

Eyeless in Gaza

With Palestine's recent bid for statehood at the UN, the mainstream British media have continued to downplay US-British military and diplomatic support for Israeli terror in the occupied territories.

Particularly since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Israel has stepped up its expansion of illegal settlements, bringing with it a sharp increase of civilian killings. British arms exports doubled during the second intifada from 2000 to 2001, reaching an impressive £22.5 million. No eyelids in Whitehall battered after three British citizens were killed between December 2002 and May 2003. In the years up to the present, British supplies to its favourite client have included small arms, grenade-making kits, tanks, combat aircraft, electric-shock belts, chemical and biological agents such as tear gas, rocket launchers and anti-tank weapons.

Blair's Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, however, showed signs of sympathy in urging that 'whether one agrees with the stance of the Israeli government is not the point. What is important is to understand the huge pressures on them.' New Labour also chose to abstain from a UN resolution condemning Israeli violence in December 2001.

Contrary to the conventional pieties which portray Britain as a stern critic of Israel's separation wall along the West Bank, in October 2003 (the same month Israel bombed 'an apparently abandoned Palestinian 'terrorist training base' [Chris McGreal, 'Israeli jets hit Syria camp in blast revenge,' *Guardian*, 6 October 2003] in Syria, in retaliation for the bombing of a Haifa restaurant which killed 19 people, including four children) Britain abstained from the UN Security Council vote declaring the wall illegal. In the same year, it was revealed that British missile trigger systems were being used in the US Apache helicopters sold to Israel.

The violence was also stepped up in 2006 after the Palestinians voted for the wrong party in a free election. The US and Britain's alleged promotion of democracy is hard to square with Israel's subsequent violence in Gaza and its harsh US/British-supported sanctions on Palestine, cutting off international aid.

When reporting the deaths of Israelis at the hands of Hamas, the BBC never fails to point out the number of children killed and infrastructure damaged. But when reporting on the deaths of Palestinians at the hands of professionally-armed Israeli forces, an 'impartial' death toll is simply quoted, leaving out the addendum 'including X children.' Here are Mike Berry and Greg Philo's findings from their concise history of the conflict:

In our samples of news content, words such as 'mass murder', 'savage cold-blooded killing' and 'lynching' were used by journalists to describe Israeli deaths but not those of Palestinians/Arabs. The word 'terrorist' was used to describe Palestinians, but when an Israeli group was reported as trying to bomb a Palestinian school, they were referred to as 'extremists' or 'vigilantes'.

The possibility of trade sanctions against Israel has always been off the agenda. Instead, Israel 'continues to receive preferential trade treatment by the British government and the EU. Britain has designated Israel one of 14 favoured 'target markets' (Mark Curtis). In a Joint Intelligence Committee report in 1969, Britain's ambassador to Israel commented on the economic motives for supporting Israel:

Israel is already a valuable trading partner for Britain, and ... there is a high future potential for our economic relations with her ... On the other hand, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion ... that our prospects for profitable economic dealings with the Arab states are best static, and may indeed over the long term inevitably decline.

A pro-Arab policy in the region was rejected by the Foreign Office a year later largely 'because of the pressure which the United States government undoubtedly exert on HMG to keep us in line in any public pronouncements or negotiations on the dispute [sic].'

An early friend of the West, Rav Kook, the chief Ashkenazic rabbi from 1921-35, was convinced that 'the difference between the Israelite soul ... and the soul of all non-Jews, at any level, is greater and deeper than the difference between the soul of a human and the soul of an animal, for between the latter there is only a quantitative difference but between the former one there is a qualitative one.' Contradicting Whitehall's rhetorical commitment to nuclear disarmament, UN resolution 687, calling for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, is constantly undermined by US-British support for Israel's nuclear possessions (along with its own, increasing, supply). Noam Chomsky explains that 'from 1967 through 1981, the United States vetoed seven resolutions condemning Israeli practices in southern Lebanon, affirming Palestinian rights, and deploring Israeli's changing of the status of Jerusalem and its establishment of settlements in the occupied territories.'

Robert Fisk, the fine Middle East correspondent for the *Independent* (who holds more British and International Journalism awards than any other foreign correspondent), noted in April 2001 that 'we are reporting this terrible conflict as if we supported the South African whites against the blacks.' Israel doesn't rely on the Palestinians for anything, and as one of the Israeli Labour leaders Moshe Dayan explained, it's quite happy for the Palestinians to 'continue to live like dogs' – a condition historically surpassed only by Samson, who was enslaved in Gaza after having his eyes burned out by the Philistines.

To the *Economist*, observing Palestinian teenagers throwing rocks at armed Israeli guards, the 'violence is not one-sided. It has, in point of fact, been initiated by the Palestinians ... Israel's aim is to stop them' (6 October 2001). A much more accurate comment was made by Ben Kaspit, for whom, unlike the Palestinian hordes, Israel is not a state with an army, but an army with a state. No sentimentalist, Churchill also clearly explained his views on the Jewish right to the holy land in comparing (like Dayan) the Palestinian Arabs to dogs: 'I do not agree that the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race to put it that way, has come in and taken their place.' His literary flair no doubt proves him worthy of the 1953 Nobel Prize for Literature, 'for his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values.'

The white phosphorous [WP] shells used by Israeli forces against the civilian population of Gaza in January 2009 were 'incendiary airburst weapons designed to incinerate a wide target area' (Curtis). This fact (documented by respectable aid groups) failed to impress BBC World News correspondent Ben Brown, who announced on January 9th that white phosphorous shells were being used 'merely to illuminate targets in Gaza' (Media Lens). WP was also used illegally in the US attack on Fallujah in 2004, creating 'increases in cancer, leukemia and infant mortality and perturbations of the normal human population birth sex ratio significantly greater than those reported for the survivors of the A-Bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945' (Chris Busby, Malak Hamdan and Entesar Ariabi Cancer, 'Infant Mortality and Birth Sex-Ratio in Fallujah, Iraq 2005–2009,' *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2010, vol. 7) – another footnote to history deemed noteworthy only by the *Independent* (Patrick Cockburn, 'Toxic legacy of US assault on Fallujah 'worse than Hiroshima,'" 24 July 2010). WP is in many ways a modern parallel to Churchill's favourite toy, poison gas, which he enjoyed using in the early 1920s – a fine contribution to the world's safety and happiness. This, he believed, would spread a 'lively terror' amongst 'uncivilised tribesmen and recalcitrant Arabs,' beginning a harsh legacy of British violence against the Kurds and Afghans.