



Israel's 'Crime Against Humanity'

http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/20081215_israels_crime_against_humar

Posted on Dec 15, 2008

By Chris Hedges

Israel's siege of Gaza, largely unseen by the outside world because of Jerusalem's refusal to allow humanitarian aid workers, reporters and photographers access to Gaza, rivals the most egregious crimes carried out at the height of apartheid by the South African regime. It comes close to the horrors visited on Sarajevo by the Bosnian Serbs. It has disturbing echoes of the Nazi ghettos of [Lodz](#) and [Warsaw](#).

"This is a stain on what is left of Israeli morality," I was told by Richard N. Veits, the former U.S. ambassador to Jordan who led a delegation from the U.S. Council for the National Interest Foundation to Gaza to meet Hamas leaders this past summer. "I am almost breathless discussing this subject. It is so myopic. Washington, of course, is a handmaiden to all this. The Israeli manipulation of a population in this manner is comparable to some of the crimes that took place against civilian populations fifty years ago."

The U.N. special [rapporteur](#) for human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, former Princeton University law professor Richard Falk, calls what Israel is doing to the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza "a crime against humanity." Falk, who is Jewish, has condemned the collective punishment of the Palestinians in Gaza as "a flagrant and massive violation of international humanitarian law as laid down in Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention." He has asked for "the International Criminal Court to investigate the situation, and determine whether the Israeli civilian leaders and military commanders responsible for the Gaza siege should be indicted and prosecuted for violations of international criminal law."

Falk, while condemning the [rocket attacks](#) by the militant group Hamas, which he points out are also criminal violations of international law, goes

on to say that “such Palestinian behavior does not legalize Israel’s imposition of a collective punishment of a life- and health-threatening character on the people of Gaza, and should not distract the U.N. or international society from discharging their fundamental moral and legal duty to render protection to the Palestinian people.”

“It is an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe that each day poses the entire 1.5 million Gazans to an unspeakable ordeal, to a struggle to survive in terms of their health,” Falk said when I reached him by phone in California shortly before he left for Israel. “This is an increasingly precarious condition. A recent study reports that 46 percent of all Gazan children suffer from acute anemia. There are reports that the sonic booms associated with Israeli overflights have caused widespread deafness, especially among children. Gazan children need thousands of hearing aids. Malnutrition is extremely high in a number of different dimensions and affects 75 percent of Gazans. There are widespread mental disorders, especially among young people without the will to live. Over 50 percent of Gazan children under the age of 12 have been found to have no will to live.”

Gaza now spends 12 hours a day without power, which can be a death sentence to the severely ill in hospitals. There are few drugs and little medicine, including no cancer or cystic fibrosis medication. Hospitals have generators but often lack fuel. Medical equipment, including one of Gaza’s three CT scanners, has been destroyed by power surges and fluctuations. Medical staff cannot control the temperature of incubators for newborns. And Israel has revoked most exit visas, meaning some of those who need specialized care, including cancer patients and those in need of kidney dialysis, have died. Of the 230 Gazans estimated to have died last year because they were denied proper medical care, several spent their final hours at Israeli crossing points where they were refused entry into Israel. The statistics gathered on children—half of Gaza’s population is under the age of 17—are increasingly grim. About 45 percent of children in Gaza have iron deficiency from a lack of fruit and vegetables, and 18 percent have stunted growth.

“It is macabre,” Falk said. “I don’t know of anything that exactly fits this situation. People have been referring to the Warsaw ghetto as the nearest analog in modern times.”

“There is no structure of an occupation that endured for decades and

involved this kind of oppressive circumstances,” the rapporteur added. “The magnitude, the deliberateness, the violations of international humanitarian law, the impact on the health, lives and survival and the overall conditions warrant the characterization of a crime against humanity. This occupation is the direct intention by the Israeli military and civilian authorities. They are responsible and should be held accountable.”

The point of this Israeli siege, ostensibly, is to break Hamas, the radical Islamic group that was elected to power in 2007. But Hamas has repeatedly proposed long-term truces with Israel and offered to negotiate a permanent truce. During the last cease-fire, established through Egyptian intermediaries in July, Hamas upheld the truce although Israel refused to ease the blockade. It was Israel that, on Nov. 4, initiated an [armed attack](#) that violated the truce and killed six Palestinians. It was only then that Hamas resumed firing rockets at Israel. Palestinians have launched more than 200 rockets on Israel since the latest round of violence began. There have been no Israeli casualties.

“This is a crime of survival,” Falk said of the rocket attacks. “Israel has put the Gazans in a set of circumstances where they either have to accept whatever is imposed on them or resist in any way available to them. That is a horrible dilemma to impose upon a people. This does not alleviate the Palestinians, and Gazans in particular, for accountability for doing these acts involving rocket fire, but it also imposes some responsibility on Israel for creating these circumstances.”

Israel seeks to break the will of the Palestinians to resist. The Israeli government has demonstrated little interest in diplomacy or a peaceful solution. The rapid expansion of Jewish settlements on the West Bank is an effort to thwart the possibility of a two-state solution by gobbling up vast tracts of Palestinian real estate. Israel also appears to want to thrust the impoverished Gaza Strip onto Egypt. There are now dozens of tunnels, the principal means for food and goods, connecting Gaza to Egypt. Israel permits the tunnels to operate, most likely as part of an effort to further cut Gaza off from Israel.

“Israel, all along, has not been prepared to enter into diplomatic process that gives the Palestinians a viable state,” Falk said. “They [the Israelis] feel time is on their side. They feel they can create enough facts on the

ground so people will come to the conclusion a viable state cannot emerge.”

The use of terror and hunger to break a hostile population is one of the oldest forms of warfare. I watched the Bosnian Serbs employ the same tactic in Sarajevo. Those who orchestrate such sieges do not grasp the terrible rage born of long humiliation, indiscriminate violence and abuse. A father or a mother whose child dies because of a lack of vaccines or proper medical care does not forget. A boy whose ill grandmother dies while detained at an Israel checkpoint does not forget. All who endure humiliation, abuse and the murder of family members do not forget. This rage becomes a virus within those who, eventually, stumble out into the daylight. Is it any wonder that 71 percent of children interviewed at a school in Gaza recently said they wanted to be a “martyr”?

The Israelis in Gaza, like the American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, are foolishly breeding the next generation of militants and Islamic radicals. Jihadists, enraged by the injustices done by Israel and the United States, seek to carry out reciprocal acts of savagery, even at the cost of their own lives. The violence unleashed on Palestinian children will, one day, be the violence unleashed on Israeli children. This is the tragedy of Gaza. This is the tragedy of Israel.



AP photo / Hatem Moussa

A Palestinian worker sweeps out the empty storeroom of a U.N. food distribution center in Gaza City.

From: rod such

Subject: [epjc] U.S. Marine on Conduct of Israeli Defense Forces

<http://community.nytimes.com/article/comments/2009/01/08/opinion/08kristof.html>

To: "Evergreen Peace and Justice Community" <epjc@lists.riseup.net>

Date: Thursday, January 8, 2009, 11:25 AM

I recently retired from the US Marine Corps, but I saw service in Iraq. I do know something of military matters that are relevant to the situation now in Gaza.

I am dismayed by the rhetoric from US politicians and pundits to the effect that if the US were under rocket attack from Mexico or Canada, we would respond like the Israelis. This a gross insult to US servicemen; I can assure you that we would NOT respond like the Israelis. In fact, US armed forces and adjunct civilians are under attack constantly in Iraq and Afghanistan by people who are much better armed, much better trained and far deadlier than Hamas (I'll ignore for now that the politicians seem to be oblivious to this fact). Israel has indeed taken a small number of casualties from Hamas rocket fire (about 20 killed since 2001), but we have taken thousands of casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, including many civilian personnel. Hundreds of American casualties have occurred due to indirect fire, often from mortars. This is particularly true in or near the Green Zone in Baghdad. This fire often originates from densely populated urban areas.

