



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING



Background and Context

Source: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Spring 2009), pp. 223-239

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Institute for Palestine Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2009.XXXVIII.3.223>

Accessed: 06/08/2014 12:56

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press and Institute for Palestine Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Journal of Palestine Studies.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Yosefa Loshitzky, "Israel's Blonde Bombshells and Real Bombs in Gaza," <i>Electronic Intifada</i> , 5 January 2009 (excerpts)	255
Richard Silverstein, "Hasbara Spam Alert: . . . Propaganda 2.0 is Here," <i>Guardian</i> , 9 January 2009 (excerpts)	257

From the launch of Operation Cast Lead and well beyond its conclusion, the Internet was flooded with thousands of articles, commentaries, analyses, and op-eds from around the world. JPS thought it useful to put together a sampling that, taken together, gives a sense of the unfolding of the war and some of the major issues surrounding it. Cuts have been made in most of the selections to minimize inevitable overlap.

All the articles in this section focus on context, whether long-term or more immediate, dealing with such issues as motivation, policy, or issues of debate concerning the war (e.g., the cease-fire and the blockade). The second section deals more specifically with the war itself and its planning (especially the meticulous long-term preparation), strategy, and conduct; and it includes mainly short news accounts. The third section concerns Israel's media spin and public relations strategy.

Over many of the articles (explicitly or implicitly) hangs the precedent of the 2006 Lebanon war in terms of its impact on strategy, the handling of media, and the issue of civilians, and disproportionate force in this type of war.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

AVI SHLAIM, "HOW ISRAEL BROUGHT GAZA TO THE BRINK OF HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE," *GUARDIAN*, 7 JANUARY 2009.

Avi Shlaim, Oxford University professor of international relations and one of the leading New Israeli Historians, is the author of many books, including the groundbreaking Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine (Columbia University Press 1988), The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World (Norton 2001), and Lion of Jordan: King Hussein's Life in War and Peace (Allen Lane 2007).

The only way to make sense of Israel's senseless war in Gaza is through understanding the historical context. Establishing the state of Israel in May 1948 involved a monumental injustice to the Palestinians. British officials bitterly resented American partisanship on behalf of the infant state. On 2 June 1948, Sir John Troutbeck wrote to the foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, that the Americans were responsible for the creation of a gangster state headed by "an utterly unscrupulous set of leaders." I used to think that this judgment was too harsh, but Israel's vicious assault on the people of Gaza, and the Bush administration's complicity in this assault, have reopened the question.

I write as someone who served loyally in the Israeli army in the mid-1960s and who has never questioned the legitimacy of the state of Israel within its pre-1967 borders. What I utterly reject is the Zionist colonial project beyond the Green Line. The Israeli

occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the June 1967 war had very little to do with security and everything to do with territorial expansionism. The aim was to establish Greater Israel through permanent political, economic, and military control over the Palestinian territories. And the result has been one of the most prolonged and brutal military occupations of modern times.

Four decades of Israeli control did incalculable damage to the economy of the Gaza Strip. With a large population of 1948 refugees crammed into a tiny strip of land, with no infrastructure or natural resources, Gaza's prospects were never bright. Gaza, however, is not simply a case of economic underdevelopment but a uniquely cruel case of deliberate de-development. To use the biblical phrase, Israel turned the people of Gaza into the hewers of wood and the drawers of water, into a source of cheap labor and a captive market for Israeli goods. The development of local industry was actively impeded so as to make it impossible for the Palestinians to end their subordination to Israel and to establish the economic underpinnings essential for real political independence.

Gaza is a classic case of colonial exploitation in the postcolonial era. Jewish settlements in occupied territories are immoral, illegal, and an insurmountable obstacle to peace. They are at once the instrument of exploitation and the symbol of the hated occupation. In Gaza, the Jewish settlers numbered only 8,000 in 2005 compared with 1.4 million local residents. Yet the settlers controlled 25% of the territory, 40% of the arable land, and the lion's share of the scarce water resources. Cheek by jowl with these foreign intruders, the majority of the local population lived in abject poverty and unimaginable misery. Eighty percent of them still subsist on less than \$2 a day. The living conditions in the Strip remain an affront to civilized values, a powerful precipitant to resistance, and a fertile breeding ground for political extremism.

In August 2005 a Likud government headed by Ariel Sharon staged a unilateral Israeli pullout from Gaza, withdrawing all 8,000 settlers and destroying the houses and farms they had left behind. Hamas, the Islamic resistance movement, conducted an effective campaign to drive the Israelis out of Gaza. The withdrawal was a humiliation for the Israel Defense Forces. To the world, Sharon presented the withdrawal from Gaza as a contribution to peace based on a two-state solution. But in the year after, another 12,000 Israelis settled on the West Bank, further reducing the scope for an independent Palestinian state. Land-grabbing and peacemaking are simply incompatible. Israel had a choice and it chose land over peace.

The real purpose behind the move was to redraw unilaterally the borders of Greater Israel by incorporating the main settlement blocs on the West Bank to the state of Israel. Withdrawal from Gaza was thus not a prelude to a peace deal with the Palestinian Authority (PA) but a prelude to further Zionist expansion on the West Bank. It was a unilateral Israeli move undertaken in what was seen, mistakenly in my view, as an Israeli national interest. Anchored in a fundamental rejection of the Palestinian national identity, the withdrawal from Gaza was part of a long-term effort to deny the Palestinian people any independent political existence on their land.

Israel's settlers were withdrawn but Israeli soldiers continued to control all access to the Gaza Strip by land, sea, and air. Gaza was converted overnight into an open-air prison. From this point on, the Israeli air force enjoyed unrestricted freedom to drop

bombs, to make sonic booms by flying low and breaking the sound barrier, and to terrorize the hapless inhabitants of this prison.

