

# SHALOM

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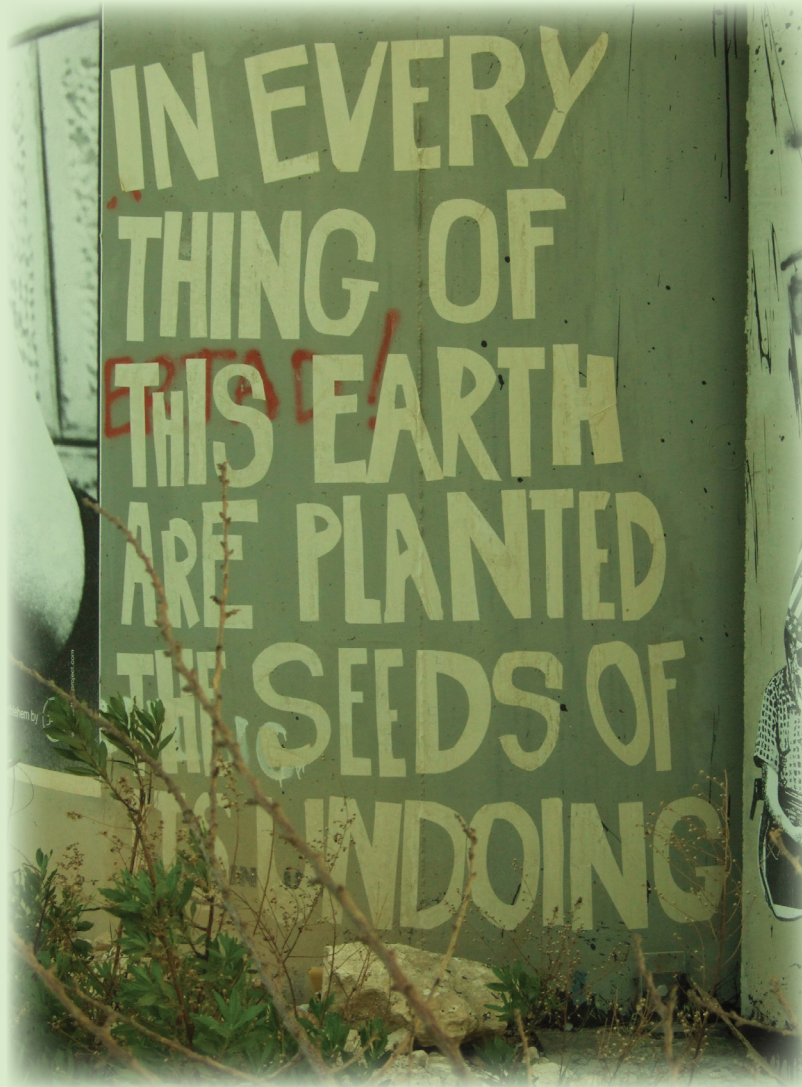
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Photo: noor light photos [Laura]/Flickr.com

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# Stefan Merken

## From Where I Sit

*Stefan Merken is Chair of Jewish Peace Fellowship.*

**T**HERE ARE MOMENTS IN OUR LIVES WHEN A PERSONAL issue bordering on the political and religious becomes paramount and one is moved to do something: write a letter, send an email, sign a petition, make a speech, or reach out to others. Such a moment motivated Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb when she learned that Judge Richard Goldstone, who chaired

the UN inquiry into the recent war in Gaza and was bitterly assailed by critics for its report's conclusions, had been told by the South African Jewish community that he would be unwelcome at his grandson's bar mitzvah in South Africa. Below is the petition Rabbi Gottlieb composed, as well as the names of rabbinic colleagues who have signed it. The JPF is proud that many of the signatories are among our friends and members.

### Rabbis thank Judge Goldstone for upholding principles of justice, compassion and truth

DEAR JUDGE GOLDSTONE:

As rabbis from diverse traditions and locations, we want to extend our warmest mazel tov to you as an elder in our community upon the bar mitzvah of your grandson. Bar and Bat Mitzvah is a call to conscience, a call to be responsible for the welfare of others, a call to fulfill the covenant of peace and justice articulated in our tradition.

As rabbis, we note the religious implications of the report you authored. We are reminded of Shimon Ben Gamliel's quote, "The world stands on three things: justice, truth, and peace as it says 'Execute the judgment of truth, and justice and peace will be established in your gates' (Zekharya 8:16)." We affirm the truth of the report that bears your name.

We are deeply saddened by the controversy that has grown up around the issuing of the report. We affirm your findings and believe you set up an impeccable standard that provides strong evidence that Israel engaged in war crimes during the assault on

Gaza that reveal a pattern of continuous and systematic assault against Palestinian people and land that has very little to do with Israel's claim of security. Your report made clear the intentional targeting of civilian infrastructures such as hospitals, schools, agricultural properties, water and sewage treatment centers and civilians themselves with deadly weapons that are illegal when used in civilian centers.

