

REALNEWS

Reflections at Day's End

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The Ruins of Rafa
Operation Cast Lead
January 2009

**Readers are advised that "The Dismemberment of Gaza, Part II"
contains a number of disturbing images**

On the Need for a New Way

At a certain point, words become pointless. After generating the thirty-eight treatises of his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas laid down his quill in a supremely eloquent statement of the limitations of written text. Not a few who have sought to use the written word as a vehicle of transformation and illumination have since concurred with the angelic doctor's conclusions. The intervening centuries since Aquinas have brought us to greater apparent freedoms where, through the ambivalent graces of technology, the oral, the aural and the visual have become more available as ways of gaining knowledge of the world.

Yet all of the written words, all of the spoken words and all of the images in the world have done little to alter our apparent determination to aggressively pursue the ways of perdition disguised as gain, to ferociously claim our freedom to do what we want whenever we want to, to heartlessly wage war without end without thought of the destruction of humans, of households and of the institutions of civil society, to voraciously acquire wealth through whatever means can be gotten away with, and to enslave the hungry and the desperate in distant places in order to fill further the already surfeited shelves of our retail spaces.

So how are we to awaken from the privileged slumber that disregards the torment and lost hopes of those who are immersed and ensnared in the chaos wrought by hubrist rulers and their bloated military establishments?

Yet there is some good will. Look carefully between the lines served up in the soporific tabloids that litter the world and you may find an occasional impassioned call for justice, an occasional reflection on the crookedness of the times. Yet the wheel relentless turns, often crushing those who happen to find themselves in its path. We just don't seem to get it, while high and respected criminals get away with it all the time.

There are some who would shrug and call this the inevitable fruit of fallen human nature. Both the blood-soaked earth and generations of grieving mothers have witnessed the madness of war, yet we continue to prepare for the waging of war without end. It's good for business, they say. Thus the whole inglorious human history.

Small wonder, then, that we remain benumbed even in the midst of the escalating predicament within which we find ourselves, where the earth's finely wrought systems that balance the concentration of gases within the atmosphere, that maintain the fertility of forests and prairies and cultivated lands, that regulate the composition and flow of oceanic waters are now irretrievably damaged by the ferocity and violence of technological civilisation.

A young family friend recently returned from a visit to Japan. She spoke of the ubiquity and the vividness of the neon light that nightly sears and punctures the skyscape of Japanese cities. Astronauts circling the earth in their amazing machines have similarly identified the cities of the world as glowing zones in an otherwise starkly darkened nightscape.

How are we to sensitively interact with our circumstances in ways that are appropriate to our present situation? How

are we to deal with the contradiction implied in meticulously replacing all our household light bulbs with new low-energy forms while the empty but well-illuminated buildings throughout the cities of the world everywhere brighten the night sky? Will we ever awaken to the irony of installing solar panels on our roofs while a new coal-fired power station is commissioned every week in China?

Perhaps we may get it on a personal level, but we still haven't got it collectively. Most of us have by now seen Al Gore's movie. Some of us can still recall David Suzuki's cautions delivered on his visits to Australia in the 1980s. Many of us applauded Ross Garnaud's courageous call in 2008. But we have all been strangely absent to the castration of his visionary suggestions by lukewarm Canberra politicians. And we have all remained strangely silent about the acquiescence and banality of a once fiery environment minister who now nods approvingly at the commissioning of the gigantic Four Mile uranium mine in South Australia.

There may be other factors at work in all of this. Seen in organic terms, we live in a senescent civilisation that has expropriated and squandered its collective reserves, needlessly vitiating its own powers in the process. The great forests of the earth have been decimated. The once-vast shoals of fish in our oceans have similarly been ruined. Mighty mountains of metal have been levelled and smelted on every continent. But unlike the coming of age in nature, our civilisation appears not to be losing its appetite, but rather becomes more voracious.

While NASA and the Space Administrations of Europe, China and

Japan busily plan for the next wave of excursions that will see the establishment of "permanent" bases on the moon and a human presence on Mars within the next ten years, we have yet to understand the enormity of the damage already done to the earth, and the need for determined collective action if we are to retain any hope for a liveable future.

It's not that we don't have the knowledge or the means of changing our present course. We just haven't understood that the earth has her own limits.