Americans do not, I repeat DO NOT, respond to that fire indiscriminately. When I say indiscriminately, I mean that even if we can precisely identify the source of the fire (which can be very difficult), we do not respond if we know we will cause civilian casualties. We always evaluate the threat to civilians before responding, and in an urban area the threat to civilians is extremely high. If US servicemen violate those rules of engagement and harm civilians, I assure you we do our best to investigate -- and mete out punishment if warranted. There are differing opinions on the conflict in Iraq, but I am proud of the conduct of our servicemen there.

With that in mind, I find the conduct of the Israeli army in Gaza to be brutal and dishonorable, and it is insulting that they and others claim that the US military would behave in the same way. I know the Israelis are operating under difficult circumstances, but their claim that they follow similar rules of engagement rings hollow; I see little evidence for this claim given the huge number of civilian casualties they have caused from indirect fire.

In particular, I am stunned at the Israeli explanation for the 30+ civilians killed at the UN school. The Israelis say they were responding to mortar fire from the school. Mortars are insidious because their high trajectory and lack of primary flash make it very difficult to trace the source of the fire; you have to have a spotter locate the crew. The Israelis claim that they traced the source of the fire precisely to the school; if so, they must have directly spotted the crew. Thus it is inconceivable that the Israelis did not know that the target was a crowded UN school, yet they chose to fire on the school anyhow. I say without hesitation that this is a criminal act. If the Israelis had said, sorry, it was an accident, that could indicate a targeting problem, confusion, or inferior training. But to openly admit that they responded reflexively to the Hamas fire without consideration for the inevitable civilian casualties is beyond the pale. The Israelis blame Hamas for firing from the school (although UN personnel on the ground dispute this), but choosing to fire directly at civilians is far worse; it is tantamount to murder. US servicemen do not behave that way in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we face much deadlier adversaries (Hamas mortar crews are apparently not very effective: I believe that all but one of the total Israeli combat fatalities have been from friendly fire). In the rare and unfortunate cases where US personnel have willingly targeted civilians, they have been court-martialed and punished.

The Israeli approach in Gaza strikes me as uncontrolled and vengeful. My objective analysis is that it has little tactical effectiveness; my opinion is that its main goal is to whip the entire Gaza population into submission. This is disturbingly similar to the Israelis conduct in Lebanon in 2006, so I feel obliged to say that the Israeli military displays a concerted pattern of disregard for civilian lives. I am not a politician, but in my opinion the US should take some sort of political action in this regard. If we continue to formally condone Israel's dishonorable and brutal military conduct in Gaza, I fear there will eventually be dire consequences for our country.

— JDS, North Carolina

Learn details of the Gaza story that don't make the U.S. or Western news agencies from F.A.I.R. (Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting) and their weekly Radio program called Counterspin.

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FAIR Counterspin January 9, 2009 (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting: FAIR.Org)

700 Gazans dead, many of them civilians

UN Sources: More than 40 killed by Israeli Tank fire at a UN School

The Red Cross is reporting that Israel is forbidding medical aid to reach bombing sites including one where the organization said they found emaciated children

Such stories have prompted outrage among international journalists but have received a more sanguine response from U.S. Journalists who largely frame Israeli actions as defensive and necessary and righteous.

Joining us now is Ali Abunimah cofounder of <http://electronicintifada.net/> and author of **One Country: A bold proposal to end the Israeli Palestinian conflict.**

Ali Abunimah: What's happening in Gaza unfortunately fits in with decades of Israeli policy of speaking with Palestinians primarily with bombs.

In Gaza before any of this started, just the first half of 2008 more than 600 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza. It barely made the news. Now we're seeing that many or more killed in the space of a few days so Israel is escalating its violence. At the same time on the other side, Yes, Israeli's have suffered, but few Israeli's have died in this course of this violence in Gaza from rockets than road accidents just to put things in perspective.

HOST: One key point in U.S. reporting is 'what caused the current attack. As USA Today reported on January 5th, "In November, the truce prayed as Hamas rockets continued to land in Israel". That USA Today quote is typical of the US media narrative that Israel is defending itself and if it wasn't for Hamas breaking what was the successful cease-fire, none of this bloodshed would be necessary. How do you respond to that theme?

Ali Abunimah: Well with two points, but let me preface it by saying that when you look at the official Israeli talking points, the ones they actually send out to journalists, and the majority of the coverage in the United States, you find that they're almost identical. There's absolutely no scrutiny of claims going on which is particularly shocking when you consider that Israel has barred international journalists from entering the Gaza strip. There are journalists there, but not Western ones. Aljazeera is there. But there are two claims that Israel has made that have been parroted. One is that Israel has been constantly under missile fire for years and years and years and is just defending itself and the other is that Hamas broke the cease-fire and both of them are really not the truth. The reality about the cease fire is that it held from June 19th when it was agreed until November 4th when Israeli forces entered the Gaza strip and killed 6 Palestinians and it was only after that that Hamas retaliated with a number of rockets. During the period of the truce, according to the Israeli government itself, there were only 26 rockets fired from the Gaza strip. None of them attributed to Hamas, none of them causing any damage or injury. So it was after Israel attacked Gaza on November 4th that Hamas started retaliating not just to that attack, but subsequent attacks and dozens of Palestinians were killed in the month of November, they just ignored that. The other element is the claim is that thousands and thousands of rockets have been falling on Israel. If you do the math, just take at face value the Israeli claim that 6,300 rockets have been fired from Gaza since 2005. Well, those rockets according to media reports, carry an explosive charge (a usually a fertilizer explosive) of about two pounds. So if you do the math, what you come up is that over a period of

years, Palestinians have launched perhaps 12 tons of explosives at Israel. Sounds like a lot, right? But on the first day, just December 27th, Israel said it dropped 100 tons of bombs on the Gaza strip and we've had 11 days and human rights watch points out that in the period from September 2005 through May 2007, the Israeli Army fired 14,617 105mm heavy artillery shells into Gaza, and the Israelis aren't using fertilizer explosives. They're using military grade high explosives, but for some reason, we never hear any of that.

HOST: Well, It's by now a traditional theme in U.S. reporting on Israel and Palestine that Palestinians are forever initiating hostilities while Israel is simply responding to the hostilities. That's playing out in this case too, isn't it?

Ali Abunimah: Absolutely, and the other part of it is the disproportionate coverage that is given to Israelis. I think many media organizations are so afraid of being criticized that they're anti-Israeli, that they play the story as if there is balance, as if Israelis and Palestinians are experiencing this equally. I mean in Gaza, you have a real humanitarian catastrophe. Families leaving their homes with nowhere to go. Schools being shelled. Hospitals with piles of bodies in them. Everywhere in the Gaza strip, injured people not even going to the hospitals because they know they cannot get treatment. People without food. The Red Cross talking about major breeches of international humanitarian law. In Israel, 3 civilians have been killed. I feel very sorry for them. But again, to put that in perspective, statistics say more civilians have died from road accidents than from this conflict since December 27th, and in Israel, football matches are going on, an election campaign is going on, you know all the TV reality shows are going on as if it were a million miles away from the Hell that Israel has created in Gaza. There is no proportion to this story, and in one of the stories that just absolutely astounded me, was in an Israeli newspaper, that the Israeli government has agreed to pay for the cost of treating Israeli pets hurt by Palestinian rockets. This is just astounding.

HOST: By contrast to U.S. reporting, the reporting in Arab countries, as is perhaps to be expected has been quite different. On January 8 the day we're recording this interview, the Los Angeles Times ran a story about the Arab media and how it portrays Gazans as heroes and victims. What can you tell us about Arab Language reporting?

Ali Abunimah: It's really been excellent, and I mean what they play on there is kind of the racist notion that Arab journalists couldn't possibly be objective or they couldn't give you the facts and that's what I think lies behind that kind of snide remarks from the LA Times. The reality is that we're getting live coverage on Aljazeera. Incidentally anybody can get Aljazeera in English on the Internet. They have an English channel now and it's free on the internet, and it is worth watching to see what you are missing from the mainstream media, but the reason Aljazeera has live coverage is because they take the story seriously, they take the lives of Palestinians seriously and so they have bureaus permanently stationed there, whereas Western and particularly American Networks, all of their reporters are up in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem living a very nice life and they trot down to Gaza once in a while for a day trip or to do a story if ever, and so it was very easy for Israel to just close the border and all those journalists are stuck in Tel Aviv, while they couldn't do that to Aljazeera because they were already there.