This is the ugly truth that is so hard for many Jewish people to face. Anyone who spends a day in Palestinian territories sees this truth immediately.

Judge Goldstone, we want to offer you our deepest thanks for upholding the principles of justice, compassion and truth that are the heart of Jewish religion and without which our claims to Jewishness are empty of meaning. We regret that your findings have led to controversy and caused you not to feel welcome at your own grandson's Bar Mitzvah. We believe your report is a clarion call to Israel and the Jewish people to awaken from the slumber of denial and return to the path of peace.

Rabbi Everett Gendler  
Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb  
Rabbi Brant Rosen  
Rabbi Brian Walt  
Rabbi Haim Beliak  
Rabbi Michael Lerner  
Rabbi Arthur Waskow  
Rabbi Michael Feinberg  
Rabbi Shai Gluskin  
Rabbi David Shneyer  
Rabbi David Mivasair

Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman  
Rabbi Douglas Krantz  
Rabbi Margaret Holub  
Rabbi Rebecca Alpert  
Rabbi Mordecai Liebling  
Rabbi Phyllis Berman  
Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer  
Rabbi Eyal Levinson  
Rabbi Doron Isaacs  
Rabbi Gershon Steinberg-Caudill

Rabbi Erin Hirsh  
Rabbi Michael Rothbaum  
Rabbi Benjamin Barnett  
Rabbi Julie Greenberg  
Rabbi Linda Holtzman  
Rabbi Ayelet S. Cohen  
Rabbi Jeffrey Marker  
Rabbi Nina H. Mandel  
Rabbi Victor Reinstein  
Rabbi Meryl M. Crean  
Rabbi Sheila Weinberg

Rabbi Pamela Frydman-Baugh  
Rabbi Lewis Weiss  
Rabbi Shaul Magid  
Rabbi Stephen Booth-Nadav  
Rabbi Phillip Bentley  
Rabbi Ana Boswell Levy  
Rabbi Chava Bahle

#### LATE BREAKING NEWS

*The South African Jewish Board of Deputies and Judge Goldstone have since announced that an agreement has been*

*reached whereby the judge will attend his grandson's bar mitzvah and "there would be no protests associated with the bar mitzvah." Justice has triumphed. ☆*

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## Murray Polner

# It's Mother's Day and We're *Still* at War

Murray Polner is coeditor of *SHALOM*.

**A**FTER THE BLOODBATH OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR the members of the now defunct Victory Chapter of the American Gold Star Mothers in St. Petersburg, Florida, knew better than most what it was to lose their sons, daughters, husbands and other close relatives in war. "We'd rather not talk about it," one mother, whose son was killed in World War II, told the *St. Petersburg Times* 15 years after the conflict ended. "It's a terrible scar that never heals. We hope there will never be another war so no other mothers will have to go through this ordeal."

But thanks to our wars in Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, and the Persian Gulf — not to mention our proxy wars around the globe — as well as the current savagery of Iraq and Afghanistan (the latter, the longest war in our history), too many moms (and dads, too) now have to mourn family members killed or severely damaged in wars dreamed up and supported by our living-room warriors, so few of whom have ever served in the military.

But still, we rightly celebrate Mother's Day. Few Americans know that it was initially suggested by two peace-minded mothers: Julia Ward Howe, a 19th-century antislavery activist and suffragette who wrote the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and Anna Reeves Jarvis, mother of 11 children, who influenced Howe and once asked her fellow Appalachian townspeople, badly divided by the Civil War, to help nurse the wounded on both sides.

Howe had lived through the carnage of the Civil War, when some 620,000 soldiers perished and an enormous number were wounded. It led her to ask a question that's as relevant today as it was in her time: "Why do not the mothers of mankind interfere in these matters, to prevent the waste of that human life of which they alone bear and know the costs?" Mother's Day, she insisted, "should be devoted to the advocacy of peace doctrines."

Though not a mother, my favorite female opponent of war and imperialism was the undeservedly forgotten poet and feminist Katherine Lee Bates, who wrote "America the Beautiful" as a poem in 1895, which is now virtually a second national anthem for all Americans, left, right and center. The poem I love best is her "Glory," in which an officer heading for the front says goodbye to his tearful mother:

Again he raged in that lurid hell  
Where the country he loved had thrown him.  
"You are promoted!" shrieked a shell.  
His mother would not have known him.