Over the past century, we have experienced two of the most destructive wars in human history. More than seventy million people, including forty seven million non-combatants, were killed during World War II alone. These are mind-numbing numbers, impossible to comprehend. The great cities of Warsaw, Dresden, Hamburg, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were all destroyed and vast charnel grounds were created in the war fields of Europe, Russia and North Africa. Yet we somehow recovered. We rebuilt, restored, repopulated and relentlessly raced towards the next calamitous round.

The Cold War may have ended, but both the US and Russia each continue to harbour over 10,000 nuclear warheads, China and France each have over 300, the UK has over 200, and depending on who you read, Israel's Negev desert shelters between 100 and 300 nuclear warheads in cold and silent silos. And the thuggish Netanyahu and Lieberman roar and rail, complaining that they didn't go far enough in Gaza.

Are our written words as dust in a gathering wind? Are our calls for peace ever to be realised? Can we find a new way to be on the earth?

LETTER FROM GEMBROOK

The Humble Blackbird

I tossed in a fresh bone and locked little dog Pip in the laundry with a hot water bottle wrapped in its favourite blanket, and took off down the steps. This morning I felt full to bursting with energy, wanting to power my way up the Quinn Road hill. Snowy took off ahead of me as if sharing my impatience to scan the horizon from the top of the hill.

Just as I threw the carry bag up over my shoulder and felt the rhythm of my trekking boots taking over, I saw two blackbirds flitting around the window of the shed. I'm sure they were trying to catch my eye, fearful I'd forgotten them, which I had till I saw them. Every morning I put a handful of mini dog yummys on the windowsill of the shed and in a couple of other strategic places. The blackbirds love them and are there waiting every day. They come up close and almost take them from your hand, as bold as you like.

On the weekend I disturbed a blackbird's nest. It had 3 speckled blue eggs inside and I had to remove it from my burning heap so it wasn't incinerated when I burn the heap, which I'll do in the next few days before the fire restrictions come in. I was glad it didn't have fledglings. I would have had to abandon plans to burn and have a dry firehazard heap there all summer. Even disposing of the eggs didn't come easily to me. The birds are a part of the garden and the whole ecosystem that keeps us alive and I have affection for their efforts to raise young.

It made me think of Paul, a fellow who lives adjoining Nobelius Park. We had a discussion about blackbirds, and birds in general, a few weeks ago. Paul is a 'greenie'. He loves the natural environment and he approached me in the park to ask what vegetation was

being removed. I'd put a sign up, in conjunction with the council, advertising the removal of vegetation and inviting objections. He approached me wanting to know what vegetation was to be removed and when I answered that in the short term the first things to go would be the three Japanese cedars near his place, he asked if this could be delayed because there were butcher birds nesting there at the time. Could we wait till the fledglings had left the nest?

I replied this would be no problem, there was no urgency. I told him that once this permit to remove vegetation was obtained it meant that the vegetation management plan had been approved by council's planning section, which meant that over a period of years, as funding allowed, we would remove more things due to overcrowding, inappropriate siting, etc, without having to obtain a permit each time. I pointed to a prunus niger tree nearby suggesting it as an example.

Now you learn something every day. Paul said he'd be sorry to see the prunus go because the leaves were a good food supply for the ring tailed possums which had drays in the thuja nearby. We went and looked and saw a blackbird's nest as well. I said, "Actually Paul, this thuja is probably to go eventually, as this area in front of the packing shed is zoned for open vista, meaning there will be low growing plantation. The thuja grows very large and will block the vista."

He said he understood the need to have a long term plan but before anything was removed, could I let him know so that if the possums were in that dray he'd move them gently to another dray before the tree removal. He said he was unconcerned about the blackbirds, they were an introduced English bird and should not be here at all. He regularly searched the park for their nests and destroyed them.

This struck me as a bit odd. If the blackbirds shouldn't be here because they aren't native, neither should the Japanese cedars, which provided nesting sites for butcher birds and others, the prunus, which give food to ringtails, and the thujas, where the ringtails nest.

I told him this, and added that if you followed that logic through, he and I shouldn't be here either as our origins are European, and the impact of our population has been devastating to just about everything indigenous over 150 years.

He saw my point. We agreed that it's very important to maintain wilderness areas without European species and to preserve large areas of native indigenous bush but this couldn't apply to the whole country if you wanted to house and feed 20 million people.

The humble blackbird plays a part in the whiteman's food chain, establishing itself along with us, in our gardens. It has a role to play eating grubs and insects and I'm sure has a beneficial role in the scheme of things. I know they are territorial but so is nearly everything. I'll keep feeding my brave little blackbirds.