HOST: Are there any other English language Arab media that you would recommend?

Ali Abunimah: Well I think Aljazeera is the best that I would recommend, but there's other English language media. The Guardian has been good although they don't have a reporter in the Gaza strip. I'll plug my own organization Electronic Intifada dot net (<http://electronicintifada.net/>) because we do have reporters in the Gaza strip and we are reporting live from Gaza, real testimonies in the words, the voices of the people in Gaza as well as the kind of analysis and opinion that you will not read on the Op-Ed pages of the Washington Post or the NY Times.

HOST: We've been speaking with Ali Abunimah, the author of One Country: a bold proposal to end the Israeli Palestinian conflict, and the cofounder of <http://electronicintifada.net/> (<http://electronicintifada.net/>). Ali Abunimah, thanks for joining us today on Counterspin.

Ali Abunimah: Thank you

- Figure E-14. U.S. Artillery Projectile, 105mm, HE, M1



Characteristics

Color: Olive drab with yellow markings
Length: 404mm
Width: 105mm
Weight: 18.11kg
Filler: Composition B

On The Media

On The Media is produced by:



(Getty Images)



The New Israeli Barrier

January 09, 2009

In what the Foreign Press Association has called an “[unprecedented restriction of press freedom](#),” the Israeli military has barred foreign correspondents from entering the Gaza Strip and thereby covering the war close-up. *New York Times* Jerusalem bureau chief Ethan Bronner says that in order to understand the current crackdown on media you have to think back to the summer of 2006.

BOB GARFIELD: From WNYC in New York, this is NPR’s On the Media. I’m Bob Garfield.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: And I’m Brooke Gladstone. The most recent fighting between the Israel defense forces and Hamas, now two weeks old, is like all modern wars, partly a battle of images - dead and wounded children in Gaza, military funerals and fear in Israel.

One image you haven't seen anywhere, however, is that of U.S. reporters on the ground in Gaza.

FEMALE CORRESPONDENT: Close to 300 foreign nationals were allowed out of Gaza, but no journalists were allowed in. Israel continues to reject international calls for a return to free press.

MALE CORRESPONDENT: I talked to the Vice Prime Minister about today. I said, look, why aren't you allowing journalists to go into Gaza? And he said, why do you want to go in? And I said, look, we're journalists. This is what we do. We need to report on the situation.

MALE CORRESPONDENT: They're actually surprisingly open about why they're not allowing journalists inside. They say they don't want too much information coming out of Gaza.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: The Israeli military has barred foreign correspondents from entering the Gaza Strip, despite an Israeli Supreme Court ruling mandating at least limited access for journalists.

Ethan Bronner is Jerusalem bureau chief for The New York Times. He says in order to understand the current crackdown on the press you have to go back to the summer of 2006.

ETHAN BRONNER: That's right. In 2006 in the war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Israeli and foreign media had sort of the run of the place. People were constantly talking to soldiers about their lack of good guns and decent food and enough water. There were mid-level commanders going live on radio talking about what they thought ought to happen.

And the commission that was set up by the government at the end of that war to examine what had gone wrong devoted some attention to the media policy of the army and decided that it was not good at all for the strategic objectives of the army.

So they revamped their information policy, and they've also taken away cell phones from soldiers, fearful that when they were talking in Lebanon at that time, that Hezbollah was listening.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Israel has a long-celebrated tradition of a free and vigorous press. Have average Israelis weighed in on this policy, or the Israeli media?

ETHAN BRONNER: Kind of shockingly, no. So far in this war – and it may be beginning to change now – but fundamentally for the first week or 10 days for sure, there was a strong uniformity of view in Israel that this was a vital, justified war and that those who didn't get that weren't really worth worrying about, so that when foreign journalists were complaining about not having access, people really were unimpressed.

The fact that there's a war here is part of a general sense in Israel of existential threat that is hard for outsiders to grasp.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Ethan, is your coverage at The Times significantly different than it would have been without the ban? It would have to be, right?

ETHAN BRONNER: Oh, it's enormously different. I mean, I want to say one thing, which is that we have in Gaza a full-time contract writer named Taghreed El-Khodary, a brave, serious professional, and our on-the-ground stuff is coming from her. But she is not a native English speaker and she is not a staff member of The New York Times.

For us, if we could get in to Gaza, believe me, the coverage would be bigger, better and stronger. We know that. Of course, it's a dangerous situation on the ground as well. There are places one would not be able to go instantly, but it would certainly be a much more comprehensive look, and not necessarily all to the ill of the Israel defense forces.

I mean, we would certainly be looking at people who have allowed their children to be placed in front of fighters and that sort of thing. It would be the whole range of stories.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: So what do you think, then? Is the ban working the way that the Israeli government hoped it would or is it backfiring?

ETHAN BRONNER: I really don't think it's working for them. I mean, for one thing, Al-Jazeera is in Gaza, and the wires, AP, Reuters, AFP, all have cameras and Palestinian reporters on the ground, and they're all doing serious work and we're all grateful to them. It is not doing what the Israelis would think.

But I can't say that if we were to go in, they would be happier necessarily. I would say that their focus on controlling the message that way is a little bit of a false focus.

And I also think, as I said, that a lot of the issue of keeping us out has to do with the Defense Ministry's decision that they don't want reporters in their way as they, quote, unquote, "do their job."

BROOKE GLADSTONE: One last question: How complete do you think the coverage is that the Israelis themselves are getting? I know you're saying that they've been so far quite unified over the war in Gaza, but do you think they're getting an unfiltered view of the carnage?

ETHAN BRONNER: They are not. No. I mean, of course, they're watching the BBC and Sky and CNN just like anyone else, but usually enraged as they watch it, convinced that this is coverage aimed to harm them.

If you look at the Israeli papers – of course, this is going to be true, I would imagine, in any country at war – you see an enormous focus on themselves and their own forces and a kind of "by the way" focus on what may be happening to the people in Gaza.

So I am certain that they are not getting a full, unfiltered view of what's happening there. That's absolutely true.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Ethan, thank you very much.

ETHAN BRONNER: Thank you, Brooke.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Ethan Bronner is Jerusalem bureau chief for The New York Times.



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January 21, 2009



Palestinian US College Grad Loses 2 Brothers in Israeli Shooting; Father Watched Son Bleed to Death After Israeli Troops Bar Ambulances

Amer Shurrab is a Palestinian from Khan Yunis and a recent graduate of Vermont's Middlebury College. On Friday, his father and two brothers were fleeing their village when their vehicle came under Israeli fire. Twenty-eight-year-old Kassab died in a hail of bullets trying to flee the vehicle. Eighteen-year-old Ibrahim survived the initial attack, but Israeli troops refused to allow an ambulance to reach them until twenty hours later. By then, it was too late. Ibrahim had bled to death in front of his father. Amer joins us to tell his story. [includes rush transcript]



Guest:

Amer Shurrab, Palestinian from Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip. Two of his brothers were killed in an Israeli attack on Friday. He can be reached at ashurrab@gmail.com

RUSH TRANSCRIPT

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AMY GOODMAN: Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have begun trying to rebuild and recover, following an end to Israel's three-week attack. Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire on Saturday, ending a twenty-two day assault that killed more than 1,300 Palestinians, most of them civilians, at least a third children. Hamas followed with a declaration of a one-week ceasefire until Israel withdraws all its troops.

Israel called off its attack after the Bush administration signed a deal promising increased US cooperation in halting arms smuggling into Gaza. The incoming Obama administration also backed the agreement.