More recently there was Lenore Breslauer, a mother of two, who helped found Another Mother for Peace during the Vietnam War and helped coin its memorable slogan, "War is not healthy for children and other living beings." Years later I came to know three mothers named Carol (Adams, Miller and Cohen, plus Louise Polner) who formed Mothers and Others Against War to protest President Jimmy Carter's absurd resurrection of draft registration. They stayed on to battle Ronald Reagan's proxy wars in Central America.

On this year's Mother's Day, while two pointless American wars that have nothing to do with our security drag on and on and on, we could use more dissenting voices of many more women of all political stripes to protest the needless use of their sons, daughters, wives and husbands as cannon fodder, as Russian mothers did in protesting Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan, and as Argentinean and Chilean mothers and grandmothers did when they marched against their neofascist military torturers and murderers of the '70s and '80s. Here in the U.S., what remains of the current antiwar movement has often been led by women demonstrating, in essence, against people who believe "War is a glorious golden thing...invoking Honor and Praise and Valor and Love of Country" — as a bitter, disillusioned and sarcastic Roland Leighton, a World War I British combat soldier, cynically wrote long ago to his fiancée, the antiwar writer Vera Brittain.

Sadly, on Mother's Day — earlier this month and in the years ahead — peace seems further away than ever. How many more war widows and grieving families do we need? Do we need yet another war memorial to the dead in Washington? Do we really need to continue disseminating the myth — and lie — that an idealistic America always fights for freedom and democracy?

More than 5,000 American soldiers and marines have already been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. More will die. They will all have had mothers. ☆



**Julia Ward Howe: "Why do not the mothers of mankind interfere in these matters, to prevent the waste of that human life of which they alone bear and know the costs?"**

Photo: Library of Congress  
Prints and Photographs Division.



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Rob Briley

# The Texas State Board of Education and History Standards

*A teacher's perspective*

Ron Briley is assistant headmaster of Sandia Preparatory School, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and editor of the recently published *The Politics of Baseball: Essays on the Pastime and Power at Home and Abroad*.

**A**S A YOUNG BOY GROWING UP IN THE TEXAS PANHANDLE IN the 1950s and 1960s, I was indoctrinated into the myths of the Alamo and Texas exceptionalism (though I do not recall learning much about the right of Texas to secede from the Union). Despite learning more about Texas high school football than the contributions of African Americans and Hispanics to the making of the state, the conservative orientation of the curriculum did not prevent me from questioning the Vietnam War and embracing the civil rights movement as a first-generation college student. And I have confidence that the teachers and students of the Texas public school system will be able to rise above and see through the narrow and partisan history standards adopted by the Texas State School Board of Education which have drawn the ire of many historians throughout the nation.

Unfortunately, this debate over standards often rages with little input from history teachers who are expected to implement mandated curricula. This attitude derives from a fundamental lack of respect in our culture for teachers. Thus, it is assumed that dentists and real estate agents are better equipped to make curricular decisions than are history educators.

Of course, I must confess that I was not too impressed with my high school history teachers, who were primarily football coaches. Class activities were limited to outlining the textbook and preparing reports from the Encyclopedia Britannica. One could either take a test on Friday or choose the Southwest Conference trivia option. But in defense of these coaches, it should be pointed out that their employment was dependent not upon their knowledge of history, but rather their won-loss record on the football field. Fortunately, even Texas has moved somewhat beyond the stereotypical high school football coach as history teacher.



*The Alamo, San Antonio, Texas. "As a young boy growing up in the Texas Panhandle in the 1950s and 1960s, I was indoctrinated into the myths of the Alamo and Texas exceptionalism (though I do not recall learning much about the right of Texas to secede from the Union)." Photo: Muhgcee/Wikimedia Commons*

There are also some credential issues with history educators, since often a teacher with a social studies degree may be teaching American history with as few as six college hours of history. Nevertheless, there is a strong movement to enhance history education around the nation, led by organizations such as the National Council for History Education, the Society for History Education, the World History Association, the American Historical Association, and the Organization of American Historians. The federally-financed Teaching American History grants provide excellent

models of collaboration between university professors and teachers in the schools. Opportunities for summer history education are also available through the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

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Perhaps the biggest problem for organizations such as the Texas State Board of Education, however, is a fundamental lack of understanding regarding history as an academic discipline. There is a popular assumption that history must be easy to teach because it is an unchanging body of knowledge which does not require the analytical rigor of science and mathematics. Yet history is an exercise in interpretation in which we filter the past through the lens of the evolving present. Thus, the civil rights movement and feminism have encouraged a more inclusive history that considers the contribution of women, Latino/as, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans and Muslim Americans to the building of our nation. The question is not simply which facts, but whose facts. It is a matter of perspective. The history of Western settlement may differ depending upon whether the story is told from the point of view of a pioneer or a Native American. In fact, it seems to be the concept of multiple perspectives which most frighten those seeking to impose absolute standards upon the schools.