Carey Williams
Gembrook, Victoria

The Dismembering of Gaza Part II

So who now remembers Gaza, apart from the families and friends of the 1,400 people who lost their lives and the 5,000 who were maimed, burned and dismembered during the 22 days of Israel's assault on Gaza from December 27th 2008 to January 18th 2009?

The new guard in the state of Israel, under the determined intentions of Benjamin Netanyahu and Avigdor

Lieberman, continues to whitewash the dirty reality within which it abides. Israel's Education Ministry has recently excised the term *Naqba* - the Palestinian word for *Great Catastrophe* - from every textbook used in Israeli schools. For the past sixty years, Palestinians have used this term to describe their experience of 1948 and the Palestinian diaspora that followed after the creation of the State of Israel. In the new lexicon of Middle Eastern history crafted by the semantic engineers of Israel, that time and that experience are now to be remembered as *The War For Independence*.

Even before UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of November 1947 that divided mandate Palestine into Jewish and Palestinian sectors, there were sustained attempts to deprive the Palestinian people of their cultural and historical identity. Edward Said gave over much of his titanic energy to the task of affirming the existential reality of people and place that has been so terribly undermined over the past 70 years. Unless one has actually walked the streets of Gaza or Ramallah, it is difficult to come to a deep understanding of the historic plight of the Palestinian people without a knowledge of Said's work. He has virtually single-handedly seared a consciousness of the cultural and historical reality of the Palestinian people into recent history. His courageous advocacy has been sustained since the time of his death in 2003 by such tireless individuals as Mustapha Barghouthi and Sara Roy.

There was no such geographical entity as Palestine before the time of the British occupation after World War I. The newly mandated Palestine had long been considered to be part of *bilad-al-sham*, or Greater Syria. The people who had lived in, worked on and travelled through those lands over many centuries and countless generations claimed their "Palestinianness" not through any

European map-making, but because of their long-standing relationship with the land and the region.

After the UN partitioning in 1947, Jewish historians set about detailing the long-standing connection between their own people and the lands that they were about to occupy. They claimed that the former mandate Palestine was an abject and neglected land that could only be rescued by Jewish colonisation.

While still in the flush of glory at the end of the six day war in 1967, then-Defence Minister Moshe Dayan told the Palestinians: “We have no solution, you shall continue to live like dogs, and whoever wishes may leave, and we will see where this process leads.” (Noam Chomsky, *Z Net*, 8/6/09)

As president of the State of Israel during the early 1970s, Golda Meir said on more than one occasion: “There is no such thing as a Palestinian.”

Benjamin Netanyahu has long been of the view that Palestinians have no right to a share of the entire Biblical land of Israel – which includes all of the West Bank and which stretches into present day Jordan – because they “stole” it from Israel in 636 A.D. (Johann Hari, *The Independent/UK*, 6/2/09).

In comments worthy of any member of Hitler’s SS, his Foreign Minister and coalition partner, Avigdor Lieberman has spoken openly of drowning Palestinians in the Dead Sea and executing Israeli Palestinians who talked to Hamas (Robert Fisk, *the Independent/UK*, 19/3/09).

In 1992, Palestinian historian Beshara Dhoumani reflected: “The political implications of the deep-rooted unwillingness to deal openly with the question of the native population [of

Palestine] were such that the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, not to mention their very existence, are still a matter of contention even today.” (“Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History”, *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, XXI, 2, 1992) The situation has, if anything, worsened in the intervening time.

Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing has written incisively on how a sustained negation and denial of the experience of another can cause the other to go mad. The systematic negation of both the ontological status and the political rights of Palestinians has similarly created a maddening reality for the people of a divided and oppressed Palestine.

Palestinian society and Palestinian culture reach far deeper than such groups as Hamas, Fatah and the Palestinian Authority. Yet the State of Israel has used the corruption and incompetence of these organisations to justify and legitimise the dehumanisation of all Palestinian men, women and children.



During the first three weeks of January 2009, volley upon volley of monstrous weapons shredded the skies of Gaza, a tiny, densely populated strip of land 8 kilometres wide and 45 kilometres long. On January 4th, the sour-mouthed Israeli President Shimon Peres said: “Israel’s aim was to provide a strong blow to the people of Gaza so they would lose their appetite for shooting at Israel” (*The Guardian*,

11/2/2009). That strong blow was relentlessly delivered. It resulted in the death of over 240 children under the age of sixteen, the death of hundreds of non-combatant men and women, the wounding of five thousand others and the creation of enduring psychological terror for tens, if not hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

The Israeli soldiers have long since returned to their homes and barracks. The bloodied mess of broken bodies and broken roads and buildings was left for the people of Gaza to deal with.

