

Israel exploits world focus on Iraq to intensify terror against Palestinians

David Cohen
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Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is carrying out bloody massacres daily in the Occupied Territories, using the world's focus on the upcoming war against Iraq as a partial measure of concealment and relying in particular on the tacit support provided by Washington.

Samira, 21, is a student who lives in the city of Nablus. She summarised the situation quite simply: "The butcher from Tel Aviv is encouraging the butcher from Washington to realise his mini-Hiroshima plan for Iraq in order to advance his historic plan: driving out the Arabs from their country, assassinating their leadership and smashing their national aspirations for national liberation and sovereignty."

The peace group Gush Shalom (Peace Block) in Israel wrote that on the night between March 2 and 3, Israel's military mounted a massive invasion of the El-Bureij Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip, in the course of which five houses were blown up leaving eight inhabitants dead including two boys aged 13 and 16 and the pregnant Noha El-Makadme (33) buried under the ruins of her home.

On March 4, the Israeli media reported on the army's operation in the Old City of Nablus. In Channel 10's report, a soldier not identified by name, rank or function was interviewed and said, "Our task here is to find the wanted terrorists and kill them." Standing near the soldier was an officer who later was identified as "Lieutenant Colonel Amir, Commander of the Reconnaissance Battalion of the Nachal Brigade".

Gush Shalom wrote that such reports "give a clear impression that the soldiers operating in the Old City of Nablus perceived their mission as the carrying out of extra-judicial executions". The movement concluded that given the broadcasts of such opinions on a news item that was "clearly proved by the military censorship, with the reporter invited to join the soldiers

on their mission in Nablus and photographing them at night with special equipment, a reasonable soldier of another unit is likely to come to the conclusion that extra-judicial executions are an official IDF policy, and act upon that conclusion on his own unit's missions."

Shulamit Aloni, a leader in Israel's Peace Coalition, wrote in *Ha'aretz*, "We do not have gas chambers and crematoria, but there is no one fixed method for genocide.... The government of Israel, using the military and its instruments of destruction, is not only spilling blood, but it is also suffocating. What other name can be given to the dropping of a one-ton bomb over a dense urban area, when the justification uttered is that we wanted to murder a dangerous terrorist and his wife?"

Aloni asked, "And what is the justification for what happened in Jenin? We did not destroy the whole neighbourhood, just 85 houses; it was not slaughter, we killed only 50-some citizens. How many does one need to murder and destroy for it to be a crime?"

Such statements are routinely dismissed as an expression of anti-Semitism by the defenders of Zionist outrages, but it is necessary to call things by their right name. Israel is using the same methods of the indiscriminate killing of civilians as the Nazis did in the Jewish ghettos, with the aim of terrorising an entire people.

Aloni explained the current situation by referring to Sharon's past: "The order that Ariel Sharon gave to the soldiers who went to wreak revenge in Qibiah [an Arab village]: 'Maximise losses in life and property', has not been forgotten. Benny Alon, (a minister in the present government), already said: 'make their life so bitter that they will transfer themselves willingly.'"

The lives of Palestinians in Gaza are indeed being made a daily hell. The web site, the *Palestine*

Monitor—Voice of Civil Society, reported on March 7, “In what has recently become a normal occurrence, Israeli soldiers last night invaded another area of the Gaza Strip. According to residents, around 40 tanks entered Jabaliya city and refugee camp. The camp residents were then subjected to random and indiscriminate shelling and gunfire which killed 11 Palestinians including Muhammad Shadeh Al-Bayara, a 61-year-old, and two children Ehab Ahmad Warde, 14, and Hamdi Abeid, 10, and injured dozens of other residents.”

It added, “Abdullah Shehadeh Al Ash’hab, a 75-year-old grandfather, was slowly riding his donkey, collecting firewood near his property, when an Israeli sniper suddenly shot him three times in the neck—killing him instantly, according to witness reports.”

It concluded, “In the past week 30 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers in various incidents. All but three of those killings occurred in the Gaza Strip, including eight killed in the invasion of Al-Bureij refugee camp on March 3. Five were children, two were female and two were over the age of 60.”

The intention is clear. The new government in Tel Aviv is initiating measures that will conclude with the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians and the realisation of Sharon’s vision of a Greater Israel. Only whether this will take place under the direct cover of war, or in its aftermath is yet to be determined.

Uri Avnery, leader of the peace movement Gush Shalom, wrote in the movement’s newsletter regarding the plans of the Sharon government in case of war against Iraq, as revealed in statements by officials and the press.

“The threats published just recently by the Israeli media include, among many others: Imposing a total curfew on the Palestinian people and land; Declaring the Palestinian territories closed military areas, thus preventing foreign and local journalists from operating in the territories.”

He warned that Sharon wishes to continue with “the Israeli practice of mass detention of Palestinian activists without charges, and the destruction of Palestinian homeland infrastructure, [and] possible mass transfer of Palestinian civilian population from certain locations adjacent to the proposed Israeli security wall. These areas belong to the occupied West Bank.... Possible efforts to transfer Palestinians from

the Occupied Territories to neighbouring countries [can be carried out, alongside] possible elimination of the elected president of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat, or his deportation to a remote area.”

Israel’s bloody atrocities and war crimes are being implemented thanks to the green light given by the Bush administration. Washington has accepted Sharon’s earlier insistence that his war against the Palestinians be made an integral part of its own plans to redraw the map of the Middle East following the military occupation of Iraq. Sharon knows that this is the key issue for him. In his speech after a suicide bomber killed 16 innocents in bus explosion in Haifa City, he made a point of insisting once more that “American and Israel are fighting against the same enemy.”

Israel has been made part of US war manoeuvres and has made statements that it will launch attacks on Syria and Hezbollah military targets as soon as war is declared. Bush’s advisers, many of whom enjoy long and intimate relations with Israel’s ruling Likud party, know all this and are urging US support for Sharon’s long-term plans for the Palestinians.



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