

The State of Israel Insane Brutality

Words fail; ordinary terms are inadequate to describe the horrors Israel daily perpetrates, and has perpetrated for years, against the Palestinians. The tragedy of Gaza has been described a hundred times over, as have the tragedies of 1948, of Qibya, of Sabra and Shatila, of Jenin--60 years of atrocity perpetrated in the name of Judaism. But the horror generally falls on deaf ears in most of Israel, in the U.S. political arena, in the mainstream U.S. media. Those who are horrified--and there are many--cannot penetrate the shield of impassivity that protects the political and media elite in Israel, even more so in the U.S., and increasingly now in Canada and Europe, from seeing, from caring.

But it needs to be said now, loudly: those who devise and carry out Israeli policies have made Israel into a monster, and it has come time for all of us--all Israelis, all Jews who allow Israel to speak for them, all Americans who do nothing to end U.S. support for Israel and its murderous policies--to recognize that we stain ourselves morally by continuing to sit by while Israel carries out its atrocities against the Palestinians. A nation that mandates the primacy of one ethnicity or religion over

submit quietly and give up resisting Israel's arrogance. We in the United States have become

is not a military that operates by civilized rules. A military establishment that drops a 500-



An elderly Palestinian man rests on his belongings on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, July 18. (AP File Photo)

inured to tragedy inflicted by Israel, and we easily fall for the spin that automatically, by some trick of the imagination, converts Israeli atrocities to examples of how Israel is victimized. But a military establishment that drops a 500-pound bomb on a residential apartment building in the middle of the night and kills 14 sleeping civilians, as happened in Gaza four years ago,

murdered by Israelis since the intifada began--is not a society with a conscience. A government that imprisons a 15-year-old girl--one of several hundred children in Israeli detention--for the crime of pushing and running away from a male soldier trying to do a body search as she entered a mosque is not a government with any moral bearings. (This story, not the kind that ever appears in the U.S. media, was reported in the London Sunday Times. The girl was shot three times as she ran away and was convicted to 18 months in prison after she came out of a coma.)

Critics of Israel note increasingly that Israel is self-destructing, nearing a catastrophe of its own making. Israeli journalist Gideon Levy talks of a society in "moral collapse."

Michel Warschawski writes of an "Israeli madness" and "insane brutality," a "putrefaction" of civilized society, that have set Israel on a suicidal course. He foresees the end of the Zionist enterprise; Israel is a "gang of hoodlums," he says, a state "that makes a mockery of legality and of civil morality. A state run in contempt of justice loses the strength to survive."

Kathleen Christison, a former CIA political analyst COUNTERPUNCH.COM

Afghan Struggle Could Last for Years Has West the Will to Fight?

The British troops sent to Afghanistan recently have got off to a dangerous and difficult start. More troops are being rushed out to support them. The question of what to do about Afghanistan, and its 30 million people, is whizzing up the agenda.

Last January John Reid, then British secretary of State for defense, announced that the small British military presence in Afghanistan was to be expanded to some 5,000 soldiers, most of whom would be based in Helmand province. Their main role would be to support reconstruction efforts. Unfortunately John Reid then added, far too optimistically, that he would be happy for them to complete their mission "without a shot being fired".

There were those in Parliament and beyond who suggested such a force would be too small for the allotted task, at a time when the dreaded and medieval Taleban was clearly on its way back. In just three weeks six British soldiers have been killed in Helmand province, which is four times the size of Wales and the main opium poppy-growing part of the country.

The Ministry of Defense described the fierce opposition as "unexpected"--ignoring those experts who had predicted it--and Des Browne, the new and

unimpressive secretary of state for defense, conceded that the arrival of the British troops had "energized the Taleban".

Last year the American Ambassador in Kabul, Ronald Neuman, sensibly declared: "We're not going to win this war militarily any time soon. If we throttle back the effort, we face trouble."

Since 2001 and the successful American-led attack on the Taleban regime, 18,000 US troops have been engaged in search and destroy operations against the Taleban in the high mountains of southeast Afghanistan. 200 American soldiers were killed in that country in 2005--the worst year so far. American troops are to be throttled back by some 3,000 in the next few weeks.