Israel likes to portray itself as an island of democracy in a sea of authoritarianism. Yet Israel has never in its entire history done anything to promote democracy on the Arab side and has done a great deal to undermine it. Israel has a long history of secret collaboration with reactionary Arab regimes to suppress Palestinian nationalism. Despite all the handicaps, the Palestinian people succeeded in building the only genuine democracy in the Arab world with the possible exception of Lebanon. In January 2006, free and fair elections for the Legislative Council of the PA brought to power a Hamas-led government. Israel, however, refused to recognize the democratically elected government, claiming that Hamas is purely and simply a terrorist organization.

America and the EU shamelessly joined Israel in ostracizing and demonizing the Hamas government and in trying to bring it down by withholding tax revenues and foreign aid. A surreal situation thus developed with a significant part of the international community imposing economic sanctions not against the occupier but against the occupied, not against the oppressor but against the oppressed.

As so often in the tragic history of Palestine, the victims were blamed for their own misfortunes. Israel's propaganda machine persistently purveyed the notion that the Palestinians are terrorists, that they reject coexistence with the Jewish state, that their nationalism is little more than anti-Semitism, that Hamas is just a bunch of religious fanatics, and that Islam is incompatible with democracy. But the simple truth is that the Palestinian people are a normal people with normal aspirations. They are no better but they are no worse than any other national group. What they aspire to, above all, is a piece of land to call their own on which to live in freedom and dignity.

Like other radical movements, Hamas began to moderate its political program following its rise to power. From the ideological rejectionism of its charter, it began to move towards pragmatic accommodation of a two-state solution. In March 2007, Hamas and Fatah formed a national unity government that was ready to negotiate a long-term cease-fire with Israel. Israel, however, refused to negotiate with a government that included Hamas.

It continued to play the old game of divide and rule between rival Palestinian factions. In the late 1980s, Israel had supported the nascent Hamas in order to weaken Fatah, the secular nationalist movement led by Yasir Arafat. Now Israel began to encourage the corrupt and pliant Fatah leaders to overthrow their religious political rivals and recapture power. Aggressive American neoconservatives participated in the sinister plot to instigate a Palestinian civil war. Their meddling was a major factor in the collapse of the national unity government and in driving Hamas to seize power in Gaza in June 2007 to preempt a Fatah coup.

The war unleashed by Israel on Gaza on 27 December was the culmination of a series of clashes and confrontations with the Hamas government. In a broader sense, however, it is a war between Israel and the Palestinian people, because the people had elected the party to power. The declared aim of the war is to weaken Hamas and to intensify the pressure until its leaders agree to a new cease-fire on Israel's terms.

The undeclared aim is to ensure that the Palestinians in Gaza are seen by the world simply as a humanitarian problem and thus to derail their struggle for independence and statehood.

The timing of the war was determined by political expediency. A general election is scheduled for 10 February and, in the lead-up to the election, all the main contenders are looking for an opportunity to prove their toughness. The army top brass had been champing at the bit to deliver a crushing blow to Hamas in order to remove the stain left on their reputation by the failure of the war against Hizballah in Lebanon in July 2006. Israel's cynical leaders could also count on apathy and impotence of the pro-western Arab regimes and on blind support from President Bush in the twilight of his term in the White House. Bush readily obliged by putting all the blame for the crisis on Hamas, vetoing proposals at the UN Security Council for an immediate cease-fire and issuing Israel with a free pass to mount a ground invasion of Gaza.

As always, mighty Israel claims to be the victim of Palestinian aggression but the sheer asymmetry of power between the two sides leaves little room for doubt as to who is the real victim. This is indeed a conflict between David and Goliath but the biblical image has been inverted—a small and defenseless Palestinian David faces a heavily armed, merciless, and overbearing Israeli Goliath. The resort to brute military force is accompanied, as always, by the shrill rhetoric of victimhood and a farrago of self-pity overlaid with self-righteousness. In Hebrew this is known as the syndrome of *bokhim ve-yorim*, “crying and shooting.”

To be sure, Hamas is not an entirely innocent party in this conflict. Denied the fruit of its electoral victory and confronted with an unscrupulous adversary, it has resorted to the weapon of the weak—terror. Militants from Hamas and Islamic Jihad kept launching Qassam rocket attacks against Israeli settlements near the border with Gaza until Egypt brokered a six-month cease-fire last June. The damage caused by these primitive rockets is minimal but the psychological impact is immense, prompting the public to demand protection from its government. Under the circumstances, Israel had the right to act in self-defense, but its response to the pinpricks of rocket attacks was totally disproportionate. The figures speak for themselves. In the three years after the withdrawal from Gaza, 11 Israelis were killed by rocket fire. On the other hand, in 2005–2007 alone, the IDF killed 1,290 Palestinians in Gaza, including 222 children.

Whatever the numbers, killing civilians is wrong. This rule applies to Israel as much as it does to Hamas, but Israel's entire record is one of unbridled and unremitting brutality towards the inhabitants of Gaza. Israel also maintained the blockade of Gaza after the cease-fire came into force which, in the view of the Hamas leaders, amounted to a violation of the agreement. During the cease-fire, Israel prevented any exports from leaving the strip in clear violation of a 2005 accord, leading to a sharp drop in employment opportunities. Officially, 49.1% of the population is unemployed. At the same time, Israel restricted drastically the number of trucks carrying food, fuel, cooking-gas canisters, spare parts for water and sanitation plants, and medical supplies to Gaza. It is difficult to see how starving and freezing the civilians of Gaza could protect the people on the Israeli side of the border. But even if it did, it would still be immoral, a form of collective punishment that is strictly forbidden by international humanitarian law.

The brutality of Israel's soldiers is fully matched by the mendacity of its spokesmen. Eight months before launching the current war on Gaza, Israel established a National Information Directorate. The core messages of this directorate to the media are that Hamas broke the cease-fire agreements; that Israel's objective is the defense of its population; and that Israel's forces are taking the utmost care not to hurt innocent civilians. Israel's spin doctors have been remarkably successful in getting this message across. But, in essence, their propaganda is a pack of lies.