But who now remembers Gaza?



There is a peculiar cynicism hidden in the events leading up to *Operation Cast Lead*. Ariel Sharon callously oversaw the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon in 1982. Two decades later, the haughty George Bush Junior lauded him as a “man of peace”. A year after that ludicrous statement was made, Sharon’s prince-hood was confirmed by his order to dismantle all

Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and to evacuate the 7,000 Israeli “settlers” who had illegally claimed lands in Gaza under the protective mantle of well-armed Israeli Defence Force guards.

The attack upon Gaza early this year could never have happened without Sharon’s emptying of Gaza of its Israeli inhabitants four years earlier. The captive and impotent native population was thereby laid bare to a relentless disgorgement of lethal weaponry by the Israeli military in *Operation Cast Lead*.

Israel has in recent decades itself become a major developer and manufacturer of sophisticated weapons. But most of its military hardware has been supplied by the US. After the Vietnam debacle in the 1970s, Israel stepped up to the pad as the next major recipient of US military aid. It has retained that position ever since.

Israel has been given over two billion dollars every year - most of it in the form of military “assistance” - by the US for decades now. In the past eight years alone, the Bush administration has provided over 21 billion dollars in “security assistance.” In addition to these lethal gratuities, Israel has recently signed contracts with US arms manufacturers for over 22 billion dollars of new military hardware. This includes a deal for 75 Joint Strike Fighters, 9 military transport aircraft and 4 combat ships.

Israel already has 180,000 heavily armed regular troops in their armed forces, 140,000 conscripts, 4,300 impenetrable Merkava battle tanks, 10,000 light tanks and armoured cars, 500 missile-laden fighter jets, 1340 helicopters, three submarines, three destroyers and 40 smaller warships.

And what do the Palestinians have?



The full might of the Israeli military was projected into the tiny space of Gaza early this year. Conn Hallinan has described Gaza as “Death’s Laboratory” (*Foreign Policy in Focus*, 12/2/09). Israel’s new weapons have caused injuries never before seen in the hospitals of Gaza. Many of these were caused by the widespread use of a new class of weapons called Dense Inert Metal Explosive (DIME). These weapons were developed eight years ago by the US Air Force and scientists from the University of California’s Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. They consist of a high explosive core around which is wrapped powdered tungsten alloy in a carbon fibre container. On detonation, the tungsten sprays out explosively over a ten-meter radius shredding everything in its field. The resultant injuries are truly shocking.



Norwegian doctor Mads Gilbert reported that the weapon causes multiple amputations. He commented: “The muscles are sort of split from the bones, hanging loose, and you also have quite severe burns.” He continued: “Those inside the perimeter of this weapon’s power zone will be torn completely apart. We have seen numerous amputations that we suspect have been caused by this.” Mads Gilbert went on to say, “I’ve never seen anything as bad as that. I have been to many conflict zones. I was in Beirut in 1982 . . . but Gaza was the worst.”



A German doctor working in Kham Younis in southern Gaza offered his own observations: “Initially, everything seems in order. . . But it turns out on operation that dozens of miniature particles can be found in all their organs.” Most of those who survive the shredding of their limbs succumb soon after to septicaemia and organ collapse. Habas Al-Wahid, head of emergency at a Gaza hospital observed that in several cases of DIME-caused injuries, the legs of the injured were sliced from their bodies “as if a saw was used to cut through the bone.”

Are these the intended fruits of human ingenuity, of our capacity for deep intelligence, of our mastery of the art of technological innovation?

The longer-term consequences of the use of tungsten-based weapons have yet to be realised. Like depleted uranium, which has caused numerous cancers and monstrous birth deformities in Iraq, aerosol tungsten will bring its own future woes. It has already been implicated as a possible cause of leukaemia and other cancers. (Conn Hallinan, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 12/2/09)

The DIME weapons used in Gaza were either supplied directly to Israel by the US or were manufactured in Israel under US instructions. They have yet to be banned under the Geneva Conventions because - until Gaza - they had yet to be systematically “tested” on a living population.

