

The reoccupation of Gaza: Israel and the Big Lie

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There is arguably no modern state that more shamelessly employs the propaganda technique of the Big Lie than Israel. Since July 6, Israel has been deploying its military forces in an operation to reoccupy Northern Gaza, killing dozens of Palestinians, including civilians, and injuring many more.

Tanks have rolled into the northern town of Beit Lahiya, bulldozing land, trees and houses. Some local residents have fled. Others hide in fear. One told the BBC, “We are living in a war. Everything is targeted by the Army...Because of the tanks, it is too dangerous to move. I didn’t go to work today. I counted 30 tanks moving in overnight, divided into two groups. They were covered by helicopters. They killed two civilians this morning.”

Israel has sought to justify the latest escalation in its assault on Gaza as a necessary measure to create a “buffer zone” following a July 5 Qassam rocket attack on the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon.

The rocket hit the parking lot of a high school, which was empty at the time, causing light damage but no injuries. The Israeli government and media immediately portrayed this event as a major act of aggression by the Palestinians.

The rocket had exploded 10 kilometers from the border with the Gaza Strip, the furthest penetration yet, and showed that the lives of scores of Israeli citizens were now being threatened, it was claimed. The furor intensified later after a second rocket hit a sports field.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert issued a stream of apocalyptic threats. The rocket attack, he declared, was “an escalation of unprecedented gravity,” a “major escalation in the war of terror that the Hamas organization is responsible for,” and an “attempt meant to harm Israeli civilians that live within the sovereign borders of Israel” that would “have far-reaching

consequences.” Israel would not “hold back or limit ourselves” in its retaliatory actions.

An emergency cabinet meeting was convened, which authorized Olmert and Defense Minister and Labour Party leader Amir Peretz “to continue [their] preparations for prolonged and graduated security activity... with emphasis on striking at institutions and infrastructures that serve terrorism” and “reducing terrorists’ freedom of movement by continuing to section off the Gaza Strip.”

Zeev Boim, a senior minister in the Security Cabinet, threatened, “As far as I’m concerned, the people of Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya can start packing.”

The tone of many media commentators was just as bellicose. The worst culprit was Zeev Schiff, military analyst for the Labour Party-oriented *Haaretz*, who described the rocket attack on Ashkelon as “an unequivocal Hamas invitation to war.”

As Goebbels famously insisted, the art of propaganda is to “lie big” and “stick to it.” There is no bigger lie than turning reality on its head. To claim that Israel is responding to Palestinian aggression requires more than a gross exaggeration of the threat posed by the crude rockets possessed by Hamas. It means ignoring everything that went on before Tuesday night.

Israel has been waging an unequal and increasingly bloody campaign against the Palestinians since it first invaded Southern Gaza on June 28 on the pretext of securing the release of Corporal Gilad Shalit. The rocket attack on Ashkelon came after a week in which Israel had made clear it intended to bring about the downfall of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority and inflict collective punishment on the Palestinians in order to end all resistance to Olmert’s plan to annex close to half of the West Bank.

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have rounded up

eight Hamas ministers, fully one-third of the Palestinian cabinet, and nearly two dozen lawmakers in the West Bank. Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres has said they will be put on trial for terrorism.

The IDF have twice bombed the offices of Prime Minister Ismail Haniya and threatened to assassinate Hamas political leader Khaled Meshaal and others exiled in Damascus. Israeli jets last week buzzed the palace of President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus and Olmert has threatened military reprisals against Syria.

Thousands of well-armed troops have been massed against an impoverished people and militants possessing little more than rifles, who are reduced to threatening suicide bomb attacks against tanks.

Israel mounts daily air attacks on Gaza's already decrepit infrastructure, destroying roads, bridges and its only power plant. With the aid of Egypt, it has sealed all the borders to prevent anyone from seeking respite from the collective punishment of the civilian population.

One resident in the Nuseirat refugee camp, in the centre of the Gaza Strip, told the BBC of the humanitarian disaster now looming. Mahmoud Mughari, 40, said, "A week ago we had electricity all the time, now it is just eight hours a day. Before, we had water two days in three, now it is four hours once every three days.... I am worried for the children, worried about disease."

Speaking of Israel's use of low-flying war planes to set off sonic booms, he added, "The smaller children do not understand that the sonic booms are just noise. My four-year-old daughter Mai thinks it's an explosion and wakes up screaming, running into my room."

These are actions that genuinely constitute an "unequivocal invitation to war"—an illegal war of aggression waged by a regime that cynically portrays itself as the victim.

Israel has one advantage not enjoyed by previous regimes, such as the Nazis, which employed the Big Lie as a centerpiece of their foreign policy: its lies are treated as good coin by the United States and the European powers. Washington was, as usual, able to block a resolution in the United Nations Security Council condemning Israel's incursion into Gaza by using its veto power. But it could not quash a resolution condemning Israel's collective punishment of the Palestinians from being moved at the recently formed

United Nations Human Rights Council.

The resolution, which was brought by Islamic states, expressed "grave concern at the violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people caused by the Israeli occupation, including the current extensive Israeli military operations."

It urged "Israel, the occupying power, to immediately release the arrested Palestinian ministers... and all other arrested Palestinian civilians" and called "for a negotiated solution to the current crisis."

Twenty-nine of the council's 47 member states backed the resolution, 11 voted against, five abstained and two members were absent. Those opposing the resolution included Britain, France and Germany.

The US representative to the UN in Geneva, Warren Tichenor, called the resolution "an unbalanced effort to single out and focus on Israel alone."

The European states justified their opposition to the resolution with similar claims that it was unbalanced. This is despite amendments calling on "all concerned parties to respect the rules of international humanitarian law and to refrain from violence against civilians" and for both sides to "treat under all circumstances all detained combatants and civilians in accordance with the Geneva Conventions."

The European Union has issued a statement condemning "the loss of lives caused by disproportionate use of force by the Israeli Defence Forces and the humanitarian crisis it has aggravated." But their performance in the United Nations makes abundantly clear that, when it comes to the crunch, none of the European powers will do anything that might risk antagonising Washington—the real sponsor of Israel's war crimes.



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