

An Opinion Editorial

# **Palestine's Guernica and the Myths of Israeli Victimhood**

Wednesday 31 December 2008, by [BARGHOUTI Moustafa](#) (Date first published: 30 November 2008).

The Israeli campaign of 'death from above' began around 11 am, on Saturday morning and stretched straight through the night into this morning. The massacre continues as I write these words.

The bloodiest single day in Palestine since the War of 1967 is far from over following on Israel's promise that this is 'only the beginning' of their campaign of state terror. At least 290 people have been murdered thus far, but the body count continues to rise at a dramatic pace as more mutilated bodies are pulled from the rubble, previous victims succumb to their wounds and new casualties are created by the minute.

What has and is occurring is nothing short of a war crime, yet the Israeli public relations machine is in full-swing, churning out lies by the minute.

Once and for all it is time to expose the myths that they have created.

## **1. Israelis have claimed to have ended the occupation of the Gaza Strip in 2005.**

While Israel has indeed removed the settlements from the tiny coastal Strip, they have in no way ended the occupation. They remained in control of the borders, the airspace and the waterways of Gaza, and have carried out frequent raids and targeted assassinations since the disengagement.

Furthermore, since 2006 Israel has imposed a comprehensive siege on the Strip. For over two years, Gazans have lived on the edge of starvation and without the most basic necessities of human life, such as cooking or heating oil and basic medications. This siege has already caused a humanitarian catastrophe which has only been exacerbated by the dramatic increase in Israeli military aggression.

## **2. Israel claims that Hamas violated the cease-fire and pulled out of it unilaterally.**

Hamas indeed respected their side of the ceasefire, except on those occasions early on when Israel carried out major offensives in the West Bank. In the last two months, the ceasefire broke down with Israelis killing several Palestinians and resulting in the response of Hamas. In other words, Hamas has not carried out an unprovoked act throughout the period of the cease-fire.

Israel, however, did not live up to any of its obligations of ending the siege and allowing vital humanitarian aid to resume in Gaza. Rather than the average of 450 trucks per day being allowed across the border, on the best days only eighty have been allowed in - with the border remaining hermetically sealed 70% of the time. Throughout the supposed 'cease-fire' Gazans have been forced to live like animals, with a total of 262 dying due to the inaccessibility of proper medical care.

Now after hundreds dead and counting, it is Israel who refuses to re-enter talks over a cease-fire. They are not intent on securing peace as they claim; it is more and more clear that they are seeking regime change - whatever the cost.

### **3. Israel claims to be pursuing peace with 'peaceful Palestinians'.**

Before the on-going massacre in the Gaza Strip, and throughout the entirety of the Annapolis Peace Process, Israel has continued and even intensified its occupation of the West Bank. In 2008, settlement expansion increased by a factor of 38, a further 4,950 Palestinians were arrested - mostly from the West Bank, and checkpoints rose from 521 to 699.

Furthermore, since the onset of the peace talks, Israel has killed 546 Palestinians, among them 76 children. These gruesome statistics are set to rise dramatically now, but previous Israeli transgressions should not be forgotten amidst this most recent horror.

Only this morning, Israel shot and killed a young peaceful protester in the West Bank village of Nihlin, and has injured dozens more over the last few hours. It is certain that they will continue to employ deadly force at non-violent demonstrations and we expect a sizable body count in the West Bank as a result. If Israel is in fact pursuing peace with 'good Palestinians', who are they talking about

### **4. Israel is acting in self-defense.**

It is difficult to claim self defense in a confrontation which they themselves have sparked, but they are doing it anyway. Self-defense is reactionary, while the actions of Israel over the last two days have been clearly premeditated. Not only did the Israeli press widely report the ongoing public relations campaign being undertaken by Israel to prepare Israeli and international public opinion for the attack, but Israel has also reportedly tried to convince the Palestinians that an attack was not coming by briefly opening crossings and reporting future meetings on the topic. They did so to ensure that casualties would be maximized and that the citizens of Gaza would be unprepared for their impending slaughter.

