

IDF major general compares Israel with pre-Holocaust Germany

Jean Shaoul
10 May 2016

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government have forced Major General Yair Golan, the deputy chief of staff of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), to retract his statement drawing parallels between recent developments in Israeli society and processes that unfolded in Europe before the Holocaust.

Netanyahu was sending out a message that no criticism of the IDF's brutal treatment of the Palestinians, or of the Israeli government, will be tolerated.

Golan's remarks, made during a speech last Wednesday evening to commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day, drew attention to the virulent anti-Palestinian and xenophobic atmosphere that pervades Israel.

"If there's something that frightens me about Holocaust remembrance it's the recognition of the revolting processes that occurred in Europe in general, and particularly in Germany, back then—70, 80 and 90 years ago—and finding signs of them here among us today in 2016," he said.

The Holocaust "must make us think deeply about the responsibility of leadership, the quality of society, and it must lead us to fundamental thinking about how we, here and now, treat the stranger, the orphan and the widow, and all who are like them."

He added, "There is nothing easier than hating the stranger, nothing easier than to stir fears and intimidate. There is nothing easier than to behave like an animal and to act sanctimoniously. ... On Holocaust Remembrance Day we ought to discuss our ability to uproot the seeds of intolerance, violence, self-destruction and moral deterioration."

Golan's remarks were aimed at the extreme nationalistic fervour expressed in the demonstrations in support of the IDF soldier Elor Azaria.

Azaria was caught on video shooting an alleged Palestinian attacker, already injured by the IDF and lying incapacitated on the ground. So blatant was the crime that the military authorities were forced to charge him with manslaughter for "unlawfully causing the death" of Abdul Fatah al-Sharif in Hebron last month.

Al-Sharif is one of more than 200 Palestinians killed by the IDF since the unrest began last October over the attempts by Israeli ultra-nationalists to take control of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem. The rallies, and the statements by politicians at such rallies, carried the clear message that all Palestinians are terrorists and so killing Palestinians, regardless of the circumstances, is not only justifiable but also desirable.

Golan's words, while true, are no more than a polite criticism of the vicious national and religious chauvinism deliberately cultivated by successive governments, as part of the broader campaign to build a social and political constituency supportive of Israel's expansion into the Palestinian territories seized during the 1967 War. It has become commonplace for these layers to taunt and insult Palestinians, chant slogans such as "death to the Arabs" and launch attacks on Palestinian property and lives that go unpunished and barely reported.

Golan's speech cut across the sanitised picture Netanyahu and his ilk like to paint, of Israel as the victim of a hostile world bent on its destruction. The Holocaust is routinely and cynically invoked to justify Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinians, its constant military assaults on the occupied territories, its wars and bellicose threats against its neighbours, including Iran.

Golan is no liberal. He spoke as someone who has long held leading positions in the IDF, which has

carried out untold crimes against Lebanon, Gaza and the Palestinian people in the occupied West Bank. He was a commander during the IDF's first operations in the West Bank against the Palestinians during the second Intifada in 2000, and used Palestinians as a human shield when entering the homes of alleged terrorists, a procedure banned by Israel's High Court in 2005, and for which he received a reprimand in 2007.

It was under Golan's command of the Northern Command that injured fighters from the US and the Gulf's proxy forces in the sectarian-stoked war to unseat Syria's President Bashar al-Assad were first allowed into Israel, in 2013, to receive medical treatment. Since then, more than 2,000 Islamist mercenaries have been treated in Israeli hospitals.

It was as a loyal servant of the Israeli state that the major general warned the ruling elite that the increasingly apparent politically noxious state of Israeli society poses a threat to its very survival.

The response of Netanyahu was to shoot the messenger. His remarks provoked a veritable witch-hunt from Israel's media, which initiated a smear campaign twisting Golan's words to suggest that he had equated the IDF with the Wehrmacht, Israel with the Nazis, and Palestinians with Jews that were transported to the concentration camps. He was accused of "cheapening the Holocaust," besmirching the good name of the IDF and defaming the state. There were calls for his resignation.

The frenzied reaction was in part conditioned by the fact that the Zionist regime and its defenders internationally were in the midst of a related campaign to brand the Labour Party in Britain as anti-Semitic.

This has centred on entirely bogus accusations levelled against that senior Labour figure Ken Livingstone, the former mayor of London, for remarks he made while defending Labour MP Naz Shah, for which he was suspended.

Livingstone famously said, "Let's remember, when Hitler won his election in 1932 [sic] his policy then was that Jews should be moved to Israel. He was supporting Zionism. [He then] went mad and ended up killing 6 million Jews." But he and others have been accused of anti-Semitism for making any comparison whatsoever between the treatment of the Jews by Nazi Germany and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. Indeed, one TV commentator noted that if Golan had been a British

Labour politician he would have been expelled from the party within the hour.

Golan retracted his statements the next day, saying that he had not meant to compare Israel and the IDF with what took place in Germany 70 years ago. Nor had he sought to criticize Israel's political leadership. He concluded by reiterating the absurd nostrum that the IDF is a moral army that maintains "purity of arms"—as laid down in the IDF's official doctrine of ethics stipulating that it must only act in a way that elicits moral approval and the political support of the world "community."

However, this climb-down only served to underscore the truth of his timorous remarks about the undemocratic nature of the Israeli state, where even the mildest of political criticism is beyond the pale. Netanyahu's demand that Golan recant expresses an increasingly isolated and demoralised ruling class that has lost its head and has no answer to the crisis it confronts except increased authoritarianism, brutality and war.

Notwithstanding the nationalist propaganda that the Zionist state represents all those of the Jewish faith, Israel is a capitalist society, divided along class lines and beset with massive social antagonisms. It is a state founded on the displacement of much of the native Arab population and the reduction of the rest to the position of second class citizens in a religion-based social order dedicated to preserving the rule of a handful of billionaires.

The incitement of racism and anti-Palestinian thuggery and the suppression of basic democratic rights this requires, including the right to speak the truth, are measures associated with Nazi Germany and the dictatorships of the 1930s. Whatever apologies are issued, whatever effort at suppressing critical voices is made, this will only deepen the revulsion and hostility toward Zionism throughout the Middle East, around the world and among Jewish workers and youth in Israel itself.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact