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## Israel's Decimation of Gaza An Open Air Prison

by NORMAN POLLACK

February 17, 2015

Operation Protective Edge is the killing machine of the 2010s, to Israel's everlasting shame. That is not how Israel perceives it, nor, increasingly, world, and especially American, Jewry. I write as a proud Jew, seeking to rid Judaism of the incubus of a hubristic-militaristic Israel that needn't have taken the form it did, as emulator of Nazi-style practices against a resident population on land which could have been the refuge of both. The nakba was inexcusable, degrading, cruel, immoral, the very antithesis of what Torah proclaims about care for the oppressed and love of the stranger. Israelis, by their actions, have forfeited their claim even to be considered Jewish, so vile their treatment of those they have already reduced to a parlous state. Gaza today is Dresden, rubble as far as the eye can see; only Hiroshima and Nagasaki look worse. Children playing amid ruins, families in tents and caravans, building materials intercepted by sea and turned back, infrastructure, UN schools, hospitals demolished—an Israeli society, passive onlookers, casual, uninterested, deaf to the cries of suffering and privation. Judaism mocked at the highest levels.

My dad, yes, from Pinsk, coming to America after World War One, who worked hard all his life, gave whatever he could in support of Jewish causes, a founding member of Rodeph Shalom in Bridgeport before moving to Miami Beach, used to say that bad news came in threes. Sure enough, in recent days, as I perused today's papers. First, the resignation of William Schabas who chaired the UN Human Rights Council's investigation into possible Israeli war crimes in this past summer's Gaza campaign. Faced with Israel's opposition to ANY investigation from

day one (even preceded by Israeli attempts to “starve the beast,” lobbying member nations of the International Criminal Court not to contribute to its operations), Schabas had no other choice. Vilified, accused of anti-Israel sentiments and activities (a distinguished international human-rights lawyer and scholar, who, among his many clients, once advised the Palestine Liberation Organization, fee—\$1,300), subject to death threats and a barrage of hostile emails, obviously organized, he believed that the commission findings, due next month, should not be lost sight of in this effort at intimidation and obfuscation.

I use the phrase “Nazi-style” advisedly and provocatively, to call attention to the techniques of AIPAC and Israel-supporters so quick to scream “self-hating Jew” whenever criticism of Israel is expressed, a din of gut-denial, meanness, and authoritarian viciousness which we, as Jews, once faced, and now give back tenfold. Intra-Jewish contestation over the fate—and FAITH—of Judaism is now at stake, yet I fear already lost. The gangsters in our midst, earlier Cohen and Schine, under McCarthy, now Adelson under Republicans and a primal force in his own right, transcend the issue of Jewish identity because aligning Judaism itself with hard-core reactionary causes having little to do with religion or Jews. Judaism, the religion, has become politicized and therefore desecrated, instead becoming a defensive shield here in America for a foreign policy of war, intervention, even torture, and domestically, the surveillance of the public, prosecution of whistleblowers, and, consistent with its political attachments, in favor of policies supporting banking and business while opposing labor organization and labor rights.

Why? Perhaps as quid pro quo for US unrestrained, all-out, support of Israel. But it has to be more than blind religious allegiance and solidarity. Israel to American Jews is code for world counterrevolution, the organized stifling of Leftist government and social movements, in popular imagination tacitly linking Left currents—Cuba, civil rights at home, socialism (even detecting traces where none exist)—with pogroms, anti-Semitism, menacing world conquest. The tragedy, still unexplained to me, is that it was not always thus. For Judaism especially in America had been in the forefront of the human rights struggle, whether union drives or civil rights marches, whether socialism or progressive New Deal Democrats, opposition to whatever degraded the living standards and free human personality of American working people, a record of radical enlightenment that is becoming increasingly thwarted, controverted, disowned, and negated. I welcome an intra-Judaic conversation, no holds barred, one that might distill and expose the Israeli war crimes and reinvigorate Judaism to affirm its former self—very like FDR’s chasing the thieves from the temple.

