculated dispersal of Diaspora Palestinians. Within the occupied territories, nooses around the necks of inconvenient, imprisoned “locals” tightened as their national movement blossomed, its strength met with the tactics of a mighty state determined to see the Palestinian National Movement disintegrate.

Indoctrinated, educated American citizens approved the grandiose and aggressive military “operations” on the grotesque pretense of “self defense.” In more recent “operations,” F-16s and Hellfire missiles blast apart civilian buildings with their inhabitants inside. Newfangled weaponry causes heretofore unseen amputation wounds, and cluster bombs assure the destruction of the civil and political infrastructures causing the highest possible number of casualties possible.

Media spin explains away precision guided weapons that massacre whole families with unfounded claims that “militants” had used the population as human shields. It is difficult to miss how much

Israel has become the protégé of its Imperial overlord.

Myths and Reality

While Palestine-based human rights groups hammer out facts such as that they found no verifiable incidents of “militants” at or near civilian targets in the most recent Israeli assaults, the exact opposite is declared in the mainstream U.S. media.

These same human rights organizations routinely publish statistics on the dead where, for example, of the approximately 2,030 people killed during “Operation Protective Edge,” 85% were civilians, including more than 450 children.

As Israel carries out one barbaric mass murder after another in Gaza — “Operation Rainbow,” “Operation Autumn Clouds,” “Operation Cast Lead” or most recently “Operation Protective Edge” — it carries out, almost unnoticed, the transformation of Palestine into isolated districts such as “Gaza,” “Nablus,” “Jenin,” “Ramallah” and others, including Christian “Bethlehem,” with most surrounded by a towering concrete wall that virtually bisects the West Bank into northern and southern sectors and cuts off the villages within these sectors.

Blatant ethnic cleansing is transforming East Jerusalem into disconnected households.

Israel did not invade Gaza to attack Hamas. Shortly before its 2014 summer operation, Palestinian thugs kidnapped and murdered three Israeli teenagers. This act, a gift to Israeli politicians and right-wing extremists, allowed them to launch a major assault — almost certainly planned well before this attack — and to label the killers as members of Hamas.

Many people believe Israel’s hope is to destroy a recent but shaky agreement between Mahmoud Abbas’ Fatah party ruling the West Bank and the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip. While this may have been a factor in launching the assault, I believe it was simply another convenient pretext, like the kidnapping and killings of the Israeli boys, for the war on Gaza.

In fact, I believe the only reason Israel even needed a pretext, which it only occasionally does, was because its good relations with Abbas might have been undermined without one.

Israel launched the latest “operation” on Gaza to continue its policy of destroying the Palestinian National Movement, to serve as justification for its continued fragmentation of the Palestinian territories; and to destroy as much as possible of the Gaza Strip, its most “dangerous” of the occupied Palestinian “districts.”

More than that, I believe Israel’s goal is to “kill” Gaza: without physical death, to make it one of the most miserably impoverished, nearly uninhabitable places in the world. The real tragedy of Gaza’s destruction is that it is entirely man-made.

Decades of publicity and activist-inspired and limited but present political attention, especially in the West, have failed to mobilize what is called the “International Community,” in reality a conglomerate of the most powerful states and international bodies.

I believe that both the United States and Israel, however, are gradually losing their heretofore unquestioned command; both have to be more careful to carry out the slaughter of innocents without global condemnation.

With near total impunity, Gaza — a strip of land with approximately 1.7 million people — is being turned into a wasteland. Its power grids rarely operate at full capacity. Electricity across the Strip,

even with generators, is challenged daily by the inaccessibility of parts with which to repair them.

Potable water is shrinking at an alarming rate. Supplies necessary for survival, such as foodstuffs, medicines, medical equipment, reconstruction and building materials for homes and businesses, school supplies, oil and gasoline to keep modern transportation operational, and the mills and factories necessary for any kind of self sufficiency, including farming and fishing on a greater scale, are disappearing or becoming more and more difficult to find or afford.

Israeli and, to a lesser extent, Egyptian military and political control have severely restricted movement to and from Gaza.