Despite all pleas to the contrary and claims of good conduct by Israel, the war upon Gaza, like all wars, was an act of profound lawlessness and deceit.

The use of phosphorus-based weapons near populated areas has long been prohibited under international law. But this did not prevent the use of such weapons by Israel. Suspicions were raised early when, in addition to the hundreds of half-ton “conventional” bombs that rained upon Gaza every day, the characteristic spray of burning white phosphorus streaking through the sky began to be noticed in some of the airbursts. Within a short time, people arrived in casualty wards of Gaza with horrible burns that continued to smoke and smoulder even after they had been washed and bandaged.



During the first week of Israel’s offensive, journalists from the UK *Times* identified row upon row of American-made pale blue M825A1 white phosphorus artillery shells from high-resolution images of Israeli artillery units on the Israeli-Gaza border (*The Times*, 5/1/09). Their reports were met with strident denials by IDF spokespersons. This echoed the Israeli denials three years earlier of having used phosphorus against civilian targets in Lebanon. They lied in August 2006 and they lied again in January 2009. But that is all part of how war is conducted by civilised nations in obscene times.

On 11th January, IDF spokeswoman Major Avital Leibovitch stated: “I can assure you we do not use any weapons that are prohibited by international law. There are other nations that use phosphorus bombs, and we have the right not to comment on this.” (*Inter Press Service*, 12/1/09) She was probably referring to the fact that both Britain and the US used white phosphorus in Iraq, especially during the Fallujah campaign. So the fact of one obscenity is thereby used to justify another.

Another weapon used in Gaza was the newly developed GPS-guided mortar. The GPS mortar was developed by the Israeli weapons industry working closely with the US company Alliant. GPS mortars are equipped with satellite navigation systems and are said to act with surgical precision. Yet they were found wanting. During the second week of January, precisely such a weapon missed its intended target by 30 meters and slammed into a United Nations Relief and Works Agency school where many women and children had sought refuge. It killed 30 of them outright. Another 10 women and children died of their injuries soon after. Many others sustained horrendous injuries. (Amira Hass, *Haaretz*, 16/1/09)

The assault upon Gaza was many months in the making. Steven Zunes reports:

“Israeli Defence minister Ehud Barak admitted that the Israeli invasion had been planned for months, back when a six-month cease fire was still in effect.” (*Foreign Policy in Focus*, 29/5/09)

Not a single Hamas rocket had been fired into Israel from the time the cease-fire was declared on June 18th 2008 and the deadly truce-breaking Israeli air attack in Gaza on November 4th 2008 that killed six Hamas members. And in spite of the predictable and cynically anticipated resumption by Hamas of cross-border rocket fire, “not a single Israeli had been killed by rocket attacks for more than half a year prior to Israel launching its war on December 27” (Steven Zunes, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 29/5/09). The planning for *Operation Cast Lead* was already under way in March 2008. It was fully in place many months before the actual assault.

After months of back-room negotiations, the US agreed to supply Israel with 1,000 GBU-39 bombs in September 2008. These new weapons had been developed and assembled by the Boeing Corporation. The GBU-39 is designed to penetrate deep into the earth before exploding. Arrays of these new weapons were delivered in early December. Within the first hours of the Israeli offensive, hundreds of GBU-39 bombs had been dropped on Rafa in an attempt to destroy the network of tunnels that enabled the movement of essential goods and materials from Egypt into Gaza.



The IDF was militarily well prepared for the December 27 assault. So too was its public relations arm. Like the GBU-39 bombs at Rafa, silver-tongued commentators miraculously and simultaneously appeared in the major media outlets throughout the Western world.

In an impassioned piece entitled “Israel’s Lies”, Henry Seigman, former national director of the American Jewish Congress inveighed:

“Western governments and most of the Western media have accepted a number of Israeli claims justifying the military assault on Gaza: that Hamas consistently violated the six-month truce that Israel observed and then refused to extend it; that Israel therefore had no choice but to destroy Hamas’s capacity to launch missiles into Israeli towns; that Hamas is a terrorist organisation, part of a global jihadi network; and that Israel has acted not only in its own defence but on behalf of an international struggle by Western democracies against this network.

I am not aware of a single major American newspaper, radio station or TV channel whose coverage of the assault on Gaza questions this version of events. . . Middle East peacemaking has been smothered in deceptive euphemisms so let me state bluntly that each of these claims is a lie.” (*London Review of Books*, 29/1/09)

Those lies were swallowed up whole by the Western world.