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Second, from Rachel Corrie (2003) to William Schabas (2015) is a straightline projection in the continuity of Israel’s continued repressive practices, intimidation of critics as today the generalized procedure, to, back then, the physical-concrete procedure, here Rachel’s death, crushed under an Israeli bulldozer as it demolished Palestinian homes, which represents the normalization of repression so obvious as not to be noticed. Rachel Corrie, a non-violent protester from Olympia, Washington, 23-years old, was in Rafah, the Occupied Territories, in March 2003, protesting housing demolition, megaphone in hand, in the path of a giant bulldozer which DELIBERATELY ran over and crushed her to death. Outcry from Washington? Outcry from Tel Aviv? What we see is a miniaturized genocide—nothing less, followed by a dozen years of fruitless litigation and recourse to justice. That by itself reveals the moral emptiness of present-day Israel and, of course, its American-backer.

Why after so long, now in the news? Let's step back. In 2012, an Israeli lower court in Haifa ruled her death an accident. Then last Thursday (Feb. 12) Israel's Supreme Court upheld the "combat activities exception" of the Civil Wrongs (Liability of the State) Law, which, if Israel pretends to democracy, this totally negates (my "Nazi-style" characterization), in which Israel is not held responsible for whatever takes place in a war zone (this of its own making and elastically defined). The Corrie family's response to the decision, mother and father all these years seeking avenues of redress, was this: "We had hoped for a different outcome, though we had come to see through this experience how deeply all of Israel's institutions are implicated in the impunity enjoyed by the Israeli military." An utterly rotten, corrupt judicial system, familiar to the world in so many instances, not least the shelling of UN schools in Gaza killing dozens. Again, even a murmur of criticism from Washington, the much vaunted world champion of human rights?

Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, (surprising it's still allowed to function), has pointed out that the Civil Wrongs Law of 2002 has been amended many times, always on behalf of the military (I might pause to mention the similarity in reasoning behind the Status of Forces Agreement that the US has demanded acceptance of in Iraq and elsewhere, to protect service members and private contractors alike from the legal jurisdiction of courts for crimes committed), so that IMPUNITY takes on an absolutist quality not quite up to democratic snuff. In 2012, the Law, again amended, introduced, according to Adalah, "near-insurmountable obstacles to justice, accountability and redress for civilian victims harmed by acts of the security forces" in the Occupied Territories.

Third, ongoing social misery in Gaza that happens to make the Washington Post (Feb. 14), but of long-standing duration, daily intensified as Gazans sink further and further into a vortex of degradation and inhuman conditions. And where is Israel, its neighbor and oppressor? Insouciant, bold, vindictive as if God is twisting its arm to bear down, crush, now a whole people, not just Rachel Corrie. In the Post article are there photographs which cannot be fudged in their prima facie indictment of Israel for war crimes. Little boys standing in rubble don't lie. Babies dying from the cold don't lie. The elderly who are hunched over open fires—all of these and more before us—don't lie. William Booth, from Khan Younis, reports: "In almost every way, the Gaza Strip is much worse off now than before last summer's war between Israel and Hamas. Scenes of misery are one of the few things in abundance in the battered coastal enclave." Booth continues, "The economy is in deep recession; pledges of billions in aid have not been honored... Diplomats, aid workers and residents warn of a looming humanitarian crisis..."

Not only Israel, we also see international collective denial of Gaza's suffering, as though human life does not matter—the latest example of social psychopathology, in which deniability trumps realism. Here is the rather sober comment of a well-known Gazan economist, Omar Shaban, to whom I shall give the final word: "After every war, we say it can't get worse, but I will say this time is the worst ever. There is no sign of life. Trade. Import. Export. Reconstruction. Aid? Dead. I'm not exaggerating when I tell my friends abroad: Gaza could collapse, maybe soon."