For example, it is not unreasonable that consideration be given to the role played by groups such as the National Rifle Association and Moral Majority in the 1980s' resurgence of conservatism, but it would be difficult to tell the whole story of American politics in the late 20th century without also including Ted Kennedy. Likewise, it would be a serious omission to discuss the rise of industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries without taking into account the countervailing power of Eugene Debs and a Socialist Party, which enjoyed strong support in Texas and Oklahoma before the First World War. The historian's discipline offers an excellent opportunity for teachers to instill critical thinking by encouraging students to reach their own conclusions based upon research and analysis of primary documents and sources.

It is the fostering of critical thinking to which the Texas State Board seems most opposed. Rather than encouraging students to investigate the role of religion in the forging of the American nation, students are instructed to accept that the founders envisioned a Christian nation. According to the Texas standards, the Second Amendment is to be treated as an absolute, rather than presenting alternative interpretations and letting students reach their own conclusions. After all, the First Amendment freedom of speech is not recognized by the courts as absolute. It is important to examine the role of Ronald Reagan in ending the cold war, but it is equally essential to appreciate the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, for American history must be placed within the global context in which students will be living during the 21st cen-

tury.

Perhaps the issue boils down to the traditional nostrum that the purpose of history is to instill patriotism in the youth. Yet, to assume their duties as citizens in a democracy, our students must learn to think critically and question the conventional wisdom. It is this type of engaged citizenry rather than rote patriotism which will propel the United States forward in the next century.

And this is the type of teaching which I attempt to offer my students. I tend to align myself more with the Howard Zinn school of historiography and an emphasis upon history from the bottom up. It is, however, a perspective which I share with my students, urging them to challenge me with differing points of analysis. I view it as my charge to present students with multiple perspectives. Thus, when we study the New Deal, it is crucial for them to understand the concept of a social safety-net program such as Social Security. It is equally important to recognize that the liberalism of the New Deal was questioned by conservatives who believed that the welfare state was undermining American individualism, while critics on the left insist that Roosevelt missed an opportunity to alter fundamentally the face of American capitalism.

To foster multiple perspectives, a teacher must be tolerant of opposing interpretations. One young man in my class took exception to the caricature of John D. Rockefeller as a "robber baron." He wrote an outstanding research paper of approximately 25 pages defending the oil tycoon. I composed a five-page rebuttal of my own, but he certainly deserved an A for his scholarship. In fact, some of my most memorable teaching moments arise from classroom debate in which students, with whom I disagree, raise challenging questions. This dialogue keeps me on my toes and makes me a better teacher. I hope that my classroom models a civil discourse which is all too often missing in the halls of Congress.

Yet, it is this type of vibrant democracy which the Texas State Board of Education seeks to stifle. For over 30 years, I have taught American history in an independent school, and I recognize that many of my public school colleagues are under greater pressure than I to adhere to state standards. Nevertheless, I have faith that dedicated teachers and inquiring young minds will find ways to subvert the antidemocratic directives of the Texas State School Board. After all, the real teaching and learning begins when the classroom door closes. ☆

*This essay appeared originally in History News Network.org.*

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## Jeremy Kuzmarov

# “It’s the Police We Worry About”

*American police training and political violence  
in the killing fields of Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan*

*Jeremy Kuzmarov is an assistant professor of history at the University of Tulsa and author of The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs. He wrote this article for The Asia-Pacific Journal.*

AS THE U.S. EXPANDS THE WAR in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Obama administration has placed a premium on police training programs. The stated aim is to provide security to the population so as to enable local forces to gradually take over from the military in completing the pacification process. A similar strategy has been pursued by the United States in Iraq. In both, American-backed forces have been implicated in sectarian violence, death squad activity and torture. At the same time, the weaponry and equipment that the U.S. provided has frequently found its way into the hands of insurgents, many of whom have infiltrated the state security apparatus, contributing to the long-drawn out nature of both conflicts. The programs on the whole exemplify the destructive consequences of American military intervention and point to the need for disengagement on the part of the U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan and Iraq — a disengagement which should include the removal of all military contractors and police trainers.