Even as the tanks began rolling and the bombs were exploding, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni instructed her minions to engage foreign language speakers everywhere to take “emergency measures to adapt Israel’s public relations to the ongoing escalation in the Gaza Strip.” (Julia Irwin, “Getting Away with Murder”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11/1/09) Within hours, the smooth-voiced Israeli spokesman Mark Regev and Martin Indyk, a former official of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, were

everywhere to be heard on Radio National and the ABC network throughout Australia.

UK journalist Robert Fisk happened to be travelling through Canada at the time the offensive was launched. He noted that numerous articles attempting to justify Israel's actions by asking readers to imagine the horror of coming under Palestinian rocket attack began to appear simultaneously in large-circulation newspapers. He commented: "I'm waiting for the same writers to ask how we'd feel if we . . . came under sustained attack from supersonic aircraft and Merkava tanks and thousands of troops whose shells and bombs tore 40 women and children to pieces outside a school, shredded whole families in their beds and who, after nearly a week, had killed almost 200 civilians out of 600 fatalities." (*The Independent*, 10/1/09)

US journalist Chris Hedges similarly railed: "The use of attack aircraft and naval ships, part of the world's fourth-largest military power, to level densely packed slums of people who were hungry, without power and often water, people surrounded on all sides by the Israeli army, was fatuously described as a war. The news coverage held up the absurd notion that a few Hamas fighters with light weapons and no organization were a counterforce to F-16 fighter jets, tank battalions, thousands of Israeli soldiers, armoured personnel carriers, naval ships and Apache attack helicopters. It fit the Israeli narrative. It may have been balanced and objective. But it was not true." (*TruthDig.com* 26/1/09)

The attack upon Gaza was clearly part of a longer-term project for the complete subjection of Palestinians by Israel. The attack was not an act of self-defence against miserable Qassam rockets. As Ben White pointed out: "During the

truce last year, rocket fire from the Gaza Strip was reduced by 97%, with the few projectiles that were fired coming from non-Hamas groups opposed to the agreement." The breaking of the ceasefire by the Israelis on November 4th – conveniently coinciding with the day of the US elections – was a deliberately provocative act that brought the expected response from Hamas. The Israelis bided their time in order to teach the Gazans a lesson for choosing Hamas during the 2006 elections. The ferocity and the duration of *Operation Cast Lead* was intended to destroy Hamas and to humiliate the Palestinians of Gaza who deigned to chose Hamas as their representatives in the elections of 2006.

The Gazans were already near-broken by the debilitating Israeli blockade of their border crossings. The compliant Mahmoud Abbas and his shadowy Fatah officials had been sequestered into what is left of the West Bank to make sure that the Palestinians there did not get too rowdy or upset about the slaughter that was happening in Gaza. Western leaders all looked away and chorused in unison about the Right of Israelis to Defend Themselves. And the Israelis set about systematically destroying every civil institution and every form of essential infrastructure necessary for the conduct of life, a life that for Gazans had already been made near intolerable.

There are also other factors behind *Operation Cast Lead* apart from the desire to destroy the will of the Palestinians of Gaza and to "catastrophise" their experience of life. In a more cynical vein, we would do well to remember that the Israelis have for many years coveted the huge reservoirs of undersea natural gas in Gaza's territorial waters that were discovered by the British Gas Group about a decade ago. This side of things will come increasingly to light in coming time as Israel attempts to secure additional

sources of energy during this time of dwindling reserves.

During the 22 days of the assault, 20,000 buildings and 5,000 homes throughout Gaza were completely destroyed leaving over half a million metric tonnes of debris yet to be cleared half a year after the attack. The Israelis targeted every part of the territories infrastructure: “Homes, businesses, factories, power grids, sewage systems and water treatment plants were reduced to piles of rubble across the Gaza Strip.” (Erin Cunningham, *Inter Press Service*, 4/5/09)

Seven schools in Gaza were totally destroyed, and 135 were substantially damaged. The Al-Azhar University of Gaza was reduced to rubble. Hospitals, medical clinics and Red Crescent warehouses were all targeted, as was every police station and every building associated with Hamas activities. Over 250 civilian Palestinian policemen were killed during the 22-day operation. Israeli military lawyers went so far as to authorise the bombing of a police cadet graduation ceremony, killing 63 young Palestinian men in a single strike (George Bisharat, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1/4/09).