A wide gap separates the reality of Israel's actions from the rhetoric of its spokesmen. It was not Hamas but the IDF that broke the cease-fire. It did so by a raid into Gaza on 4 November that killed six Hamas men. Israel's objective is not just the defense of its population but the eventual overthrow of the Hamas government in Gaza by turning the people against their rulers. And far from taking care to spare civilians, Israel is guilty of indiscriminate bombing and of a three-year-old blockade that has brought the inhabitants of Gaza, now 1.5 million, to the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe.

The biblical injunction of an eye for an eye is savage enough. But Israel's insane offensive against Gaza seems to follow the logic of an eye for an eyelash. After eight days of bombing, with a death toll of more than 400 Palestinians and four Israelis, the gung-ho cabinet ordered a land invasion of Gaza the consequences of which are incalculable.

No amount of military escalation can buy Israel immunity from rocket attacks from the military wing of Hamas. Despite all the death and destruction that Israel has inflicted on them, they kept up their resistance and they kept firing their rockets. This is a movement that glorifies victimhood and martyrdom. There is simply no military solution to the conflict between the two communities. The problem with Israel's concept of security is that it denies even the most elementary security to the other community. The only way for Israel to achieve security is not through shooting but through talks with Hamas, which has repeatedly declared its readiness to negotiate a long-term cease-fire with the Jewish state within its pre-1967 borders for 20, 30, or even 50 years. Israel has rejected this offer for the same reason it spurned the Arab League peace plan of 2002, which is still on the table: it involves concessions and compromises.

This brief review of Israel's record over the past four decades makes it difficult to resist the conclusion that it has become a rogue state with "an utterly unscrupulous set of leaders." A rogue state habitually violates international law, possesses weapons of mass destruction, and practices terrorism—the use of violence against civilians for political purposes. Israel fulfills all of these three criteria; the cap fits and it must wear it. Israel's real aim is not peaceful coexistence with its Palestinian neighbors but military domination. It keeps compounding the mistakes of the past with new and more disastrous ones. Politicians, like everyone else, are of course free to repeat the lies and mistakes of the past. But it is not mandatory to do so.

**NORMAN G. FINKELSTEIN, "FOILING ANOTHER PALESTINIAN
'PEACE OFFENSIVE': BEHIND THE BLOODBATH IN GAZA,"
19 JANUARY 2009 (EXCERPTS).**

Norman G. Finkelstein is author of a number of books on Zionism, including Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History (University

of California Press 2005). The excerpts below, taken from an article posted to his blog (www.normanfinkelstein.com), focus on Israeli motivations—notably restoring Israeli deterrence and thwarting peace initiatives inconsistent with its goals—in historical perspective. Footnotes have been eliminated for space reasons.

Early speculation on the motive behind Israel's slaughter in Gaza that began on 27 December 2008 and continued till 18 January 2009 centered on the upcoming elections in Israel. The jockeying for votes was no doubt a factor in this Sparta-like society consumed by "revenge and the thirst for blood," where killing Arabs is a sure crowd-pleaser. (Polls during the war showed that 80–90 percent of Israeli Jews supported it.) But as Israeli journalist Gideon Levy pointed out on *Democracy Now*, "Israel went through a very similar war . . . two and a half years ago [in Lebanon], when there were no elections." When crucial state interests are at stake, Israeli ruling elites seldom launch major operations for narrowly electoral gains. . . .

The fundamental motives behind the latest Israeli attack on Gaza lie elsewhere: (1) in the need to restore Israel's "deterrence capacity," and (2) in the threat posed by a new Palestinian "peace offensive."

Israel's "larger concern" in the current offensive, *New York Times* Middle East correspondent Ethan Bronner reported, quoting Israeli sources, was to "re-establish Israeli deterrence," because "its enemies are less afraid of it than they once were, or should be." Preserving its deterrence capacity has always loomed large in Israeli strategic doctrine. Indeed, it was the main impetus behind Israel's first-strike against Egypt in June 1967 that resulted in Israel's occupation of Gaza (and the West Bank). To justify the onslaught on Gaza, Israeli historian Benny Morris wrote that "[m]any Israelis feel that the walls . . . are closing in . . . much as they felt in early June 1967." Ordinary Israelis no doubt felt threatened in June 1967, but—as Morris surely knows—the Israeli leadership experienced no such trepidation.

During the 2006 Lebanon war Israel flattened the southern suburb of Beirut known as the Dahiya, where Hizballah commanded much popular support. In the war's aftermath Israeli military officers began referring to the "Dahiya strategy": "We shall pulverize the 160 Shiite villages [in Lebanon] that have turned into Shiite army bases," the IDF Northern Command Chief explained, "and we shall not show mercy when it comes to hitting the national infrastructure of a state that, in practice, is controlled by Hizballah." In the event of hostilities, a reserve colonel at the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies chimed in, Israel needs "to act immediately, decisively, and with force that is disproportionate . . . Such a response aims at inflicting damage and meting out punishment to an extent that will demand long and expensive reconstruction processes." The new strategy was to be used against all of Israel's regional adversaries who had waxed defiant—"the Palestinians in Gaza are all Khalid Mishal, the Lebanese are all Nasrallah, and the Iranians are all Ahmadinejad"—but Gaza was the prime target for this blitzkrieg-cum-bloodbath strategy. "Too bad it did not take hold immediately after the 'disengagement' from Gaza and the first rocket barrages," a respected Israeli columnist lamented. "Had we immediately adopted the Dahiya strategy, we would have

likely spared ourselves much trouble.” After a Palestinian rocket attack, Israel’s interior minister urged in late September 2008, “the IDF should . . . decide on a neighborhood in Gaza and level it.” And, insofar as the Dahiya strategy could not be inflicted just yet on Lebanon and Iran, it was predictably pre-tested in Gaza.