In Afghanistan, after almost nine years and \$7 billion spent on training and salaries, an internal report concluded that “nepotism, financial improprieties and unethical recruitment practices were commonplace” among the American-backed forces, which engaged in widespread criminal activity and bribery and were “overmatched in counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics operations.” American police advisors,

whose background as small-town cops did little to prepare them for policing in a war zone, made six-figure salaries, 50 times more than their Afghan counterparts, who resented their presence. According to a recent poll, less than 20 per-

cent of the population in the eastern and southern provinces trusted the police, who are poorly motivated and whose poor performance has contributed to political instability and the resurgence of the Taliban. A taxi driver interviewed by RAND Corporation analyst Seth G. Jones tellingly commented, “Forget about the Taliban, it is the police we worry about.”<sup>1</sup>

Despised and feared, the Afghan national police have been continuously controlled by ethnic warlords paid off by the CIA and are central to what Ambassador Ron Neumann characterized as the pattern of “repression and oppression” gripping the country. They have routinely engaged in shake-downs at impromptu checkpoints, shot at and killed stone-throwing or unarmed demonstrators, stolen farmers’ land, and terrorized the civilian population while undertaking house-to-house raids in military-assisted sweep operations. They have further intimidated voters during fraudulent

elections, including the one that brought Hamid Karzai back to power in 2009. According to village elders in Babaji, police



**Afghan President Hamid Karzai. “Karzai’s 2007 appointee as anticorruption chief, Izzatullah Wasifi, ... spent almost four years in a Nevada prison for trying to sell heroin to an undercover police officer.”** Photo: MSgt Chris Haylett. ISAF Headquarters Public Affairs Office, Kabul, Afghanistan/Flickr

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<sup>1</sup> See James Glanz, “The Reach of War: U.S. Report Finds Dismal Training of Afghan Police,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2006; Ahmed Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008), 204-5; Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America’s War in Afghanistan* (New York: Norton, 2009), 172.



bent on taking revenge against clan rivals carried out the abduction and rape of pre-teen girls and boys.<sup>2</sup> These kinds of abuses fit with a larger historical pattern, and are a product of the ethnic antagonisms and social polarizations bred by the U.S. intervention and the mobilization of police for military and political ends.

The support by the Bush administration for torture and other harsh methods strengthened the proclivity towards indiscriminate violence. The International Red Cross reported massive overcrowding in Afghan prisons, “harsh” conditions, a lack of clarity about the legal basis for detention, and people being held “incommunicado” in isolation cells where they were “subjected to cruel treatment in violation of the Geneva Conventions.” An undisclosed number have died in custody, including several thousand who were allegedly transported under the oversight of CIA-backed warlord Rashid Dostum in unventilated containers, where they suffocated to death or were shot.<sup>3</sup>

Corruption has been a major problem as police routinely accept kickbacks from black-market activities. Fitting a historical pattern, the State Department and CIA have maintained close ties with top officials who are directly involved in the narcotics trade, causing production to rise to over 8,000 tons per year. The president’s own brother, Ahmed Wali, a CIA “asset” who heads a paramilitary group used for raids on suspected Taliban enclaves, has allegedly used drug proceeds to fund state terror operations, including intimidation of opponents in the rigged election of 2009. Karzai’s 2007 appointee as anticorruption chief, Izzatullah Wasifi, meanwhile, spent al-



**Bernard Kerik:** “In Iraq ... American training programs have contributed to the shattering of the societal fabric. The mission was initially headed by Bernard Kerik, former New York City police commissioner who won fame in leading rescue efforts at Ground Zero on September 11 and was later convicted and sentenced to four years in prison on charges of tax fraud and other counts. Photo: Bernard Kerik/Wikimedia Commons

most four years in a Nevada prison for trying to sell heroin to an undercover police officer. A CIA officer commented that during the U.S.-NATO occupation, “Virtually every significant Afghan figure has had brushes with the drug trade. If you are looking for Mother Theresa, she doesn’t live in Afghanistan.”<sup>4</sup>

Cheryl Bernard, a RAND analyst and wife of Zalmay Khalilzad, a U.S. ambassador to the UN during the George W. Bush administration, explained one of the key reasons for the lack of good governance: “To defeat the Soviets we threw the worst crazies against them. Then we allowed them to get rid of, just kill all the moderate leaders. The reason we don’t have moderate leaders in Afghanistan today is because we let the nuts kill them all. They killed all the leftists, the moderates, the middle of the roaders. They were just eliminated, during the 1980s and afterwards.”<sup>5</sup> The United States continues to tolerate high levels of corruption out of perceived geopolitical expediency, claiming that it is en-

grained within the political culture of Afghanistan and other “backward nations” in which it intervenes. In reality, however, it is a product of historical contingencies, the breakdown of social mores caused by the war climate and the need of elite officials lacking popular legitimacy to obtain money for counterinsurgency operations.

Beginning in 2004, as war increasingly spilled over into Pakistan, the State Department provided tens of millions of dollars in technical aid, training and equipment to the Pakistani police. The central aim was to fight the Taliban and consolidate the power of military dictator Pervez Musharraf and his successor, Ali Asaf Zhardari. American advisors introduced a computerized security and evaluation system to monitor all movement across the border, created special counternarcotics units and a police air wing which was supplied with three Caravan spotter planes and eight Huey helicopters to aid in counterinsurgency operations. Police play a vital role alongside mercenary firms such as Xe in operations

<sup>2</sup> See D. Gareth Porter, “A Bigger Problem Than the Taliban? Afghanistan’s U.S.-Backed Child Raping Police,” *Counterpunch*, July 30, 2009 [<http://www.counterpunch.org/portero7302009.html>]; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 172; Marc Herold, “Afghanistan: Terror U.S. Style,” *Frontline*, March 11, 2009, [<http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2009/03/11/terror-u-s-style.html>]; Douglas Valentine, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the CIA’s Dirty War in Afghanistan,” *Z Magazine*, Feb. 2010, 31-35.

<sup>3</sup> William Fischer, “Rights: Afghan Prison Looks Like Another Guantanamo,” *IPS News*, Jan. 15, 2008 (also available online at [ipsnews.net/](http://ipsnews.net/)); Paul Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Gould, *Invisible History: Afghanistan’s Untold Story* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009), 317.

<sup>4</sup> Dexter Filkins, Mark Mazetti and James Risen, “Brother of Afghan Leader Said to Be Paid by CIA,” *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 2009; Malalai Joya, with Derrick O’Keefe, *A Woman Among Warlords: The Extraordinary Story of an Afghan Who Dared to Raise Her Voice* (New York: Scribner, 2009), 205.

<sup>5</sup> Fitzgerald and Gould, op. cit., 284.

identifying targets for CIA Predator drone attacks which have killed hundreds of civilians, including over 100 during an errant strike on the village of Bola Baluk.<sup>6</sup> As in Afghanistan, militarization has enhanced the already repressive character of the police and contributed to the intensification of a vicious civil war in which over two million people have been rendered refugees. The Pakistani intelligence service (ISI) meanwhile is deeply caught up in the heroin traffic, with the usual CIA collusion, and has been infiltrated by pro-Taliban elements, revealing the futility of American training programs and intervention.<sup>7</sup>

In Iraq, much as in Vietnam three decades earlier, American training programs have contributed to the shattering of the societal fabric. The mission was initially headed by Bernard Kerik, former New York City police commissioner who won fame in leading rescue efforts at Ground Zero on September 11 and was later convicted and sentenced to four years in prison on charges of tax fraud and other counts.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of hundreds of millions in funding, the Iraqi National Police (INP) remains under-equipped and riddled with cronyism and corruption. Its staff was so poorly motivated and paid that many sold their bullets and uniforms on the black market. Historically, the forces trained by the United

States to subdue their own countrymen have taken on the air of paid mercenaries with little loyalty to their benefactor or the cause they purportedly represent. Iraq is no exception to this general rule. A State Department report noted that because of poor morale, Iraqi police have been rendered “ineffective and have quit or abandoned their stations.” They were infiltrated by sectarian militias who used American weapons to engage in ethnic cleansing and brazenly drove through city streets in daylight hours with dead bodies in the backs of their trucks. Militarized units routinely fired into crowds of unarmed demonstrators and had a history of going on forays into Sunni neighborhoods just to punish civilians. Several dozen investigative journalists and 200 prominent academics who opposed the U.S. invasion were among those assassinated. Jerry Burke, one of the original police trainers who served two tours in Iraq, told reporters in 2007 that the INP was unsalvageable and that many of its members should be prosecuted for criminal human rights violations, war crimes and death squad activities.<sup>9</sup>

By training and arming Iraqi police officials notorious for corruption, beatings, kidnappings and mass executions, American advisors contributed to the bloodbath in Iraq. The only solution at this point is for the U.S. to disengage from the war and to provide reparations aid for all the damage that has been done so that Iraqis and Afghans and Pakistanis can rebuild their own shattered societies and sort out internecine conflicts on their own. The U.S. interventions have done nothing but aggravate local conflicts while sowing violence and misery for the majority of the population. ☆

6 C. Christine Fair and Peter Chalk, eds. *Fortifying Pakistan: The Role of U.S. Internal Security Assistance* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press, 2006), 51; Jeremy Scahill, “The Secret U.S. War in Pakistan,” *The Nation*, Dec. 21-28, 2009, 11; Mike Whitney, “From My-Lai to Bala Baluk,” *Counterpunch*, May 15, 2009 (available online at [www.counterpunch.org/whitney05152009.html](http://www.counterpunch.org/whitney05152009.html)).

7 On the long standing corruption of the ISI, see Lawrence Lifschultz, “Pakistan: The Empire of Heroin,” in *War on Drugs: Studies in the Failure of U.S. Narcotics Policy*, eds. Alfred W. McCoy and Alan A. Block (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), 319-52.

8 Sam Dolnick, “Kerik Is Sentenced in Corruption Case,” *New York Times*, Feb. 18, 2010; Benjamin Weiser, “Kerik Pleads Not Guilty to a Revised Indictment,” *New York Times*, Dec. 29, 2008.

9 Spencer Ackerman, “Training Iraq’s Death Squads,” *The Nation*, May 17, 2007; Ken Silverstein, “Jerry Burke on Iraq’s Corrupt Police Force,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Sept. 11, 2007; Christopher Allbritton, “Why Iraq’s police Are a Menace,” *Time Magazine*, March 20, 2006; Patrick Cockburn, *The Occupation* (London: Verso, 2006), 123.

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David N. Myers

## A Deep, Festering Wound

David N. Myers teaches Jewish history at UCLA. He is the author of *Between Jew and Arab: The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz* (University Press of New England, 2008), which contains an English translation of “*Between Jew and Arab*.”

CURRENT DISCOURSE ON ISRAEL AND “THE CONFLICT” is so inflamed as to offer little middle ground for reasonable debate. Israel is cast by some as a paragon of virtue incapable of misdeed — and by others as the primary, even sole, source of evil in the international order. These divergent views affirm the law of the excluded middle, and the consequences are tragic. New thinking on sensitive issues — for example, whether Israel should be a Jewish state or a state of all its citizens, or how best to end the occupation — is forestalled. Likewise, self-criticism, a quality preciously needed for such thinking and yet rarely present in the polemical fray, is discouraged.

It is in such moments of stasis and despair that I tend to look to the past for guidance. This is not only an occupational hazard as an historian. It is also based on the realization that the past contains a multitude of lost voices, some of which bear deep insights that can inspire us in the future. One such voice that I have attempted to recover in my own work is that of Simon Rawidowicz (1897-1957).

To students of 20th-century Jewish thought, Rawidowicz is known as an astute and wide-ranging scholar whose studies of Maimonides, Moses Mendelssohn and Nachman Krochmal, among many others, opened new gateways of understanding. Alongside his scholarly reputation, Rawidowicz also became known for his distinctive vision of Jewish nationalism, the product of decades of reflection and summarized in his posthumous 900-page Hebrew volume, *Bavel vi-Yerushalayim* (Babylon and Jerusalem). The project of “Babylon and Jerusalem,” as Rawidowicz formulated it, was to avoid the

polarized extremes of the regnant Jewish nationalist ideologies — Diasporism and Zionism — with which he grew up in Europe. Mixing historical description and ideological prescription, Rawidowicz argued vehemently against the Zionist claim that Jews could maintain a healthy collective existence only in the Land of Israel. At the same time, he refused to accept the Diasporists’ willingness to surrender a strong bond to the homeland — and especially to the Hebrew language. The result was a synthesized vision of a Jewish nation with two centers, one in the Diaspora (Babylon) and one in Palestine (Jerusalem).

Rawidowicz’s idiosyncratic view of Jewish nationalism always struck me as both refreshing and intuitively sound. From the first time I encountered his writings 25 years ago, I vowed to study him in greater detail at some point in my career. During the last decade I have acted on that promise, making many trips to the archive of his papers located in the basement of the home of his son, Professor Benjamin Ravid of Brandeis University. Once, while walking amidst the treasures of the archive, Ben Ravid handed me a 33-page Hebrew text, a sort of coda to Rawidowicz’s massive book on Babylon and Jerusalem that was never published.

This chapter, entitled “Between Jew and Arab,” represented a sharp departure from Rawidowicz’s usual concerns.

Up to that point, he had spent most of his time meditating on the Jewish condition, and particularly on the struggle of Jews to preserve their cultural distinctiveness in the face of manifold threats. The year 1948 altered his perspective dramatically. The assumption of sovereignty by Jews in the new State of Israel transformed the age-old “Jewish Question” into the “Arab Question.” It was no longer Jews who were a beleaguered national minority arrayed against a powerful host. Jews had become the powerful sovereign. The small Arab population that remained in the newly created State of Israel was now the



*Palestinian refugees making their way to Lebanon from Galilee in October/November 1948. “The question of these refugees is not an Arab question; it is a Jewish question, a question that 1948 placed upon the Jewish people.” Photo: Fred Csasznik/Wikimedia Commons*

beleaguered national minority. In characteristic fashion, Rawidowicz described this shift by making recourse to a rabbinic discussion about a dispute between two parties over a garment:

One [side] has grabbed hold of it, dominates, and leads, while the other is led. The first rules as a decisive majority, as a nation-state. The other is dominated as a minority. And domination is in the hands of the Jews.