In Brussels last December NATO agreed to increase its commitment to Afghanistan from 10,000 to 16,000. However, it is running into trouble matching its fine, brave words with troop numbers and supporting equipment. NATO's poor response so far has been the target of Conservative backbenchers in the Commons.

Gen. Sir David Richards is now the British commander of all NATO forces in the country, and NATO is going to take over responsibility for the

four southern provinces in a few days. He will be only too aware he has a grim war to fight.

The Taleban are thought to have over 1,000 experienced fighters in the South, and they work with elements of Al-Qaeda, tribal militias opposed to the Kabul government and drug traffickers.

Part of what is at stake is the great advances which have been made in Afghanistan since 2001. President Hamid Karzai was elected for a five-year term, with 55.4 percent of the vote in October 2004. In the Parliament in Kabul a quarter of its members are women. Last year the Afghan economy grew by 14 percent. Some 5 million refugees have returned. Immunization has saved the lives of 35,000 Afghan children.

British ministers have talked of Afghanistan being the new battleground of the Western world--I think unwisely. To gain the upper hand is going to require the dispatch of many tens of thousands of highly professional, well equipped, and properly led and trained troops. They will be fighting with the Afghan National Army which is still very weak.

This struggle could last for decades. Has the world the will? Who is going to do the fighting?
Sir Cyril Townsend ARABNEWS.COM

Fragility of a Flat World

The world is flat! So says columnist Thomas Friedman who chose that provocative title for his best-selling book to awaken people to the dramatic effects that technology is having on the world economy.

Distance is shrinking. Geographical barriers no longer provide easy protection. Manufacturing workers and high-tech professionals alike in Europe and America are being challenged by global competition. Western consumers who call a local company are likely to speak to someone in India.

Skeptics have pointed to the limits of Friedman's metaphor. As one put it, the world is not flat, but "spiky". A contour map of economic activity in the world would show mountains of prosperity and many ravines of deprivation. Moreover, distance is far from dead. Even neighbours with low tariff barriers, like Canada and the United States, trade more internally than across borders.

Such criticism notwithstanding, Friedman makes an important point. Globalisation, which can be defined as interdependence at inter-continental distances, is as old as human history. Witness the migration of peoples and religions, or trade along the ancient silk route that connected medieval Europe and Asia. But globalisation today is different, because it is becoming quicker and thicker.

After the first transatlantic cable in 1868, Europe and America could communicate in a minute. In 1919, the economist John Maynard Keynes described the possibility of an Englishman in London using a telephone to order goods from around the world to be delivered to his house by the afternoon. But Keynes' Englishman was wealthy and thus exceptional. Today, hundreds of millions of people around the world have access to global goods in their local supermarkets.

Similarly, as recently as two decades ago, instantaneous global communication existed, but was economically out of reach for most people. Now, virtually anyone can enter an Internet café and enjoy a capability that was once available only to governments, multinational corporations, and a few individuals or organisations with large budgets. Tremendous declines in computing, communication, and transport costs have democratised technology.

Only a decade ago, two-thirds of all Internet users were in the US. Today, less than a quarter are located there. Knowledge is power, and more people have access to information today than at any time in human history. Non-state actors now have capabilities that were once limited to governments. The nation-state is not about to be replaced as the dominant institution of world politics,

but it will have to share the stage with more actors, including organisations like Oxfam, celebrities like Bono, and transnational terrorist networks like Al Qaeda.

But flattening is reversible. It has happened before. The world economy was highly integrated in 1914, but economic interdependence declined during the next three decades. The global economy did not recover that same level of integration until 1970, and even then it remained divided by the Iron Curtain.

World War I was the trigger that set off the reversal, with economic globalisation declining while military globalisation increased, as witnessed by two world wars and a global cold war. This reflected deeper problems of domestic inequality created by 19th-century economic progress. Politics did not keep pace, and the result was the rise of pathological ideologies--fascism and communism--that divided nations and the world. The creation of the welfare state in Western countries after World War II helped to create a safety net for people disadvantaged by economic change, thereby encouraging them to accept the return of international economic interdependence.