Numerous apartment buildings and the few remaining factories and industries still in operation after the intensification

of the Israeli border blockades after the 2006 elections were systematically destroyed.

Even though 70% of Gaza’s agricultural system had been rendered useless by the Israeli border siege which had blocked the entry of pipes and pumps essential for irrigation, Israeli tanks and bulldozers set about ruining what little was left. Vast acreages of farming land including olive orchards, fruit plantations, chicken farms and other established farms throughout Gaza were systematically destroyed.

And thus we witness the face of the new compassionate warfare. Count the dead in the thousands rather than tens or hundreds of thousands. Reduce the entire population to abject subjection rather than starvation unto death. Break apart all the institutional forms necessary for the conduct of civil society rather than totally incinerating and destroying cities and countrysides. And then stridently claim all such actions to be fair and just and necessary for self-protection.

Among the first to speak loudly and passionately about the criminality of Israel’s actions was Richard Falk, Professor of International Law at Princeton University and newly appointed special rapporteur on the Palestinian territories.

As the first Israeli bombs exploded on December 27th, Falk drew attention to the massive violation of international humanitarian law that was happening in Gaza. He called upon the United Nations to halt Israel’s actions and to immediately provide protection for the Palestinian people (“Israel’s War Crimes” *CommonDreams.org*, 30/12/09). But for decades now, neither the wishes nor the resolutions of the United Nations have tempered the actions of Israel towards Palestinians. Falk was later to write:

“The focus of legal debate should not be upon whether Israeli force was disproportionate. Of course it was. The focus should be on whether the Israeli attacks were a prohibited non-defensive use of force under the UN charter, amounting to an act of aggression, and as such, constituting a crime against peace. . . .

Israel initiated the Gaza campaign without adequate legal foundation or just cause, and was responsible for causing the overwhelming proportion of devastation and the entirety of civilian suffering” (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, 12/3/09).

Soon after, George Bisharat, professor of Law at the University of California published a series of articles in US newspapers detailing how international law had been brutalised by Israel in its 22-day assault upon Gaza. He describes how Israeli lawyers deliberately manipulate legal process to achieve their desired ends. Quoting Daniel Reisner, former head of Israel’s 20-lawyer International Law Division in the Military Advocate General’s office, he showed how powerful lawyers acting in concert can effectively change the rules:

“If you do something for long enough, the world will accept it. The whole of international law is now based on the notion that an act that is forbidden today becomes permissible if executed by enough countries. . . . International law progresses through violations. We invented the targeted assassination thesis and we had to push it. At first there were protrusions that made it hard to insert easily into the legal molds. Eight years later, it is in the centre of the bounds of legitimacy” (“Israel: Transforming International Law by Violating It”, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1/4/09).

Yet there are some lawyers who are more driven by ethical considerations than a will to serve political ideologies. In early February 2009, a group of eight American lawyers, all members of the National Lawyers Guild in the US

visited and reported on their observations of the situation in Gaza. They confirmed that the IDF had fired missiles at UNRWA schools in Gaza City, Jabalyia and Bet Labiya. They expressed deep concern at the use of white phosphorus, DIME munitions and other prohibited weapons and at “the use of conventional weapons in a prohibited manner, specifically, the use of battlefield weapons in densely populated civilian areas.”

All eight members of the Delegation called upon both Israel and the US - which supplied most of the weapons used in the assault – to be held accountable for the criminality of their actions. (“What We Found in Gaza”, *CommonDreams.org*, 8/2/2009)



The horror of Gaza cannot be dismissed as a distant phenomenon that does not concern us. We may withdraw into our own complacency and comfort, but in truth, no one is exempted from the pain visited upon innocent households. No one can evade the consequences of the destructive exercise of brutal force.

The immense yet subdued anguish, the heavy-hearted impotence that weighs on so many, the outraged sense of justice at the grotesque disproportionality of the violence we have witnessed, the travesty of all norms of reasonable

human conduct will neither pass nor be forgotten.

The assault upon Gaza has done nothing to further the making of peace in Palestine. It has done much to deepen resentments that will find their own tragic and futile expressions in time to come. No cheek has been turned at any stage in the volleys of violence that have shaken the Holy Land for more than half a century. And little regard has been given to the humanity of the generations swept into a gathering maelstrom fuelled and fired by a coldly calculated demonic fury.