Israel's ceasefire is widely seen to have little to do with the situation on the ground, but instead with the timing of yesterday's inauguration of Barack Obama. Early Wednesday, Israel said it had completed its troop pullout from Gaza. The statement came about thirteen hours after Obama was sworn into office.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army announced it will investigate claims it used white phosphorus illegally in its three-week assault. The move follows numerous allegations by the media and human rights groups that the army fired phosphorus shells where they could harm civilians. White phosphorus shells cause horrific burns if they come in contact with the skin.

On Tuesday, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon toured the UN's badly damaged headquarters in Gaza City. The compound was set aflame when Israel attacked it last week, burning hundreds of tons of desperately needed aid stored in the warehouses. Ban Ki-moon said he was "appalled" at the destruction.

The damage to Gaza's infrastructure is estimated in the billions. UN humanitarian chief John Holmes has urged Israel to fully open all crossings to allow a free flow of goods. He said no reconstruction could begin until Israel allows building materials into Gaza. Thousands of buildings are destroyed, including more than 4,000 homes. Estimates for the rebuilding of Gaza's devastated infrastructure are in the billions of dollars. At least 400,000 people are still without running water. About 100,000 have been internally displaced. Electricity is scarce, available for less than half the day, if it's available at all.

Bodies continue to be pulled out of the rubble of destroyed buildings and homes. On Monday, the forty-eighth corpse was discovered from a block in the Zeitoun district that was wiped out in an Israeli bombing. Witnesses and aid workers have reported the victims were taking shelter in the homes on the block on orders from the Israeli military. The Red Cross has accused Israel of blocking medical workers from reaching the site for days.

On Friday, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni faced questions about alleged Israeli war crimes at a news conference here in Washington, D.C. She was questioned by Russell Mokhiber of the *Corporate Crime Reporter*.

RUSSELL MOKHIBER: Russell Mokhiber. I believe—

MODERATOR: Let me remind you, please keep your questions short, very short.

RUSSELL MOKHIBER: It'll be short.

TZIPI LIVNI: I'll try to do so with my answers.

RUSSELL MOKHIBER: I believe about thirteen Israelis have been killed in this conflict. Human Rights Watch put out a report today saying more than a thousand Palestinians have been killed, including 322 children, and more than 4,500 Palestinians have been wounded, including 1,600 children. The report says—accuses Israel of engaging in war crimes. By using this weapon in such circumstance, Israel is committing indiscriminate attacks in violation of the laws of war. I'd like your response to that.

TZIPI LIVNI: Well, Israel is acting not only according to the international law, but according to our values. And the Israeli soldiers are trying to avoid any kind of civil casualties. Before we started the military operation, we announced through the media—we asked them to leave places in which there are Hamas headquarters. And unfortunately, they have Hamas headquarters in places in which they live. This is a highly populated place. Before targeting a house, we called. Israel made about 90,000 phone calls to citizens, asking them to leave before we target a place in which we know that we have Hamas headquarter or a place in which they manufacture Qassam rockets.

RUSSELL MOKHIBER: Well, this report says—

TZIPI LIVNI: To which I am trying to—I would like to answer—I would like to answer your question. Thank you. Now, a loss of a child is something which is terrible to any family. We are trying—

MODERATOR: Dan, you're next.

TZIPI LIVNI: We are trying—

RUSSELL MOKHIBER: Where is the answer? Where is the answer?

TZIPI LIVNI: No, I want—before—but I would like—it's very important—

RUSSELL MOKHIBER: Peter, I have a question for you: how come—since when does the Press Club invite terrorists like her? Since when [inaudible] Press Club to a terrorist like her?

TZIPI LIVNI: I would like to give an answer, not to you, but to those who ask this question and they really care, because we do care for the loss of life of civilians. And during this war, we tried to avoid civil casualties, but these things happen.

AMY GOODMAN: Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, answering Russell Mokhiber at a news conference on Friday before Mokhiber's microphone was cut. That video courtesy of therealnews.com.

Well, as the Foreign Minister was denying Israeli war crimes in Gaza Friday, my next guest lost two of his brothers to Israeli attacks on that same day. Amer Shurrab is a Palestinian from Khan Yunis living in the United States. On Friday, his father and two brothers were fleeing their village when their vehicle came under Israeli fire. Twenty-eight-year-old Kassab died in a hail of bullets trying to flee the vehicle. Eighteen-year-old Ibrahim survived the initial attack, but Israeli troops refused to allow an ambulance to reach them until twenty hours later. By then, it was too late. Ibrahim had bled to death in front of his father.

Amer Shurrab lives here in Washington, D.C. He joins me now in the studio.

Amer, can you explain what you understand took place?

AMER SHURRAB: Well, thank you for having me, Amy. What happened on Friday, my dad, Mohammed Shurrab, and my two brothers were leaving our farm in the Fukhari area. It's a neighborhood of Khan Yunis. They were driving back home at the time of the daily lull or the ceasefire. They left the farm at around 12:45, afternoon, and they were driving on one of the main roads in the area. As they turned into that road, Israeli troops opened fire on them from a house that they occupied in the area. They started firing at them without warning, without saying "Stop" or "You can't pass by." And they fired to kill. They didn't fire at the engine or at the tires. They fired toward the passengers and toward the drivers.

My brother Kassab was hit with several bullets, and as my dad and my brother Ibrahim tried to duck, Kassab was hit with so many bullets, including a bullet in the chest. And he tried to jump out of the car, but he fell out like a meter away from the car, and he fell on his face. My dad got Ibrahim, and then the soldiers started shouting at them with broken Arabic, "Get out of the car, you SOB's!" So, as Ibrahim opened the door of the car, he was trying to get off, and they shot him in his leg. He was shot in the leg under the knee. So he screamed, "I got injured!" and he fell on the ground. And my dad, at this point, he couldn't even get out of the car because of the hail of bullets. And he finally managed to get out.

So, they were outside of the car. Ibrahim tried to call an ambulance, but the soldiers shouted at him, "Drop it, or I'm going to shoot you, you..."—and he cursed at him. And they told them not to move. So they had their backs to their car. The car hit a wall. And my dad and my brother had their back to the wall. They were both bleeding. My dad was hit with a bullet in his left arm. They were bleeding. The soldiers them, "Oh, call an ambulance." But they would even only allow my dad to use a phone. They wouldn't allow Ibrahim to do it. And they threatened to shoot them several times.

Sorry.

So my dad tried to call the ambulance. He asked Ibrahim for the emergency number, which is 101. He called them. He called the Palestinian Red Crescent, and they asked for an ambulance. He gave them his location. But they said, "We can't send an ambulance without the coordination and approval of the Israeli army. And they're not giving us permission." So my dad called my uncle, asked him to find a way to send an ambulance. So my uncle found an ambulance and went there, on his own responsibility, trying to rescue them. But they were stopped by some Israeli tanks, and they told them, "Go back, or we will start shooting at you." So they had to leave. And my uncle called the Red Cross, the International Red Cross. He called, and the Red Cross tried to get in touch with the IDF to get help through, but the IDF wouldn't give them any positive response. They also called—the Red Cross called a human rights organization, the Physicians for Human Rights, the Israel chapter, who also got in touch with the Israeli army and tried to get help through, but they

wouldn't get any permission. They kept calling them, but in vain.

At the same time, my dad and my brother were still bleeding. They weren't even allowed to get back into the car. They asked the troops, who could see them and hear them, they asked for help. They asked for some first aid or to allow some ambulance in. But the troops would say, "Oh, call an ambulance. Let the ambulance come and pick you up." My dad continued to call the emergency number, and they told him, "We can't do anything."

That was—so by around 7:00 or 8:00, you know, the media, local media, started calling him, and they asked him to broadcast his—lively, on air. He gave his location. He gave his name and the condition he is in, and he asked for help, for somebody to dispatch an ambulance. He called several—several local radios talked to him, as well as BBC Arabic, and he broadcasted his plea, but no one would help. Physicians for Human Rights also called, as well as contacting the IDF. They got in touch with members of the Knesset. They got in touch with some Israeli media websites, including Ynet and Walla!, who also, in turn, got in touch with the IDF, describing the situation, asking to allow help. But it was all in vain.

Around 8:00, my brother Ibrahim was still bleeding, was telling my dad, "Daddy, I'm cold." He was shivering and trembling. So my dad took off his coat and covered him. And he asked him, "Ibrahim, are you still cold?" He's like, "Yes, Daddy, I'm cold." So he told him, "Stand up. I will help you to get back into the car." So, as they stood up, the soldiers told them—you know, the soldiers told them, "Sit down, or I'm going to shoot you." He said, "Do whatever you want. I'm taking him to the car." He took him into the car and put —tried to cover him. And they were stuck there. By midnight, Al Jazeera channel called my dad and asked him to describe his case, and he did on air.

AMY GOODMAN: Amer, our show is going to end in fifteen seconds, I'm so sorry. Your brother died a few hours later?

AMER SHURRAB: Yeah, he died at midnight. And the army wouldn't allow help to come in until around noon the next day on Saturday.

AMY GOODMAN: Amer Shurrab, I want to thank you for being with us, and our condolences to your family.

AMER SHURRAB: Thank you for having me, Amy.



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January 22, 2009



Part II: Palestinian US College Grad Loses 2 Brothers in Israeli Shooting; Father Watched Son Bleed to Death After Israeli Troops Blocked Ambulances

We return to the heart-wrenching tale of Amer Shurrab, who lost two of his brothers on the same day in an Israeli attack in Gaza. Amer is a Palestinian from Khan Yunis living in the United States. He recently graduated from Middlebury College. On Friday, his father and two brothers were fleeing their village when their vehicle came under Israeli fire. Twenty-eight-year-old Kassab died in a hail of bullets trying to flee the vehicle. Eighteen-year-old Ibrahim survived the initial attack, but Israeli troops refused to allow an ambulance to reach them until twenty hours later. [includes rush transcript]



Guests:

Amer Shurrab, Palestinian from Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip. Two of his brothers were killed in an Israeli attack on Friday. He can be reached at ashurrab@gmail.com

Phyllis Bennis, fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., specializing in Middle East and United Nations issues. Her books include *Challenging Empire: How People, Governments, and the UN Defy US Power* and *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer*.

RUSH TRANSCRIPT

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- [Palestinian US College Grad Loses 2 Brothers in Israeli Shooting; Father Watched Son Bleed to Death After Israeli Troops Bar Ambulances](#) (1/21/2009)

AMY GOODMAN: We return to a story we first heard yesterday on *Democracy Now!* It's the heart-wrenching tale of Amer Shurrab. He lost two of his brothers on the same day in an Israeli attack in Gaza. Amer is a Palestinian from Khan Yunis living in the United States. He just graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont.

On Friday, his dad and two brothers were fleeing their village when their vehicle came under Israeli fire. His brother, twenty-eight-year-old Kassab, died in a hail of bullets trying to flee the vehicle. His other brother, eighteen years old, Ibrahim, survived the initial attack, but Israeli troops refused to allow an ambulance to reach him and his father until twenty hours later. By then, it was too late. Ibrahim had bled to death in front of his father.

Amer Shurrab joins us today again from Washington, D.C. to continue with the story he began yesterday. Juan and I welcome you to *Democracy Now!*, Amer.

AMER SHURRAB: Thank you for having me, Amy.

AMY GOODMAN: Amer, for those who didn't hear yesterday, if you could briefly tell us again your understanding. It was Friday, is that right? That was when Tzipi Livni was actually in Washington, D.C., meeting with Condoleezza Rice.

AMER SHURRAB: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: And you got the call from your dad?

AMER SHURRAB: I got the call from my big brother, who lives in Saudi Arabia. He watched my dad's plea on air on Al Jazeera.

AMY GOODMAN: And this was still when your father was on the ground with, Ibrahim, your eighteen-year-old brother, who was wounded in the leg, not—should not have been a fatal wound.

AMER SHURRAB: No, absolutely not.

AMY GOODMAN: And what did you do at that moment when you heard they were there? What was your dad trying to do at that point, and what did you do?

AMER SHURRAB: Well, my dad was asking for help from everyone who could help. What I did with a group of friends, we started contacting everyone we could know who could—might be able to provide them help. I contacted the Seeds of Peace, whom I am a member of. I contacted Middlebury College. I contacted my host parents. I contacted the International Red Cross. I tried to contact the media, the BBC, the CNN. I contacted the Israeli journalist, Amira Hass. And I tried to get in touch with everyone I could think of.

And my network, we contacted my fellow UW—United World College students, who also tried to contact everyone they could think of who could influence the Israeli army or send the word out. Maybe it will influence the Israeli army, and they will allow help.

And throughout the night, we were in contact with Al-Haq, which is an NGO based in Ramallah, who were following the story. We were talking with a Middlebury alumni. She's interning with Al-Haq, and she was following the story with us.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And from what you have heard from your family there, what kind of response from the pressure on the Israeli army or the Israeli government—what was the reaction of the Israeli army to all the people that were trying to contact them to let them let an ambulance get through?

AMER SHURRAB: Well, they didn't get any positive response, and the army said, "We can't. We have to fully explore the situation. We have to evaluate the situation and see how it will affect the operations in the area." And at some point, they informed Physicians for Human Rights, another aid group that was contacting them, that there's an explanation for not sending the ambulance, but they said they wouldn't provide the explanation.

AMY GOODMAN: Amer, your father and brother Ibrahim are on one side of the road on one side of the car that was shot at, and Ibrahim is lying there, your father calling on the cell phone, trying to get help. On the other side of the car, the passenger side, was your other brother, Kassab, who had been shot dead at the beginning of this attack, Israeli forces from a house. Was your father able to get to his body just on the other side of the car?

AMER SHURRAB: He wasn't able to get to his body until about seven hours later, because any—

AMY GOODMAN: What was stopping him?

AMER SHURRAB: If he tries to move, the troops would tell him, "Don't move, or we are going to shoot you." And if he actually attempts to move, they fire in the air or around him. But around 8:00 p.m. or so on Friday, he saw some cats, some wild cats, starting to circle around Kassab's body, so he couldn't take it anymore. And he moved the two or three feet that separated him from Kassab's body just to make sure the cats wouldn't get to his body.

JUAN GONZALEZ: But he wasn't able to actually bring the body back to where he was or move it in any way.

AMER SHURRAB: No, all he could do is just turn him on his back and cover his face with his coat.

AMY GOODMAN: Amer, Ibrahim—tell us what was happening with him through the day, your eighteen-year-old brother, who your father was with. Where was he shot?

AMER SHURRAB: He was shot in his leg just under the knee. And while he was getting out of the car, upon the orders of the soldiers, he got shot, and he screamed, "I have been injured!" And he tried to call the ambulance, but the soldiers ordered him to drop the phone, or they would shoot him.

But they would allow my father to use a cell phone. My father tried to call the emergency number several times. And Ibrahim would tell him, every five minutes, "I'm hurt. I'm injured. I'm in pain. Call an ambulance." And he was bleeding all the time. And after sunset, he started shivering and trembling, telling my dad he was cold.

And after my dad found out that Kassab was dead, Ibrahim asked my dad, "Were you pleased with him, Daddy?" And he said, "Yes, I'm pleased with him." And then Ibrahim, around 9:00, Ibrahim told my dad he was still shivering from cold, and he told my dad, "I'm so cold." So my dad told him, "OK, stand up, and I will help you to get in the car. Maybe it will be warmer there."

So, as they stood up, the soldier said, "Don't move, or we will shoot you." But my dad screamed back. He was like, "You killed my son! If you want to shoot us, shoot us! I don't care!" And he helped him into the car. He—my dad took off his coat and covered Ibrahim with it. And they had some laundry piled in the back of the car, so he covered Ibrahim with it, trying to—just trying to provide him with some warmth. And he asked him, "Ibrahim, are you warm?" He said, "I'm warm, Daddy, but I'm in pain. Call an ambulance. Call 101." And he would repeat that every five minutes. "Call an ambulance. Call 101."