The great threat to a flat world is likely to come from the non-state and transnational forces that have been unleashed by the diffusion of technology. On Sept. 11, 2001, a non-state network killed more Americans in a surprise attack than the government of Japan did at Pearl Harbour in 1941. I have called this the privatisation of war. If such actors obtain nuclear and biological materials, the world will look very different. Borders will become harder to cross for both people and goods. And if such actors disrupt the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, home to two-thirds of the world's reserves, a global depression like that of the 1930s could strengthen protectionism further.

Globalisation has two driving forces: technology and policy. Thus far, policy has reinforced the flattening effects of technology. As the world's largest economy, the US has taken the lead in promoting policies that reduce barriers. But the events described above could reverse such policies.

Some critics of globalisation might welcome such an outcome. But the result, as we saw after 1914, would be the worst of both worlds--reversal of the economic globalisation that spreads technology and power, but reinforcement of negative dimensions of military and ecological globalisation, such as war, terror, climate change and the spread of infectious diseases. In that case, the flat world could become a desert.

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Obasanjo's Troubling Endgame

In Nigeria today, the key question now-days is not whether President Olusegun Obasanjo will quit after his second (and final) term expires next year, but who will succeed him. Given Nigeria's history of sit-tight military dictatorships, that is real progress. Unfortunately, it is not necessarily the president's doing.

Attempts by Obasanjo's supporters to persuade the national assembly to amend the constitution to enable Obasanjo to continue in office beyond two terms met a solid wall of opposition. Government and commercial activities virtually ground to a halt this spring as democracy activists, in alliance with politicians and lawmakers opposed to a third term, battled Obasanjo's allies to thwart the proposed bill.

The failure of Obasanjo's supporters triggered three big political developments. The president's authority is draining away precipitately, and his vice-like grip on his People's Democratic Party (PDP) has loosened. Opposition parties, human rights groups, and other government critics, hitherto cowed by a seemingly omnipotent Obasanjo and PDP machine, have found a new lease on life. Obasanjo, besieged and angry that friends at home

and abroad (particularly in the United States and Europe) betrayed him by aiding his political opponents in killing the amendment, is determined to settle scores.

The storm had hardly settled when Obasanjo sacked General Aliyu Gusau, his powerful national security adviser. Several senior military officers whose loyalty was questionable were also replaced. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the finance minister and the brain behind the government's economic reforms, was redeployed to head the foreign ministry, in a move widely seen as punishment.

Obasanjo is also shaking up the oil industry in a double manoeuvre interpreted as a rap on the knuckles for his Western allies and a last ditch effort to secure a legacy as the one Nigerian leader who tamed corruption in that sector.

American, British and French oil companies enjoyed a virtual monopoly of Nigeria's oil industry. Royal Dutch Shell's joint venture with the government produces half of the country's daily output of 2.5 million barrels. Two US companies, Chevron Texaco and Mobil, are also key players. Obasanjo's new oil

policy threatens this dominance.

China made a dramatic entry into the picture last April, when Nigerian officials announced that China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) had bought a 45 per cent stake in a Nigerian oil field for more than \$2 billion. That field will pump 225,000 barrels per day when it begins production in 2008. Obasanjo also negotiated a loan of \$1 billion from the Chinese government to finance repair of Nigeria's railroads and buy new rolling stock.

The announcement was welcomed by ordinary Nigerians, but incited jitters in the industry, prompting anxious questions about how deep Obasanjo's angry sword will cut, and how smooth the political succession is likely to be. Obasanjo has made it clear that Atiku Abubakar, the vice president and the arrowhead of the anti-third term coalition, will not succeed him. But this has not stopped Abubakar, a formidable political operator, from launching his presidential bid, despite uncertainty over whether he will fight it out with



Olusegun Obasanjo

his boss for control of the PDP machinery or decamp to another political party.

In fact, the PDP has splintered into three warring factions, drastically reducing Obasanjo's chances to control the succession.

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