The operative plan for the Gaza bloodbath can be gleaned from authoritative statements after the war got underway: “What we have to do is act systematically with the aim of punishing all the organizations that are firing the rockets and mortars, as well as the civilians who are enabling them to fire and hide” (reserve major-general); “After this operation there will not be one Hamas building left standing in Gaza” (deputy IDF chief of staff); “Anything affiliated with Hamas is a legitimate target” (IDF spokesperson’s office). Whereas Israel killed a mere 55 Lebanese during the first two days of the 2006 war, the Israeli media exulted at Israel’s “shock and awe” (*Ma’ariv*) as it killed more than 300 Palestinians in the first two days of the attack on Gaza. Several days into the slaughter an informed Israeli strategic analyst observed, “The IDF, which planned to attack buildings and sites populated by hundreds of people, did not warn them in advance to leave, but intended to kill a great many of them, and succeeded.” Morris could barely contain his pride at “Israel’s highly efficient air assault on Hamas.” The Israeli columnist B. Michael was less impressed by the dispatch of helicopter gunships and jet planes “over a giant prison and firing at its people”—for example, “70 . . . traffic cops at their graduation ceremony, young men in desperate search of a livelihood who thought they’d found it in the police and instead found death from the skies.”

As Israel targeted schools, mosques, hospitals, ambulances, and UN sanctuaries, as it slaughtered and incinerated Gaza’s defenseless civilian population (one-third of the 1,200 reported casualties were children), Israeli commentators gloated that “Gaza is to Lebanon as the second sitting for an exam is to the first—a second chance to get it right,” and that this time around Israel had “hurled [Gaza] back,” not 20 years as it promised to do in Lebanon, but “into the 1940s. Electricity is available only for a few hours a day”; that “Israel regained its deterrence capabilities” because “the war in Gaza has compensated for the shortcomings of the [2006] Second Lebanon War”; and that “There is no doubt that Hizballah leader Hasan Nasrallah is upset these days . . . There will no longer be anyone in the Arab world who can claim that Israel is weak.”

. . .

Beyond restoring its deterrence capacity, Israel’s main goal in the Gaza slaughter was to fend off the latest threat posed by Palestinian moderation. For the past three decades the international community has consistently supported a settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict that calls for two states based on a full Israeli withdrawal to its June 1967 border, and a “just resolution” of the refugee question based on the right of return and compensation. The vote on the annual UN General Assembly resolution, “Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine,” supporting these terms for resolving the conflict in 2008 was 164 in favor, 7 against (Israel, United States, Australia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau), and 3 abstentions. At the regional level the Arab League in March 2002 unanimously put forth a peace initiative on this basis, which it has subsequently reaffirmed. In recent times Hamas has repeatedly signaled its own

acceptance of such a settlement. For example, in March 2008 Khalid Mishal, head of Hamas's Political Bureau, stated in an interview:

There is an opportunity to deal with this conflict in a manner different than Israel and, behind it, the U.S. is dealing with it today. There is an opportunity to achieve a Palestinian national consensus on a political program based on the 1967 borders, and this is an exceptional circumstance, in which most Palestinian forces, including Hamas, accept a state on the 1967 borders. . . . There is also an Arab consensus on this demand, and this is a historic situation. But no one is taking advantage of this opportunity. No one is moving to cooperate with this opportunity. Even this minimum that has been accepted by the Palestinians and the Arabs has been rejected by Israel and by the U.S.

Israel is fully cognizant that the Hamas Charter is not an insurmountable obstacle to a two-state settlement on the June 1967 border. . . .

In addition, Hamas was "careful to maintain the cease-fire" it entered into with Israel in June 2008, according to an official Israeli publication, despite Israel's renegeing on the crucial component of the truce that it ease the economic siege of Gaza. "The lull was sporadically violated by rocket and mortar shell fire, carried out by rogue terrorist organizations," the source continues. "At the same time, the [Hamas] movement tried to enforce the terms of the arrangement on the other terrorist organizations and to prevent them from violating it." Moreover, Hamas was "interested in renewing the relative calm with Israel" (Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin). The Islamic movement could thus be trusted to stand by its word, making it a credible negotiating partner, while its apparent ability to extract concessions from Israel, unlike the hapless PA doing Israel's bidding but getting no returns, enhanced Hamas's stature among Palestinians. For Israel these developments constituted a veritable disaster. It could no longer justify shunning Hamas, and it would be only a matter of time before international pressure in particular from the Europeans would be exerted on it to negotiate. The prospect of an incoming U.S. administration negotiating with Iran and Hamas, and moving closer to the international consensus for settling the Israel-Palestine conflict, which some U.S. policymakers now advocate, would have further highlighted Israel's intransigence.

. . . Israel needed to provoke Hamas into breaking the truce, and then radicalize or destroy it, thereby eliminating it as a legitimate negotiating partner. It is not the first time Israel confronted such a diabolical threat—an Arab League peace initiative, Palestinian support for a two-state settlement and a Palestinian cease-fire—and not the first time it embarked on provocation and war to overcome it.

In the mid-1970s the PLO mainstream began supporting a two-state settlement on the June 1967 border. In addition, the PLO, headquartered in Lebanon, was strictly adhering to a truce with Israel that had been negotiated in July 1981. In August 1981 Saudi Arabia unveiled, and the Arab League subsequently approved, a peace plan based on the two-state settlement. Israel reacted in September 1981 by stepping up preparations

to destroy the PLO. In his analysis of the buildup to the 1982 Lebanon war, Israeli strategic analyst Avner Yaniv reported that Yasir Arafat was contemplating a historic compromise with the “Zionist state,” whereas “all Israeli cabinets since 1967” as well as “leading mainstream doves” opposed a Palestinian state. Fearing diplomatic pressures, Israel maneuvered to sabotage the two-state settlement. It conducted punitive military raids “deliberately out of proportion” against “Palestinian and Lebanese civilians” in order to weaken “PLO moderates,” strengthen the hand of Arafat’s “radical rivals,” and guarantee the PLO’s “inflexibility.” However, Israel eventually had to choose between a pair of stark options: “a political move leading to a historic compromise with the PLO, or preemptive military action against it.” To fend off Arafat’s “peace offensive”—Yaniv’s telling phrase—Israel embarked on military action in June 1982. The Israeli invasion “had been preceded by more than a year of effective cease-fire with the PLO,” but after murderous Israeli provocations, the last of which left as many as 200 civilians dead (including 60 occupants of a Palestinian children’s hospital), the PLO finally retaliated, causing a single Israeli casualty. Although Israel used the PLO’s resumption of attacks as the pretext for its invasion, Yaniv concluded that the “*raison d’être* of the entire operation” was “destroying the PLO as a political force capable of claiming a Palestinian state on the West Bank.” It deserves passing notice that in his new history of the “peace process,” Martin Indyk, former U.S. ambassador to Israel, provides this capsule summary of the sequence of events just narrated: “In 1982, Arafat’s terrorist activities eventually provoked the Israeli government of Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon into a full-scale invasion of Lebanon.”

Fast forward to 2008. Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni stated in early December 2008 that although Israel wanted to create a temporary period of calm with Hamas, an extended truce “harms the Israeli strategic goal, empowers Hamas, and gives the impression that Israel recognizes the movement.” Translation: a protracted cease-fire that enhanced Hamas’s credibility would have undermined Israel’s strategic goal of retaining control of the West Bank. As far back as March 2007 Israel had decided on attacking Hamas, and only negotiated the June truce because “the Israeli army needed time to prepare.” Once all the pieces were in place, Israel only lacked a pretext. On 4 November, while the American media were riveted on election day, Israel broke the cease-fire by killing seven Palestinian militants, on the flimsy excuse that Hamas was digging a tunnel to abduct Israeli soldiers, and knowing full well that its operation would provoke Hamas into hitting back. “Last week’s ‘ticking tunnel,’ dug ostensibly to facilitate the abduction of Israeli soldiers,” *Ha’Aretz* reported in mid-November, was not a clear and present danger: Its existence was always known and its use could have been prevented on the Israeli side, or at least the soldiers stationed beside it removed from harm’s way. It is impossible to claim that those who decided to blow up the tunnel were simply being thoughtless. The military establishment was aware of the immediate implications of the measure, as well as of the fact that the policy of “controlled entry” into a narrow area of the Strip leads to the same place: an end to the lull. That is policy—not a tactical decision by a commander on the ground.

After Hamas predictably resumed its rocket attacks “[i]n retaliation” (Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center), Israel could embark on yet another murderous invasion in order to foil yet another Palestinian peace offensive.

AUGUSTUS RICHARD NORTON, "THE GAZA WAR: ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES," REAL INSTITUTO ELCANO, 3 FEBRUARY 2009 (EXCERPTS).

Augustus Richard Norton, professor of anthropology and political science at Boston University and an expert on Middle Eastern politics and state-society relations, is the author of a number of books, including, most recently, a book on Hizballab. The excerpts below concern mainly aspects of the U.S.-Israeli collaboration with regard to Gaza in the run-up to the war.

[M]uch like the Lebanon war of 2006, Israel's strategic gains in Operation Cast Lead have dissipated day by day. Had Israel inflicted a fierce three- or four-day campaign upon Hamas and its infrastructure, the Islamist group would have enjoyed less sympathy in the Arab world and it might have been possible to restore a cease-fire under terms dictated by Israel. After 23 days of fighting, Israel has fallen well short of a clear-cut strategic victory, namely, vanquishing Hamas.

In fact, the Gaza war put the spotlight on several issues that Israel, the former Bush administration, and the PA [Palestinian Authority] would have preferred to keep in the shadows, in particular, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza (both before and as a result of the war), Israel's primary role in fomenting and deepening that crisis, the inherent weakness of the PA, the necessity of bringing Hamas into a coalition with Fatah if the Palestinians are to constitute a credible negotiating position vis-à-vis Israel and, if there is any prospect for the establishment of the much-avowed two-state solution . . . [the need for the United States] to adopt a far more balanced and assertive role than George Bush was willing to do during his presidency.

U.S.-Israeli Collaboration?

The level of complicity between Israel and the U.S. in the timing and goals of the Gaza war remain to be revealed. It is known that key staff members of Bush's National Security Council were intent on toppling Hamas and providing Israel more or less with anything that it needed to do so. After Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006, to the acknowledged surprise of President Bush and his secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, U.S.-led efforts began to undermine the electoral result politically and militarily. A program began with U.S. funding and direction and Jordanian help to train a Palestinian force capable of defeating Hamas's militiamen in Gaza. These efforts are described in an authoritative April 2008 article by David Rose, which even includes an aide-memoire carried by Jake Wallis, the U.S. consul general in East Jerusalem, when he met, in early 2007, with Abu Mazin (Mahmud Abbas) to urge him to declare a state of emergency that would void the Hamas electoral victory.

As for Abu Mazin, an Israeli official quoted in a December 2008 report by the International Crisis Group claimed that he had "taken the courageous decision to wipe out Hamas." The claim cannot yet be verified, but in the first days of the war Abu Mazin's silence while Gaza burned was astonishing, and when he did speak he openly blamed Hamas for provoking "the massacre" (Israeli officials are privately dismissive of Abu Mazin who they find a weak and unimaginative leader). Other Palestinian officials,

notably Muhammad Dahlan, who headed the forces that Hamas defeated in June 2007, underlined that he was “happy about the coup against Hamas.” To the extent that Israel benefited from the collaboration of anti-Hamas Palestinians in Gaza, it is likely that Dahlan would have played a substantial role.

...

Israeli War Aims

Israel was coy about its objectives in this war, but neither Israeli nor U.S. officials hid their hope that Hamas would be toppled. The secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, speaking at the UN on 6 January, looked forward to the “eventual” return of the legitimate PA in Gaza. The Israeli foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, the Kadima party candidate for prime minister in the February Knesset elections, . . . claimed that the war was a struggle between moderates and extremists, a chance to strike a blow against Islamist radicals in the Arab world, not least the venerable Muslim [Brotherhood]. Hamas was created by the Palestinian branch of the [Brotherhood] in 1987. Since the [Brotherhood] [is] the most important opposition group in Egypt, the logic of Husni Mubarak’s partnership with Israel against Hamas is transparent. . . . Arab regimes that could hardly hide their glee at the prospect of Hamas being toppled . . . were unsettled by the . . . daily bloodshed.

U.S. support was crucial, of course, and the U.S. position began to shift 10 days into the war . . . [On] 8 January 2009, the U.S. abstained on Security Council resolution 1860 calling for an “immediate, durable, fully respected” cease-fire. Ehud Olmert bragged that he intervened by calling President Bush and convincing him that the U.S. should abstain rather than vote in favor of the cease-fire. [Secy. of State] Rice denied the claim, but in point of fact the resolution was crafted by Rice and her associates and it would be strange for the Secretary to enlist support for a resolution and then abstain when it came to a vote. The incident illustrated how deeply embedded Israel had become in the policy process in the Bush White House.

...

Emerging from Rubble

...

Given Israel’s objective of cutting off Hamas’s access to weapons and munitions, Israel devoted a lot of attention to destroying the hundreds of tunnels that are used to smuggle licit and illicit goods from Egypt into southern Gaza. Many of the tunnels are dug and operated by individual entrepreneurs so one can only guess at how many tunnels exist. A credible estimate puts the total at more than 400 . . . Israel claims to have destroyed or badly damaged 80% of them, but damage assessments in war are notoriously unreliable. The paradox is that the Israeli blockade of Gaza provides the impetus for so many Gazans to become moles. In fact, the tunnel commerce represents a significant segment of the Gaza economy, and it probably employs an estimated 25,000 Gazans. Were the borders to open and the Gazan economy to rebound, then the rationale for the subterranean commerce would largely disappear. Without open borders, the incentives for tunneling remain and the financial incentives for Palestinians

in Gaza and for their Egyptian partners would be likely to prevail over almost any security system. At present, the restrictions imposed by Israel include not only essential supplies and building materials, but even shekels. Indeed, following the war, the only significant supplies of currency in public hands was controlled by Hamas, which had smuggled the money in through the tunnels. Since Hamas took over the Gaza strip in 2007, Israel has allowed only three shipments of money to enter. Since Israeli shipments into Gaza must be paid for with currency, the currency shortage has a direct impact on trade.

Israel is trapped in a conundrum, namely that in order to create the conditions for effectively controlling smuggling in Gaza it must take a step that will be celebrated by Hamas, and by Gazans in general, as a victory. That step is to allow essential trade to resume. This is an issue that is likely to become one of the first important disagreements between the U.S. and Israel. President Obama has already outlined the components of a durable cease-fire, which includes monitored but open borders. The situation is made more complicated by the palpable weakness of the PA in Gaza. It is difficult to imagine a monitoring mechanism that does not imply a significant ration of cooperation with Hamas, whether tacit or explicit. . . .

ALASTAIR CROOKE, "GAZA: A PAWN IN THE NEW 'GREAT GAME,'" *ASIA TIMES*, 14 JANUARY 2009 (EXCERPTS).

Alastair Crooke is founder of Conflicts Forum, an organization that seeks to understand political Islam. He is most recently author of Resistance: The Essence of the Islamist Revolution (Pluto Press 2009).

As Europeans watch the humanitarian disaster in Gaza unfold on nightly news bulletins, many may wonder why this crisis seems to have left their governments groping in such apparent fumbling disarray. . . . What has happened in Gaza was all too foreseeable. A few Israelis forewarned about this coming crisis, but the appeal of the "grand narrative"—of a global struggle between "moderates" and "extremists"—overrode their warnings to the Israeli electorate. . . . It is a narrative that has served Israel's wider interests in garnering legitimacy for the Israeli campaign against Iran, and in dichotomizing the region into Westernized "moderates" and Islamist "extremists."

Former British prime minister and current Middle East envoy for the Quartet group of the United Nations Tony Blair [has] proselytized around the world on this theme, [which] has been a huge asset for an Israel that aspires to become the leading member of a "moderate" bloc rather than an isolated island in an increasingly Islamist Middle East. . . . European acquiescence to this Blairite vision of squeezing and humbling Hamas has directly contributed to the bloodshed seen in the streets of Gaza today. . . .

At one level, Europeans may say they have been working diligently to pursue an Israeli-Palestinian solution, but their actions suggest the opposite—that they have been more concerned to deliver a knockout blow to the camp of global "extremism." Pursuing such irreconcilable ends has only succeeded both in stripping their protégé Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas of any popular legitimacy and in closing the path of political participation to Hamas. . . . European "social engineering" in Gaza has

created only deep division among Palestinians, and possibly pushed a Palestinian state beyond reach.

European leaders bought into this strategy, hoping to pull off a quickie under-the-table “peace” deal with Abbas that could then be “enforced” on the Palestinians through a multinational “peacekeeping” force.

This was to be achieved with the collaboration of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, who were becoming increasingly fearful of the challenge from within their own domestic electorate and who were not averse to seeing Hamas cornered in Gaza and “punished” by the Israelis. . . . Any psychologist, however, might have advised the European and U.S. policymakers that putting one-and-a-half million Palestinians “on a diet,” as an earlier Israeli chief-of-staff to the Israeli prime minister described it, and shredding any plans or hopes that they may have had for their futures, does not make humans more docile or more moderate. . . .