And all that time, my dad was receiving calls from the media, from human rights groups, and he was repeating his appeal and telling them, "My son was killed, and the other one is bleeding, and he's in pain. Send us help." And help was nowhere to be seen.

And around midnight, he got a call from Al Jazeera, and they told him, "You are on air. Please tell us where you are. What's happening?" So he broadcasted his plea on air. And once he was done, he couldn't hear the breath of Ibrahim. He thought he fell asleep. He talked to him; he wouldn't respond. He placed his hand on his forehead. It was still warm, but he wasn't breathing anymore, and he had no pulse.

JUAN GONZALEZ: Amer, could you tell—in all of the twenty hours that your father was there, those soldiers who did the shooting never came out to even come near them or to try to, in one way or another, find out the results of what they had done?

AMER SHURRAB: No, no. He asked them for help several times, but they didn't care.

AMY GOODMAN: Now, Amer, your father, your family, you, are all well known there. You have a farm on the border. Did you know Israeli soldiers as you were growing up? Your farm right in the suburb of Khan Yunis.

AMER SHURRAB: Well, our farm is about 500 meters away from the borders. In several occasions, when there are incursions, the troops would come by, like, pass him, storm by him and continue. They wouldn't come near him. They knew he has nothing to do with anything. He has no political or military affiliations.

One time, they detained Ibrahim for pointing a flashlight he was carrying at night. They came to the farm. They searched everything. And they kick and destroyed around the house and the farm. They took my dad's cell phones. They shot the tires,

took Ibrahim, questioned him and informed him with so many details about our family, about our cell phone numbers, about our nicknames, about what we do, and they asked him several other questions. And then they let him go.

AMY GOODMAN: Now, were any of these soldiers who were there—did your dad know any of them? Did he see any of them? Where were they shooting from?

AMER SHURRAB: They were shooting from a house that was about thirty or forty yards away from the car. He doesn't know any one of them in person.

But the soldiers took a group of the residents and other citizens. They took them as hostages or human shields in that house. And some of these hostages actually understood Hebrew. They spoke and understood Hebrew, and they overheard the conversation between the soldiers. The soldiers told the officer, when they saw the car, that this car, they know the car, and they know that the passengers are civilians, but the officer ordered them to shoot and shoot to kill.

Later on, as part of this unit, there were two army medics, two army doctors, who asked the officer for permission to go help the victims, to go help the injured, but the officer refused, because he knew they were civilians, and he didn't want to get exposed. He didn't want the story to get out, because he thought he might get in trouble for that.

AMY GOODMAN: They actually heard him say that?

AMER SHURRAB: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: The people in the house who spoke Hebrew?

AMER SHURRAB: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: And how do you know this?

AMER SHURRAB: Because one of the hostages is a man who works for my dad in the family, and the man who understood Hebrew told this worker about the conversation, and when the worker visited my dad in hospital, he informed him of this conversation.

JUAN GONZALEZ: So that would mean that if there is an investigation, an impartial investigation of what happened, there were actually witnesses, civilian witnesses in the house, to what these Israeli soldiers did?

AMER SHURRAB: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: And your dad was able to contact his brother, and his brother tried to get an ambulance to them as they lay in the street and as he was in the car?

AMER SHURRAB: Yes. So, around—the attack happened at about 1:00. So, around 2:00, after the Red Crescent said, "We can't send an ambulance without coordination with the army," my uncle, who was called by my dad, managed to get an ambulance and get it going there on his own responsibility.

As they approached the area, they were stopped by a row of tanks, and the soldiers on the tanks informed them with loudspeakers, they told them, "You go back. You leave, or we will start firing at you." So they were left with no choice but to leave

without reaching the victims.

JUAN GONZALEZ: Your brother Kassab was twenty-eight. Ibrahim was eighteen. Could you tell us a little bit about them? Were they working on the farm with your father? Or, what their aspirations were for the future?

AMER SHURRAB: Kassab was an architect. He graduated from the Islamic University and finally graduated in 2007. He had so much trouble in college, because it was very hard to get to college because of the checkpoints and the troubles on the roads. So he missed so many classes and lectures, and he had to extend his period of study. But he graduated from the Islamic University in 2007 with a bachelor as an architect.

Ibrahim was a freshman in college, in Al-Azhar University. He started studying commerce, and he was about to finish his first semester.

They regularly go to the farm to help my father around with work, to just get some fresh air and to enjoy nature there.

AMY GOODMAN: And, Amer, how did you end up coming to the United States and going to Middlebury College?

AMER SHURRAB: Well, in 2001, I joined a program called United World College. So I went to the United World College of the Adriatic in Italy. It's in a town called Duino in the province of Trieste. It's on the Adriatic Sea. So I studied there, and I received my international baccalaureate program. And after that, I received—I applied for some US colleges, and I received a full scholarship from Middlebury College as a Davis United World College Scholar in 2004.

AMY GOODMAN: And you graduated with an economics degree?

AMER SHURRAB: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: And now you're in Washington.

AMER SHURRAB: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: Have you spoken to your dad in the hospital? And how is he? How far is that hospital from where they lay in the road?

AMER SHURRAB: The hospital was about one kilometer away from where they were. So even if they were allowed to walk there, they probably would have made it.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And your father, how's he doing?

AMER SHURRAB: I was informed he was dispatched from hospital yesterday. His injury is not life-threatening, but the experience he has gone through is just horrific. I can't even begin to imagine how he feels.

And I managed to talk—to have only one long conversation with him. And he's dying inside every minute of every day. And his only hope in life, to see justice being served and to know that those who murdered his sons and who committed this atrocity will not get away with it.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And if you could express to the American people and to the

incoming administration of Barack Obama what you would hope our country would do about this situation and the continued killing there?

AMER SHURRAB: I lived in this country for over four years now. I know the people in this country are peace-loving and good-natured. And I know they're not aware of these atrocities. I urge the people, I urge the President Obama, and I urge the Congress to look at the fact, to look at what is going and to make sure it stops, make sure no more innocent—no more innocent lives are being—no more innocents are being killed anymore. I urge them to stop this madness.

They can be friends of Israel, but a friend or a good friend—a good friend will tell their friends when they make a mistake. They will never give them a *carte blanche* to do whatever they want, because, at the end of the day, what Israel is doing today is harming it more than anyone else.

AMY GOODMAN: Amer Shurrab, I want to thank you for joining us. It's very brave of you to come on the air in so much pain to tell the story of your brothers and your dad, and we very much appreciate it. We will also post on our website at democracynow.org, in addition to the transcript and the video, the photographs of your family.

Amer Shurrab is now in Washington, D.C. He just graduated from Middlebury College in economics. He's there in Washington looking for a job. His two brothers, Kassab, twenty-eight, and Ibrahim, died in an Israeli attack in Khan Yunis on Friday, his dad just released from the hospital.

This is *Democracy Now!*, democracynow.org, the War and Peace Report. We'll be back in a minute.

[break]

AMY GOODMAN: During that break, for our TV audience and online video, we showed the photographs of Amer's older brother Kassab before the attack, and we showed the pictures of his father in the hospital. You can go to our website to view the video and the photos.

I'm Amy Goodman, with Juan Gonzalez, as we're continuing in Washington right now, in the studio right next to Amer's, by Phyllis Bennis, the fellow at Institute for Policy Studies specializing in the Middle East and United Nations issues. Her books include *Challenging Empire: How People, Governments, and the UN Defy US Power*, as well as *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer*.

Phyllis, to start, as you listen to Amer's story, where does international law fit in, not to mention local law, in Israel and the Occupied Territories?

PHYLLIS BENNIS: Yeah, it's very difficult, of course, Amy, to listen, to hear firsthand the horrific character of these attacks. But it is very important that we understand the legal basis and the question of the role of the United States. The United States, of course, has provided an average of \$3 billion a year in military aid to Israel. The F-16s, the Apache helicopters, the TOW missiles, a huge amount, the fuel, the fossil fuels that are fueling the Israeli military right now, all are coming from the United States. And that makes us complicit in a very direct way when those weapons are used illegally. And according to US law, the Arms Export Control Act, it is prohibited for Israel or for any country receiving US military equipment—but in this case Israel—it is prohibited to use that equipment, that military equipment, that ammunition, those weapons, outside of very narrow constraints. All of this violates

those narrow constraints.

