

Law and Justice: Israel Investigated, But Will It Repent?

By [Ramzy Baroud](#)

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Any variation of the words “ Palestine ” and “massacre” are sure to yield millions of results on major search engines on the World Wide Web. These results are largely in reference to hundreds of different dates and events in which numerous Palestinians were killed by the Israeli army or settlers. But references to massacres of similar nature precede the state of Israel itself, whose establishment was secured through the ever-expanding agenda of ethnically cleansing Palestinians. Throughout its history, this bloodletting project has been carried out for once specific purpose, that being the illegal acquirement of land and the suppression or extermination of those who dare to resist.

Israel has denied almost every massacre it has committed. Those too obvious to deny, were “investigated” by Israel itself, which predictably, mostly found its soldiers “not guilty” or culpable of minor misconduct. Israeli “investigations” served the dual purpose of helping Israelis retain their sense of moral superiority, and sending a highly touted message to international media of Israeli democracy at work and the independence of the country’s judiciary.

With the Gaza tragedy of December 2008-January 2009 being the latest in the ever growing list of Palestinian massacres, little seems to have changed the way Israel views its action, with the full approval of the US and the half hearted position of much of the international community.

Nonetheless, on April 3, the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed Richard Goldstone, a South-African Jewish judge to further investigate what the council had already resolved, in a vote on January 12, as “grave” violations of human rights by the Israeli army, in reference to the 22-day Israeli onslaught in Gaza, where over 1,400 Palestinians – mostly civilians – were killed and over 5,500 wounded.

Israeli foreign ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor told AFP , in response to the UNHRC decision that the investigation was “not an attempt to find the truth but to tarnish Israel ‘s reputation and to join efforts led by some countries to demonize Israel .” He added, “The investigation has no moral ground since it decided even before it started who is guilty and of what.” Palmor went on to exploit Israel ’s ever winning card: democracy, claiming that democratic nations didn’t support the call to investigate the Gaza murders.

But the truth is, the UNHRC didn’t jump to conclusions, but was following up on massive evidence, all pointing to the same inference: that Israel has committed war crimes in Gaza .

The work of UN human rights investigator Richard Falk itself represents an inescapable

indictment of the Israeli army. His statements and reports of recent months maintained that the Israeli blockade against Gaza is “an unconditional violation of international humanitarian law”, and that “massive assault on a densely populated urbanized setting, subjected the entire civilian population to “an inhumane form of warfare that kills, maims and inflicts mental harm”.

The illegality of the Israeli war and the violations of human rights committed throughout the Israeli violence are not only made clear by the international legal standards used by Falk; many others made similar assessments.

For example, on March 23, UN human rights experts accused Israel , of using Gazans as human shields, highlighting the case of an 11-year-old boy. UN secretary-general’s envoy for protecting children in armed conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy stated that Israeli “violations were reported on a daily basis, too numerous to list.”

Coomaraswamy “explained that the Israeli army shot Palestinian children, bulldozed a home with a woman and child still inside and shelled a building they had ordered civilians into a day earlier,” Press TV reported. But these were “just a few examples of the hundreds of incidents that have been documented and verified”.

The Israeli onslaught and ongoing siege has cost Gaza dearly, destroyed its humble economy, ruined its arable land and continues to starve its population. Reports of such facts are easily available. The words “ Gaza ” and “destroyed” are also sure to yield ample results. Falk, a well-regarded Jewish professor knew fully the underpinnings of his statement when he said in late January that the Israeli actions in Gaza are reminiscent of “the worst kind of international memories of the Warsaw Ghetto”.

Still, Palmor, like most Israelis, is not convinced, and continues to sermonize on morality and democracy and the rest of the ever predictable terms. But if Palmor indeed believes of such an international conspiracy of ‘undemocratic’ countries to “tarnish” Israel’s otherwise prefect “reputation”, he might wish to revert to Israeli newspaper Haaretz’s extensive coverage of Israeli soldiers’ testimonies of their own conduct in Gaza.

“It feels like hunting season has begun,” Haaretz quoted an Israeli soldier who served in Gaza as saying. “Sometimes it reminds me of a Play Station (computer) game. You hear cheers in the war room after you see on the screens that the missile hit a target, as if it were a soccer game.”

“There was one house with a family in it... we put them into some room. Afterward, we left the house and another company went in, and a few days after we went in there was an order to release the family. We took our positions upstairs. There was a sniper positioned on the roof and the company commander released the family and told them to take a right,” said another soldier. “One mother and her two children didn’t understand, and they took a left. Someone forgot to notify the sniper on the roof that the family had been released, and that it was okay, it was fine, to hold fire, and he... you can say he acted as necessary, as he was ordered to.”

In a better world, many Israeli political and military leaders would find themselves before an international criminal court answering difficult questions. For now, they remain adamant that the Israeli army is the “most moral” in the world.

One must hope that the term “justice for Palestine ” will quit being simply a popular search item, and in fact reflect a tangible reality; so that the extensive list of Palestinian massacres will finally come to an end.

Ramzy Baroud (www.ramzybaroud.net) is an author and editor of PalestineChronicle.com. His work has been published in many newspapers, journals and anthologies around the world. His latest book is, “The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People’s Struggle” (Pluto Press, London), and his forthcoming book is, “My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza The Untold Story” (Pluto Press, London)

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