As Gaza was squeezed to the point of desperation in the hope that its inhabitants would turn on Hamas, Britain and the U.S. busied themselves in training a Palestinian “special forces” militia around Abbas. The force was used to suppress political activity by Hamas in the West Bank and to close down welfare and social organizations that are not aligned directly with Abbas. A policy of political “cleansing” of the West Bank, cloaked under the rhetoric of “building security institutions,” predictably has been met with an equivalent counter-reaction by Hamas in Gaza—exacerbating Palestinian divisions.

. . .

Even in the wake of this humanitarian disaster, European mediators seem more concerned to fight the global war of “moderates” versus “extremists” than to achieve a solution. Blair on Israeli television argued that the priority must be to ensure that weapons cannot continue to reach Hamas via the smuggling tunnels—or else the killing continues.

This is being said, however, at exactly the same time that Israeli officials were briefing journalists that the army began planning, training, and acquiring the new weapons from the U.S. for this assault—even as the terms of the past cease-fire were still to be agreed with Hamas.

. . .

Repeated Western attempts to lay a template that has persistently misconceived where the real risk of extremism lies in Islamism, and miscast immoderates as the moderates, has so far only served to light the fires of extremism, rather than extinguish them.

**HENRY SIEGMAN, “ISRAEL’S LIES,” *LONDON REVIEW OF BOOKS*, 29
JANUARY 2009 (EXCERPTS).**

Henry Siegman is a former national director of the American Jewish Congress and former director of the U.S. Middle East Project at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. This article was filed on 15 January 2009.

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 organization, part of a global jihadi network; and that Israel has acted not only in its own defense 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. Criticism of Israel's actions, if any (and there has been none from the Bush administration), has focused instead on whether the IDF's carnage is proportional to the threat it sought to counter, and whether it is taking adequate measures to prevent civilian casualties.

Middle East peacemaking has been smothered in deceptive euphemisms, so let me state bluntly that each of these claims is a lie. Israel, not Hamas, violated the truce: Hamas undertook to stop firing rockets into Israel; in return, Israel was to ease its throttlehold on Gaza. In fact, during the truce, it tightened it further. This was confirmed not only by every neutral international observer and NGO on the scene but by Brigadier General (Res.) Shmuel Zakai, a former commander of the IDF's Gaza Division. In an interview in *Ha'Aretz* on 22 December, he accused Israel's government of having made a "central error" during the *tabdiyeh*, the six-month period of relative truce, by failing "to take advantage of the calm to improve, rather than markedly worsen, the economic plight of the Palestinians of the Strip . . . When you create a *tabdiyeh*, and the economic pressure on the Strip continues," General Zakai said, "it is obvious that Hamas will try to reach an improved *tabdiyeh*, and that their way to achieve this is resumed Qassam fire . . . You cannot just land blows, leave the Palestinians in Gaza in the economic distress they're in, and expect that Hamas will just sit around and do nothing."

The truce, which began in June last year and was due for renewal in December, required both parties to refrain from violent action against the other. Hamas had to cease its rocket assaults and prevent the firing of rockets by other groups such as Islamic Jihad (even Israel's intelligence agencies acknowledged this had been implemented with surprising effectiveness), and Israel had to put a stop to its targeted assassinations and military incursions. This understanding was seriously violated on 4 November, when the IDF entered Gaza and killed six members of Hamas. Hamas responded by launching Qassam rockets and Grad missiles. Even so, it offered to extend the truce, but only on condition that Israel ended its blockade. Israel refused. It could have met its obligation to protect its citizens by agreeing to ease the blockade, but it didn't even try. It cannot be said that Israel launched its assault to protect its citizens from rockets. It did so to protect its right to continue the strangulation of Gaza's population.

Everyone seems to have forgotten that Hamas declared an end to suicide bombings and rocket fire when it decided to join the Palestinian political process, and largely stuck to it for more than a year. Bush publicly welcomed that decision, citing it as an example of the success of his campaign for democracy in the Middle East. (He had no other success to point to.) When Hamas unexpectedly won the election, Israel and the U.S. immediately sought to delegitimize the result and embraced Mahmud Abbas, the head of Fatah, who until then had been dismissed by Israel's leaders as a "plucked chicken." They armed and trained his security forces to overthrow Hamas; and when

Hamas—brutally, to be sure—preempted this violent attempt to reverse the result of the first honest democratic election in the modern Middle East, Israel and the Bush administration imposed the blockade.

Israel seeks to counter these indisputable facts by maintaining that in withdrawing Israeli settlements from Gaza in 2005, Ariel Sharon gave Hamas the chance to set out on the path to statehood, a chance it refused to take; instead, it transformed Gaza into a launching pad for firing missiles at Israel's civilian population. The charge is a lie twice over. First, for all its failings, Hamas brought to Gaza a level of law and order unknown in recent years, and did so without the large sums of money that donors showered on the Fatah-led PA. It eliminated the violent gangs and warlords who terrorized Gaza under Fatah's rule. . . .

The greater lie is that Sharon's withdrawal from Gaza was intended as a prelude to further withdrawals and a peace agreement. This is how Sharon's senior adviser Dov Weisglass, who was also his chief negotiator with the Americans, described the withdrawal from Gaza, in an interview with *Ha'Aretz* in August 2004:

. . .

The significance [of the agreement with the U.S.] is the freezing of the political process. And when you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state and you prevent a discussion about the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. Effectively, this whole package that is called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed from our agenda indefinitely. And all this with [President Bush's] authority and permission . . . and the ratification of both houses of Congress.

. . . It is too easy to describe Hamas simply as a "terror organization." It is a religious nationalist movement that resorts to terrorism, as the Zionist movement did during its struggle for statehood, in the mistaken belief that it is the only way to end an oppressive occupation and bring about a Palestinian state. While Hamas's ideology formally calls for that state to be established on the ruins of the state of Israel, this doesn't determine Hamas's actual policies today any more than the same declaration in the PLO charter determines Fatah's actions.