Beyond that, the question of international law is impacted very directly. The Israelis have a very particular obligation in Gaza and the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem as the occupying power. Under the Geneva Conventions, as the occupying power, Israel has the obligation to protect the civilian population. And that has a whole range of specific obligations, starting with no collective punishment, no use of prohibited weapons. The whole range of attacks that we have seen during this period of the three-week war in Gaza constituted a whole host of violations of different articles of the Geneva Conventions, starting with Article 33, that prohibits as an absolute any collective punishment, meaning that the siege of Gaza, which was creating a humanitarian disaster in Gaza even before the military assault began, was itself a violation of the prohibition that says Israel cannot punish anyone in Gaza, let alone the entire population of a million-and-a-half people, half of whom are children under seventeen, cannot punish them for any act they were not personally responsible for.

So the notion that they could fire on a civilian car, in this case with a father and his two sons, knowing they were civilians who were guilty of nothing, who were accused of nothing, that they could fire on that car, because they felt threatened or for any other reason, is absolutely a violation. Then there's another violation inherent in the refusal of allowing medical care, refusing to protect the wounded. So the fact that there were medics on the scene who asked, maybe begged, the Israeli commander to treat the wounded, as they are obligated to do under international law, those medics were trying to do what international law says they must do, and they were prevented from doing so by their commander. That makes their commander guilty of another separate war crime, a crime of the violation of international humanitarian law, that requires them to provide aid and medical help to the wounded. So there's a host of violations here.

The kind of weapons that we're seeing being used, the use of white phosphorus, for instance, which was used not only in civilian areas, which is all of the Gaza Strip, is one giant civilian area. There is nowhere to hide. That's been the conclusion of Amnesty International, that when Israeli notifications to people in Gaza said, "You should flee, because we are going to bomb your home, we are going to attack your neighborhood, there is a Hamas person who lives next door," there is nowhere in Gaza to flee in this most densely populated area.

JUAN GONZALEZ: Phyllis, in this particular case, the issue of who would actually follow up this case, because there are witnesses, clearly, and they did not even taken into custody the father, so they didn't—they weren't possibly claiming he did anything illegal—

PHYLLIS BENNIS: Right.

JUAN GONZALEZ: —who would pursue this case?

PHYLLIS BENNIS: Well, I assume that because of the level of publicity on this case, the fact that the father's pleas were broadcast while there were going on on Al Jazeera, perhaps other networks as well, in these kinds of cases, historically, the Israeli military, the IDF, has claimed over and over again, "We are investigating." Besides that, I would assume that the humanitarian organizations on the ground—Physicians for Human Rights in Israel; the Palestinian organizations, like Al-Haq, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights in Gaza; the United Nations human rights—the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights— I'm sure, will take an interest in this.

AMY GOODMAN: Phyllis Bennis, I want to thank you very much for being with us, fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. Her latest book, *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer*.



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Why Did Congress Shamelessly Pander to Israel? By Tana Ganeva, AlterNet Posted on January 17, 2009, <http://www.alternet.org/story/120495/>

Last week, soon after the Red Cross and other humanitarian groups condemned Israel for blocking deliveries of vital aid for wounded civilians in Gaza, and with the Palestinian death toll at 700, the U.S. House and Senate passed resolutions that not only blamed Palestinians for the bloodbath, but praised Israel for its conduct of the assault.

The House resolution, co-sponsored by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., commends Israel for bringing "humanitarian aid to Gaza with hundreds of trucks carrying humanitarian assistance and numerous ambulances entering the Gaza Strip since the current round of fighting began."

Minority Leader Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who co-sponsored the Senate resolution with Majority Leader Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., stated before the vote, "The Israelis ... are responding exactly the same way we would." Reid added: "When we pass this resolution, the United States Senate will strengthen our historic bond with the state of Israel ... "

In a recent article on AlterNet titled, "Virtually the Entire Dem-Controlled Congress Supports Israel's War Crimes in Gaza," Stephen Zunes, chairman of the Middle Eastern studies department at the University of San Francisco, argued that the resolutions not only fly in the face of international law, but undermine core humanitarian principles established as far back as the Magna Carta.

Zunes writes that nothing Hamas has or has not done would "absolve Israel of its responsibility under international humanitarian law for the far greater civilian deaths its armed forces have inflicted upon the Palestinians in Gaza. Indeed, it has long been a principle of Western jurisprudence that someone who is the proximate cause of a crime cannot claim innocence simply because of the influence of another party."

Zunes also calls out progressives for demonizing American Israel Public Affairs Committee and Republicans, while letting Democrats off the hook -- after all, the resolutions were co-sponsored by Reid and Pelosi -- and points out that until otherwise-liberal politicians are held accountable for supporting Israeli militarism, the United States will continue to pursue policies at odds with international law and commonly accepted principles of human rights.

In response to the article, AlterNet readers voiced some strong opinions about our government's unqualified support for the Israeli war on Gaza.

Dr. Brian marvels at unprincipled stances taken by U.S. politicians: I've treated the injured under fire and been arrested and nearly executed for it. So when I see my colleagues in Palestine, both expats and Palestinian, working around the clock and in danger to save lives, while Israel uses U.S. weaponry to extinguish lives, I marvel at the diametric opposition of ethical principles.

Our government tells us its objective is to eliminate terrorism, but who can doubt that the carnage in Gaza juxtaposed with its gleeful endorsement by our government will swell the ranks of angry young men seeking revenge?

Alex Lawyer agrees, pointing out that the unequivocal and vocal support American politicians give Israel is not only unethical, but plays to the advantage of so-called terrorist groups:

Our Congress has endorsed the rule of law: the law of the jungle, red in tooth and claw. As the Athenians told the Melians, "The strong do what they will, and the weak endure what they must." This isn't new. Both the U.S. and Israel have long been scofflaws and hypocrites. A look at human rights treaties reveals that they are usually in the company of regimes they otherwise deplore. Al-Qaida, Hezbollah, Jaamat Islamia and Hamas must be absolutely giddy at the public relations and recruiting coup we have handed them.

But **James Allen** argues that in condemning the atrocities in Gaza, many liberals go too far in the other direction and wrongly exonerate Hamas.

I continue to be astounded by "liberals" who treat bomb and rocket attacks against Israelis as justice, while condemning Israeli retaliation. There were 2,117 deaths at Pearl Harbor; to accept the peculiar calculus of anti-Israelites, U.S. was morally bound to terminate its war against Japan after the first 2,117 deaths. Poles lost land to Russia in the aftermath of WW II, yet we don't hear of Polish suicide bombers. Germans lost land. Etc., etc. etc. Only the Palestinians have adopted bloodlust as their guiding philosophy; why is this so attractive to "liberals"?

Zunes piece responds: What liberals do you know of who believe bomb and rocket attacks against Israelis are "justice?" This is a red herring. I, and everyone else I know who has written articles on this Web site, condemn both sides for attacking civilians.

DCostello2 agrees with Zunes: Why is it that when one speaks out against Israel, it is immediately thought that one supports Hamas? Did you speak out against the illegal and immoral U.S. war on Iraq? If so, does that mean you support al-Qaida? Why does Israel get to benefit from this kind of twisted logic?

Some commenters wonder if most U.S. politicians even know very much about the conflict:

Freelyb writes: How many of them really know what has gone on over time between these two factions? How much research do they do on all these things that they influence so strongly? I'd really like to know ...

Particle paints our politicians as not only ignorant, but foolish and cowardly:

No doubt a few are ignorant clods. More just pander to ignorant clods. Probably more than a few have been following this for years, but are either biased or simply too cowardly to speak up.

I would guess that there is probably a sense in Congress that Israel will have its desperate way one way or the other. But in the long run that it (Israel) will be doomed by issues that boil down to geography. It's all a sort of mad, hopeless bravura. Mad to the point of being a sick and archaic opera played out by played-out thugs and fools.

So how can Americans keep politicians accountable? **tony_opmoc** has one idea:

Virtually the entire Dem-controlled Congress should be tried for war crimes against humanity.

Erin suggests a more realistic route: I second that proposal. But since that won't happen, lets vote all of them, except the five who voted against it, out at the next election.

jreinhardt1 points out that our politicians' unethical positions hardly end with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

America has opened up two illegal wars against Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. has blatantly forced regime change of other countries, covert or overt, for the last 110 years, since the Spanish-American War. Until the chambers of Congress and the executive office are cleaned out, America's underbelly is a filth-ridden hidden government working for the special interests on K Street, and the Department of Defense is anything but. Obama must flush out criminals from the last executive office, or he becomes nothing better than what was there previously. We must take the log out of our own eyes before we pick out the twigs from other nations. Otherwise, America is nothing but a nation led by hypocrites.

Tana Ganeva is an editorial assistant at AlterNet. Ms word: Gaza congressional pandering 09-01-17

globalnet@mindspring.com writes: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-falk/understanding-the-gaza-ca_b_154777.html

Understanding the Gaza Catastrophe By Richard Falk, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories January 2, 2009

For eighteen months the entire 1.5 million people of Gaza experienced a punishing blockade imposed by Israel, and a variety of traumatizing challenges to the normalcy of daily life. A flicker of hope emerged some six months ago when an Egyptian arranged truce produced an effective ceasefire that cut Israeli casualties to zero despite the cross-border periodic firing of homemade rockets that fell harmlessly on nearby Israeli territory, and undoubtedly caused anxiety in the border town of Sderot. During the ceasefire the Hamas leadership in Gaza repeatedly offered to extend the truce, even proposing a ten-year period and claimed a receptivity to a political solution based on acceptance of Israel's 1967 borders. Israel ignored these diplomatic initiatives, and failed to carry out its side of the ceasefire agreement that involved some easing of the blockade that had been restricting the entry to Gaza of food, medicine, and fuel to a trickle.

Israel also refused exit permits to students with foreign fellowship awards and to Gazan journalists and respected NGO representatives. At the same time, it made it increasingly difficult for journalists to enter, and I was myself expelled from Israel a couple of weeks ago when I tried to enter to carry out my UN job of monitoring respect for human rights in occupied Palestine, that is, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as Gaza. Clearly, prior to the current crisis, Israel used its authority to prevent credible observers from giving accurate and truthful accounts of the dire humanitarian situation that had been already documented as producing severe declines in the physical condition and mental health of the Gazan population, especially noting malnutrition among children and the absence of treatment facilities for those suffering from a variety of diseases. The Israeli attacks were directed against a society already in grave condition after a blockade maintained during the prior 18 months.

As always in relation to the underlying conflict, some facts bearing on this latest crisis are murky and contested, although the American public in particular gets 99% of its information filtered through an exceedingly pro-Israeli media lens. Hamas is blamed for the breakdown of the truce by its supposed unwillingness to renew it, and by the alleged increased incidence of rocket attacks. But the reality is more clouded. There was no substantial rocket fire from Gaza during the ceasefire until Israel launched an attack last November 4th directed at what it claimed were Palestinian militants in Gaza, killing several Palestinians. It was at this point that rocket fire from Gaza intensified. Also, it was Hamas that on numerous public occasions called for extending the truce, with its calls never acknowledged, much less acted upon, by Israeli officialdom. Beyond this, attributing all the rockets to Hamas is not convincing either. A variety of independent militia groups operate in Gaza, some such as the Fatah-backed al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade are anti-Hamas, and may even be sending rockets to provoke or justify Israeli retaliation. It is well confirmed that when US-supported Fatah controlled Gaza's governing structure it was unable to stop rocket attacks despite a concerted effort to do so.

What this background suggests strongly is that Israel launched its devastating attacks, starting on December 27, not simply to stop the rockets or in retaliation, but also for a series of unacknowledged reasons. It was evident for several weeks prior to the Israeli attacks that the Israeli military and political leaders were preparing the public for large-scale military operations against the Hamas. The timing of the attacks seemed prompted by a series of considerations: most of all, the interest of political contenders, the Defense Minister Ehud Barak and the Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, in demonstrating their toughness prior to national elections scheduled for February, but now possibly postponed until military operations cease. Such Israeli shows of force have been a feature of past Israeli election campaigns, and on this occasion especially, the current government was being successfully challenged by Israel's notoriously militarist politician, Benjamin Netanyahu, for its supposed failures to uphold security. Reinforcing these electoral

motivations was the little concealed pressure from the Israeli military commanders to seize the opportunity in Gaza to erase the memories of their failure to destroy Hezbollah in the devastating Lebanon War of 2006 that both tarnished Israel's reputation as a military power and led to widespread international condemnation of Israel for the heavy bombardment of undefended Lebanese villages, disproportionate force, and extensive use of cluster bombs against heavily populated areas.

Respected and conservative Israeli commentators go further. For instance, the prominent historian, Benny Morris writing in the *New York Times* a few days ago, relates the campaign in Gaza to a deeper set of forebodings in Israel that he compares to the dark mood of the public that preceded the 1967 War when Israelis felt deeply threatened by Arab mobilizations on their borders. Morris insists that despite Israeli prosperity of recent years, and relative security, several factors have led Israel to act boldly in Gaza: the perceived continuing refusal of the Arab world to accept the existence of Israel as an established reality; the inflammatory threats voiced by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad together with Iran's supposed push to acquire nuclear weapons, the fading memory of the Holocaust combined with growing sympathy in the West with the Palestinian plight, and the radicalization of political movements on Israel's borders in the form of Hezbollah and Hamas. In effect, Morris argues that Israel is trying via the crushing of Hamas in Gaza to send a wider message to the region that it will stop at nothing to uphold its claims of sovereignty and security.

There are two conclusions that emerge: the people of Gaza are being severely victimized for reasons remote from the rockets and border security concerns, but seemingly to improve election prospects of current leaders now facing defeat, and to warn others in the region that Israel will use overwhelming force whenever its interests are at stake.

That such a human catastrophe can happen with minimal outside interference also shows the weakness of international law and the United Nations, as well as the geopolitical priorities of the important players. The passive support of the United States government for whatever Israel does is again the critical factor, as it was in 2006 when it launched its aggressive war against Lebanon. What is less evident is that the main Arab neighbors, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, with their extreme hostility toward Hamas that is viewed as backed by Iran, their main regional rival, were also willing to stand aside while Gaza was being so brutally attacked, with some Arab diplomats even blaming the attacks on Palestinian disunity or on the refusal of Hamas to accept the leadership of Mamoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority.

The people of Gaza are victims of geopolitics at its inhumane worst: producing what Israel itself calls a 'total war' against an essentially defenseless society that lacks any defensive military capability whatsoever and is completely vulnerable to Israeli attacks mounted by F-16 bombers and Apache helicopters. What this also means is that the flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, as set forth in the Geneva Conventions, is quietly set aside while the carnage continues and the bodies pile up. It additionally means that the UN is once more revealed to be impotent when its main members deprive it of the political will to protect a people subject to unlawful uses of force on a large scale. Finally, this means that the public can shriek and march all over the world, but that the killing will go on as if nothing is happening. The picture being painted day by day in Gaza is one that begs for renewed commitment to international law and the authority of the UN Charter, starting here in the United States, especially with a new leadership that promised its citizens change, including a less militarist approach to diplomatic leadership.

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Independent International Commission on Kosovo. He is the author or coauthor of numerous books, including Religion and Humane Global Governance; Human Rights Horizons; On Humane Governance: Toward a New Global Politics; Explorations at the Edge of Time; Revolutionaries and Functionaries; The Promise of World Order; Indefensible Weapons; Human Rights and State Sovereignty; A Study of Future Worlds; This Endangered Planet; coeditor of Crimes of War. He serves as Chair of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation's Board of Directors and as honorary vice president of the American Society of International Law.

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