Employment and underemployment accelerate the rate of impoverishment as well as the psychological well-being of its inhabitants. Domestic violence and crime in general have risen dramatically, while hundreds of thousands of Gazans, mostly children, have grown up with post-traumatic stress disorder or a lack of long-term coping mechanisms.

How are the people of a predominantly refugee population supposed to cope in the modern world as psychological, social, and economic wrecks? What is surprising is the extent to which this population has shown such courage, strength, and resilience.

Gazan Palestinian society is gradually being pulled apart, turning the clock backwards to an age when extended families and their relative power managed social relations rather than a sense of a united nationhood with its concept of the public citizen.

Fragmentation, Pollution, Destruction

This fragmentation mirrors the geographical fragmentation of the remaining Palestinian lands and their isolation from one another. Israel has established "Closed Military Zones" within the perimeter of the Gazan border, designed to annex still more land from Gaza and push the population in upon itself still further. Gunboats stationed on the sea have already greatly limited the fishing industry, and the primary sewage treatment plants are on the verge of breaking down entirely.

The sludge from these plants, when they have collapsed, has already on a number of occasions literally drowned people, destroyed their homes, and ruined acres of land around some villages. Other sewage is piped into the sea, most of it remaining close to shore. One can only wonder at the effects of this pollution on the population, particularly with regard to its once flourishing fishing industry.

Pollution and the general inability to curb it is destroying the environment within Gaza. There are virtually no ready means of stopping this process in the absence of functioning municipalities, garbage disposal systems, recycling plants, and proper materials to rebuild roads and bridges that Israel has destroyed.

Flood control during the rainy season does not exist, nor does a modern postal system. The mobile communications system is often interrupted by the presence of Israeli drones, and telephone, email and Internet access is restricted by the routine lack of electricity.

Resources in general are diminishing although, significantly, the one that would serve to reverse dramatically the gradual destruction of Gaza, its extensive offshore natural gas deposits, have been stolen. This is equivalent to the theft of potentially hundreds of millions of dollars.

How long will international aid organizations continue to pay for Israel's occupation? How long will the "international community" continue to put band-aids on its infected wounds? When will it

understand that the “blockade” Israel officially declared after the 2006 victory of Hamas in free and fair elections has, in fact, been going on since at least the 1993 Oslo Accords when, simultaneously, the establishment of illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank began to increase dramatically?

When will it understand that Israel’s Disengagement of 2005 led to virtual prohibition of Gazan Palestinian employment in Israel and its dire consequences?

Israel’s occupation oppresses and collectively punishes the Palestinian population, most noticeably in Gaza, apparently to demonstrate its stranglehold over their lives. Whatever the pretext, Israel feels obliged to show the Palestinian people who is in control of their lives and their destinies, even when alleged negotiations are underway.

The present Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with a right ward moving Israeli Jewish population, has now demanded that outside parties recognize Israel as a Jewish State, or “the state of the Jewish people,” not simply a state with the right to exist (however obscure that phrase may be).

Policies established even before Netanyahu’s regime indicate an increasingly deliberate move toward a state designated for Jews only. Where then are the Palestinians to go? It is clear that those in the West Bank are being gradually herded, like animals, into reservations that resemble the Native American reservations in the United States.

In my view, however, these “reservations” are even worse now than what exists in this country. Modern technology has allowed Israel in certain ways to surpass its master. Otherwise, it continues to use the actions and policies of the United States as a model for its own behavior. It has even adopted euphemisms designed by U.S. governments, such as the “War on Terror.”

For Israel, Gaza’s population has become a greater and greater problem. No Prime Minister would now be able to push the population into Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. What then to do with 1.7 million unwanted, and dehumanized, people?

In my view, the goal of Israel is to make the Gazans leave. Barring that, Israel must make life within the Strip so unbearable that disease, internal strife over existing resources, unlivable conditions and the scarcity of the resources necessary to survive will ultimately kill the population without death.

This would allow Israel, at least figuratively, to sweep the dust that remains into the dustpan of the southeastern Mediterranean Sea.

Global public opinion will ultimately respond in one of two ways: it will force its regimes to stop the process of death without killing, or it will shame itself inexcusably by standing by as it happens. Only in that case will Israel be able, as they like to stay, to “finish the job.”

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P.S.

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