These are not the conclusions of an apologist for Hamas but the opinions of the former head of Mossad and Sharon's national security adviser, Ephraim Halevy. The Hamas leadership has undergone a change "right under our very noses," Halevy wrote recently in *Yedi'ot Abaronot*, by recognizing that "its ideological goal is not attainable and will not be in the foreseeable future." It is now ready and willing to see the establishment of a Palestinian state within the temporary borders of 1967. Halevy noted that while Hamas has not said how "temporary" those borders would be, "they know that the moment a Palestinian state is established with their cooperation, they will be obligated to change the rules of the game: they will have to adopt a path that could lead them far from their original ideological goals." In an earlier article, Halevy also pointed out the absurdity of linking Hamas to al-Qa'ida.

Why then are Israel's leaders so determined to destroy Hamas? Because they believe that its leadership, unlike that of Fatah, cannot be intimidated into accepting a peace accord that establishes a Palestinian "state" made up of territorially disconnected entities over which Israel would be able to retain permanent control. Control of the West Bank has been the unwavering objective of Israel's military, intelligence, and political elites since the end of the Six-Day War. They believe that Hamas would not permit such a cantonization of Palestinian territory, no matter how long the occupation continues. They may be wrong about Abbas and his superannuated cohorts, but they are entirely right about Hamas. . . .

JIMMY CARTER, "AN UNNECESSARY WAR," *WASHINGTON POST*, 8 JANUARY 2009 (EXCERPTS).

Jimmy Carter, former U.S. president, has been involved in Middle East peace efforts since his tenure as president (1977–81). In recent years he has earned considerable opprobrium in the United States for meeting with Hamas and for authoring Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid (Simon and Schuster 2006). His op-ed sheds light on the cease-fire concluded between Israel and Hamas in June 2008.

I know from personal involvement that the devastating invasion of Gaza by Israel could easily have been avoided. After visiting Sederot last April and seeing the serious psychological damage caused by [Hamas] rockets that had fallen in that area . . . I declared their launching from Gaza to be inexcusable and an act of terrorism. Although casualties were rare (three deaths in seven years), the town was traumatized by the unpredictable explosions. . . . Mayor Eli Moyal assembled a group of citizens in his office to meet us and complained that the government of Israel was not stopping the rockets, either through diplomacy or military action.

Knowing that we would soon be seeing Hamas leaders . . . in Damascus, we promised to assess prospects for a cease-fire. From Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Sulayman, who was negotiating between the Israelis and Hamas, we learned that there was a fundamental difference between the two sides. Hamas wanted a comprehensive cease-fire in both the West Bank and Gaza, and the Israelis refused to discuss anything other than Gaza.

We knew that the 1.5 million inhabitants of Gaza were being starved, as the UN special rapporteur on the right to food had found that acute malnutrition in Gaza was on the same scale as in the poorest nations in the southern Sahara, with more than half of all Palestinian families eating only one meal a day.

Palestinian leaders from Gaza were noncommittal on all issues, claiming that rockets were the only way to . . . dramatize their humanitarian plight. The top Hamas leaders in Damascus, however, agreed to consider a cease-fire in Gaza only, provided Israel would not attack Gaza and would permit normal humanitarian supplies to be delivered to Palestinian citizens.

After extended discussions with those from Gaza, these Hamas leaders also agreed to accept any peace agreement that might be negotiated between the Israelis and Pres.

Mahmud Abbas, who also heads the PLO, provided it was approved by a majority vote of Palestinians in a referendum or by an elected unity government.

Since we were . . . not negotiators, we relayed this information to the Egyptians, and they pursued the cease-fire proposal. After about a month, the Egyptians and Hamas informed us that all military action by both sides and all rocket firing would stop on 19 June, for a period of six months, and that humanitarian supplies would be restored to the normal level that had existed before Israel's withdrawal in 2005 (about 700 trucks daily).

We were unable to confirm this in Jerusalem because of Israel's unwillingness to admit to any negotiations with Hamas, but rocket firing was soon stopped and there was an increase in supplies of food, water, medicine, and fuel. Yet the increase was to an average of about 20 percent of normal levels. And this fragile truce was partially broken on 4 November, when Israel launched an attack in Gaza to destroy a defensive tunnel being dug by Hamas inside the wall that encloses Gaza.

On another visit to Syria in mid-December, I made an effort for the impending six-month deadline to be extended. It was clear that the preeminent issue was opening the crossings into Gaza. Representatives from the Carter Center visited Jerusalem, met with Israeli officials and asked if this was possible in exchange for a cessation of rocket fire. The Israeli government informally proposed that 15 percent of normal supplies might be possible if Hamas first stopped all rocket fire for 48 hours. This was unacceptable to Hamas, and hostilities erupted. . . .

PLANNING, STRATEGY, AND CONDUCT OF THE WAR

BARAK RAVID, "DISINFORMATION, SECRECY AND LIES: HOW THE GAZA OFFENSIVE CAME ABOUT," *HA'ARETZ*, 31 DECEMBER 2008.

Barak Ravid is a correspondent with Ha'Aretz. This article highlights the fact that Israel's cease-fire negotiations with Hamas and its preparations for war occurred simultaneously.

Long-term preparation, careful gathering of information, secret discussions, operational deception, and the misleading of the public—all these stood behind the Israel Defense Forces "Cast Lead" operation against Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip. . . .

Sources in the defense establishment said Defense Minister Ehud Barak instructed the Israel Defense Forces to prepare for the operation over six months ago, even as Israel was beginning to negotiate a cease-fire agreement with Hamas. According to the sources, Barak maintained that although the lull would allow Hamas to prepare for a showdown with Israel, the Israeli army needed time to prepare, as well.

Barak gave orders to carry out a comprehensive intelligence-gathering drive which sought to map out Hamas's security infrastructure, along with that of other militant organizations operating in the Strip. This intelligence-gathering effort brought back information about permanent bases, weapon silos, training camps, the homes of senior officials, and coordinates for other facilities.

The plan of action that was implemented in Operation Cast Lead remained only a blueprint until a month ago, when tensions soared after the IDF carried out an