There is more that could be said, and more, perhaps, that should be said about how the people of Gaza have been manacled since 1993 when Israel closed the borders and “managed” the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza; about the 42 year long occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem; about the wholesale separation and isolation of the Palestinians of Gaza from their fellow Palestinians in the West Bank; about the progressive cantonisation of the West Bank by the relentless construction of militarily-protected illegal “settlements”; about the “security barriers” that have drawn and quartered any semblance of autonomous life and culture for all Palestinians; about the forced impoverishment, reduced access to markets, and forfeited freedoms of all Gazans. The betrayal of Gaza represents not only a failure of justice, but also a failure of the human spirit.

We will continue to remain vigilant regarding further movements in the Middle East as the seams that hold the phenomenal world together everywhere begin to stretch to their limits.

Notes

1. Political economist and long-time associate of Edward Said, Sara Roy recently visited Australia and offered a poignant and powerful portrait of the plight of Gazans at the University of Sydney in October 2008. A podcast of her lecture is available at <http://www.usyd.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=2681>

2. Historian Beshara Doumani has been active for decades documenting the history of the Palestinian people. His website at the University of California, Berkeley carries many useful scholarly articles and papers that deconstruct the ontological dispossession that has been used by Israeli historians to justify their illegal actions in the occupied territories of Palestine. See: <http://history.berkeley.edu/faculty/Doumani/>

LETTER FROM ALEXANDRA

Encountering Fear

The whip and weal of fear can occur at any time in our lives. Times of trauma, of vulnerability, of weakness or crisis, can all serve to release the cold malignant shadow of fear into our lives. Fear is a killer. Fear mangles and disables the capacity for goodness and love within us but it cannot be blithely exorcised in a sunny burst of positive self-talk or banished by well-intentioned crystal waving. Fear knows how to dig deep, how to be cool, how to pay the rent, how to nurse itself into form amidst the shadows of resentment, vengeance, insecurity and hurt that haunt our lives. Fear is born in the laceration of the hurts of our lives. Fear unchecked will continue to grow the bleeding edges of that hurt into that strike-first hardness of heart that is the engine room of the perpetual game of combative, competitive self defence that so many of us seemingly have to play.

The biblical assertion that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18) might seem impossibly idealistic but it indicates that love and fear are much more likely polarities than love and hate. Fear then is a kind of surrender to a loveless state of being. The question as always is the perennial one of what do we do with our pain? No matter how understandable, salutary or unavoidable the actual experience of fear may be, we are called to transform that experience with a loving response to life rather than allow the fear to grow into a thousand and one mutations of the pain we have suffered.

This is all very well but I can remember clearly enough many times when I was a prison chaplain a particular raw naked dance with fear. I used to resent its presence, so often gnawing and growing in my guts each time I would visit a prison. I was not really concerned about my physical safety but there was something profoundly exposing and menacing within the stronghold of fear and hostility that was prison life. Just one spearing look could split you right open. Somehow The Fear was one of dispossession, of being exposed and revealed as if all the topsoil of the self was washed away, revealing an ugly eroded gully soil beneath, all bleached and blighted. Annihilation!

Maybe what makes fear so virulent is this horror at the nothingness within, as if all our selves have been stripped away revealing them for the phantoms they are. Out on the long stretches of the road this threatening horror could linger just out of sight. There is so much of inhospitable nowhere out there if we

only look with alien eyes. Yet on closer examination it is possible to feel that great web of life running through things, holding its ground against the rise and fall of fortune. Sometimes whilst standing on that life-webbed ground we may be able to learn the lessons of openness, acceptance, resilience and generosity that can drive fear away. Standing still, in all the nothingness, we can discover the freedom from fear that is our birthright.

Vincent Jewell
Alexandra, Victoria

An End to Cruelty

What waste wrought, what storms spent,
Have brought you to thicker airs and
slower dissolutions?

The gravity of your crimes now draws you
to extinction.

Remain ye fixed among your own,
Far from fragrant field, from sharp sea air
From glance of wind, from sting of sand.
There are some who must never return.

Of time ahead, we cannot tell,
Yet know that He on that cold day
In thunder crack and tear of veil
Untombed the graves and emptied hells.

Son of the One of then and now
Howbeit you in force and fire?
In grace and love where least they're seen?
In face and place of present time?
In silence and in keeping still?

I saw you then in flint of fire
And feel you now in shake of fault and
shocks that rock the mother.