It is also misleading to claim self-defense in a conflict with such an overwhelming asymmetry of power. Israel is the largest military force in the region, and the fifth largest in the world. Furthermore, they are the fourth largest exporter of arms and have a military industrial complex rivaling that of the United States. In other words, Israel has always had a comprehensive monopoly over the use of force, and much like its super power ally, Israel uses war as an advertising showcase of its many instruments of death.

### **5. Israel claims to have struck military targets only.**

Even while image after image of dead and mutilated women and children flash across our televisions, Israel brazenly claims that their munitions expertly struck only military installations. We know this to be false as many other civilian sites have been hit by airstrikes including a hospital and mosque.

In the most densely populated area on the planet, tons upon tons of explosives have been dropped. The first estimates of injured are in the thousands. Israel will claim that these are merely 'collateral damage' or accidental deaths. The sheer ridiculousness and inhumanity of such a claim should sicken the world community.

### **6. Israel claims that it is attacking Hamas and not the Palestinian people.**

First and foremost, missiles do not differentiate people by their political affiliation; they simply kill everyone in their path. Israel knows this, and so do Palestinians. What Israel also knows, but is not saying publicly, is how much their recent actions will actually strengthen Hamas - whose message of resistance and revenge is being echoed by the angry and grieving.

The targets of the strike, police and not Hamas militants, give us some clue as to Israel's mistaken intention. They are hoping to create anarchy in the Strip by removing the pillar of law and order.

## **7. Israel claims that Palestinians are the source of violence.**

Let us be clear and unequivocal. The occupation of Palestine since the War of 1967 has been and remains the root of violence between Israelis and Palestinians. Violence can be ended with the occupation and the granting of Palestine's national and human rights. Hamas does not control the West Bank and yet we remain occupied, our rights violated and our children killed.

With these myths understood, let us ponder the real reasons behind these airstrikes; what we find may be even more disgusting than the act itself.

The leaders of Israel are holding press conferences, dressed in black, with sleeves rolled up. 'It's time to fight', they say, 'but it won't be easy.'

To prove just how hard it is, Livni, Olmert and Barak did not even wear make-up to the press conference, and Barak has ended his election campaign to focus on the Gaza campaign. What heroes...what leaders...

We all know the truth: the suspension of the electioneering is exactly that - electioneering. Like John McCain's suspension of his presidential campaign to return to Washington to 'deal with' the financial crisis, this act is little more than a publicity stunt.

The candidates have to appear 'tough enough to lead', and there is seemingly no better way of doing that than bathing in Palestinian blood.

'Look at me,' Livni says in her black suit and unkempt hair, 'I am a warrior. I am strong enough to pull the trigger. Don't you feel more confident about voting for me, now that you know I am as ruthless as Bibi Netanyahu?'

I do not know which is more disturbing, her and Barak, or the constituency they are trying to please.

In the end, this will in no way improve the security of the average Israeli; in fact it can be expected to get much worse in the coming days as the massacre could presumably provoke a new generation of suicide bombers.

It will not undermine Hamas either, and it will not result in the three fools, Barak, Livni and Olmert, looking 'tough'. Their misguided political venture will likely blow up in their faces as did the brutally similar 2006 invasion of Lebanon.

In closing, there is another reason - beyond the internal politics of Israel - why this attack has been allowed to occur: the complicity and silence of the international community.

Israel cannot and would not act against the will of its economic allies in Europe or its military allies in the US. Israel may be pulling the trigger ending hundreds, perhaps even thousands of lives this week, but it is the apathy of the world and the inhumane tolerance of Palestinian suffering which allows this to occur.

'The evil only exists because the good remain silent'

From Occupied Palestine,

Dr. Mustafa Baghouthi

Secretary General of the Palestinian National Initiative