

An open letter to "Friends of Israel"

By Dick and Rochelle (Caplan) Platkin

An open letter to "Friends of Israel" especially American Jews and elected officials who supported Israel's attack on Gaza, from an Israeli-American couple now temporarily working and living in Be'er Sheva, Israel, about 45 kilometers from the Gaza Strip.

At this point no one knows how long the cease fires will last and if/when the next round of fighting or invasions will begin. But, we do know the war or words is already waging, so we will jump in as participants.

While we had a number of air raid sirens sending us to bomb shelters in Be'er Sheva, they were a nuisance and inexcusable, but qualitatively different than what had been going on in Gaza for decades, but especially in the past two years, and even worse in the past three weeks during the Israeli military assault.

We should not forget that the Palestinians who live in Gaza are the descendants of the same Palestinian refugees who were forcibly evicted from the Negev and southern coastal areas of Israel, including what is now Sderot and Ashdod, in the 1948 war. This has been meticulously documented by many Israeli historians who have debunked all of the old stories we were taught as kids, such as Israel Zangwill's famous line about a "A people without a land for a land without people."

One historian here in Be'er Sheva, at Ben Gurion University, Benny Morris, has fully documented this ethnic cleansing, and it is painful to read.

Another academic here in Be'er Sheva, Neve Gordon, the chair of Poli Sci, completely rejects the claim of the Israeli government and its friendly media that this war was forced on Israel, which, therefore, had no choice but to attack Gaza. His position is that had Israel engaged in negotiations with Hamas when they won the Palestinian elections in 2006, instead of rejecting any contact with them and then imposing a siege on Gaza, as well as a series of smaller military attacks that have cumulatively killed about 1000 Palestinians, that the rockets and the recent "war" could have been avoided.

Democracy Now had a debate between Prof. Gordon and Lanny Davis, a U.S. war supporter, and the link is below. Since the debate 400 more Palestinians were killed, including 125 women and children.

http://www.democracynow.org/2009/1/12/fmr_clinton_special_counsel_lanny

Fmr. Clinton Special Counsel Lanny Davis vs. Israeli Professor Neve Gordon: A Debate on the Israeli Assault on Gaza via Democracy Now.

Israel has poured thousands of reservists into Gaza as Israeli troops push

deeper into Gaza City in the seventeenth day of fighting. Nearly 900 Palestinians have now died, including 275 children. Another 4,100 Palestinians have been injured. The Israeli death toll is at thirteen. We host a debate on the crisis with Lanny Davis, senior adviser to the Israel Project and the former special counsel to President Clinton, and with Neve Gordon, an Israeli professor at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

In addition to Morris and Gordon, another Israeli scholar who has changed our perspective is Avi Shlaim, now at Oxford. Like Simha Flapan ([Israel's Founding Myths](#)), Shlaim, in his masterful [The Iron Wall](#), uses Israel's foreign ministry archives to further debunk nearly the Exodus narrative we were presented, such as the continued claim that Israel has never had any Arab partners to talk peace with. In response, Shlaim offers long lists of different Arab peace offers which were rejected by Israel throughout the decades, from 48 to date.

The most recent of these peace offers is the Saudi/Arab Peace Plan, which was originally offered to Israel in 2002 through the auspices of [NY Times](#) columnist, Tom Friedman. It is based on UN resolutions 224 and 338 (Land for Peace), and it is still on the table. If accepted by Israel, it would establish a full and comprehensive Middle East peace between Israel and the entire 21 countries of the Arab League. Once adopted, it is widely assumed that two non-members of the Arab League, Iran and Hamas, would also accept it. This is why Prof. Gordon rejects the Israeli government's *Ein Breira* (No alternative) justification for the attack on Gaza.

Unfortunately, Israel has refused to even enter into any negotiations on the Saudi peace plan, and the reason is obvious. In exchange for a full and comprehensive regional peace with the entire Arab world, the settlements on the West Bank would have to go.

So, when we heard the *Hasbara* (Hebrew for PR or propaganda) machine claim that Israel had no choice but to attack Gaza with overwhelming military strength, it is so clearly off the mark, that it hard to take this argument seriously.

But, even if the argument were correct, many government critics here, such as columnists and reporters for Israel's newspaper of record, [Ha'aretz](#), argue that the war itself is counter-productive. After 20 days, Hamas is still firing missiles, and more Israelis have so far died in this war than in all the years of Hamas rockets (13 to 11). Plus new cities which were never fired upon, such as Be'er Sheva, suddenly came under target. The columnists in [Ha'aretz](#), especially Gideon Levy and Amira Hass, also point out that Hamas is growing in popularity among Palestinians, while Israel's junior partner, Abu Mazzen, head of the Palestinian Authority and the loser in the Palestinian elections, has been further discredited by the assault on Gaza. If Abbas had any chance or running Gaza before, he has none after these attacks.

Other columnists, especially Gideon Rachman of the [Financial Times](#), Britain's mainstream business paper, make an even stronger argument. He writes that all of

Israel's strategic interests have been set back by the war, and even if Israel manages to claim some type of a body count victory, Israel will be the war's long-term loser. When we see pictures of what is going on in Gaza (unlike the U.S., we have BBC World and AlJazeera in English in Israel, so we get a direct TV feed of what is going on), we have no doubt Levy, Hass, and Rachman are totally correct. Every one of the 4000 destroyed houses will create new Palestinian resistance fighter. Likewise for the families of the 1300 plus dead and 5000 plus wounded. Plus, imagine what the long-term political consequences are of destroying the civilian infrastructure, such as schools, roads, clinics and hospitals, utilities, and sewage facilities.

Another important feature of this war was discussed by Nicholas Kristoff in the NY Times. He reminded readers that Hamas is where it is today because for many years it was promoted by Israel in order to weaken opposition to the occupation from the secular PLO. It did that all right, but no one here in Israel or in the States wants to hold those Israeli officials responsible for the rise of Hamas accountable for their actions.

The most chilling analysis, however, came from Levy in Ha'aretz. He wrote that given the trajectory of this war, that its architects, Olmert, Livney, and Barak, have a good chance of being tried in the Hague for war crimes. He may well be right.

If you don't have time for the material we have suggested, there is one book by Israeli anthropologist, Jeff Halper (originally from Minnesota) which is top notch: An Israeli in Palestine. I strongly recommend it.

Bottom line: it is time for Jews in the diaspora to shed their reflexive support for the right wing parties in Israel and start reading some of the critical scholarship and journalism coming out of Israel. If you don't support John Hagge, Pat Robertson, Joe the Plumber, Sarah Palin, and the late Jerry Fallwell in the United States, why would people so naively accept what their Israeli counterparts claim, especially when so much new and accurate information and analysis is available.

We will attach a copy of the report, plus others that we think are worth reading.

If you would like to forward this open letter to others, you have our permission. And, if you would like to be dropped from any further reports, please let us know.

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