The altered balance of power represented a significant political and moral test for the sovereign Jewish state. From his study in Waltham, Massachusetts, Rawidowicz closely followed developments in Israel, relying on regular clippings of newspapers and journals sent by his brother in Tel Aviv. The evidence he accumulated in the early 1950s, when he wrote “Between Jew and Arab,” was not encouraging. In particular, the early legislative actions of the Knesset betrayed traces of discriminatory steps against the Arab minority. Rawidowicz had no objection to the Law of Return (1950) that granted Jews the right to immigrate and become citizens in the new state. But he was dismayed by the Law of Nationality (1952), which set a much higher bar for citizenship for the native Arab population of historic Palestine than for Jewish immigrants. And he was further upset by a statute passed by the Knesset in 1953, the Land Acquisition (Validation of Acts and Compensation) Law, which facilitated transfer of annexed Arab land to the Israel Development Authority.

These laws suggested to Rawidowicz that the hard-earned historical and ethical lessons that Jews had absorbed as a Diaspora minority were being blithely disregarded in the new state, and that Jews were acting, in the words of the Proverb, like “the servant who has now come to reign.” The fact that a number of earlier Zionist thinkers such as Ahad Ha-am and Yitshak Epstein had used this biblical phrase as a warning against Zionist hubris reminded Rawidowicz that such moral voices once existed — but had largely disappeared.

And yet as unsettled as he was by the Knesset’s discriminatory laws, against which “morality itself protests,” Rawidowicz deemed them relatively insignificant “compared to one major act of discrimination: the denial of repatriation that was imposed upon the Arabs who left Palestine — or took flight from it — with the outbreak of war between the State of Israel and the Arab countries.” Indeed, it was the “plight of the refugees,” as he called, that stood at the heart of Rawidowicz’s chapter “Between Jew and Arab.”

It is essential to emphasize that very few Israeli or Jewish thinkers, intellectuals or activists saw fit in the early 1950s to declare that the plight of Arab refugees was a — perhaps *the* — measure of Jewish political sagacity and moral integrity. Rawidowicz was most unusual in that regard. He was less in-



terested in the question that has engaged historians over the last two decades: whether the refugees fled of their own accord or were expelled. What mattered most was the injustice of displacement — and the fact that Israel “shut its gates to *every* refugee, to men, women, and children who did not commit any wrong.” Rawidowicz believed that Jews and the State of Israel had to assume the mantle of responsibility:

The question of these refugees is not an Arab question; it is a *Jewish question*, a question that 1948 placed upon the Jewish people. The Jewish people must deliver this problem from the world with all deliberate speed and thoroughness. Let not a single Arab refugee from the State of Israel remain in the world. This is an existential imperative for the State of Israel, from which it can not flinch.

In adopting this stance, Simon Rawidowicz knew that he would encounter fierce criticism, principally from his fellow Jews. In his chapter, he asserted that “it is better that I should be the target of the arrow of every crossbow in Israel than I should hold my tongue and say: Israel has no sin.” Ironically, and sadly, his bold expression of Jewish morality did not see the light of day. “Between Jew and Arab” was never published. We don’t know exactly why, though it is reasonable to assume that Rawidowicz was persuaded to shelve the text lest his entire life’s work be discredited.

Notwithstanding a 50-year silence, Rawidowicz’s voice is one of those from the past upon which we can and should draw. Even if he had a last-minute crisis of confidence in publishing “Between and Arab,” we can still learn much from his example. He was a proud Jew, a staunch (though idiosyncratic) Jewish nationalist and an unreconstructed believer in a noble Jewish morality. He was, in short, an *ohev Yisra’el*, a passionate lover of his own people. But that love did not come at the expense of self-criticism, of probing introspection into one’s own darkest corners. Rather, self-criticism deepened and completed that love.

Today Rawidowicz’s call for the repatriation of all Palestinian refugees to the State of Israel has an air of unreality to it. It seems neither practicable nor desirable in the present state of enmity. Nevertheless, rereading Rawidowicz’s powerful chapter can and should serve to remind us of the “plight of the refugees.” That plight remains a deep wound seared into Palestinian national identity. Unless and until Israel acknowledges and assumes *some* measure of responsibility for it, the wound will continue to fester. But should it summon the courage for such an act of moral clarity, Israel would be reaping the benefit of a liberating self-criticism that is so desperately lacking in the Middle East — and yet so necessary to escape the perilous stasis that grips the region today. ☆

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J. Zel Lurie

# At-Tuwani Kids vs. American Jewish Myths

*Jesse Zel Lurie was the longtime editor of Hadassah Magazine. He is the senior columnist for the Jewish Journal of South Florida, which publishes editions in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami.*

**I**T WAS THE STRANGEST SIGHT I HAD EVER SEEN DURING numerous visits in the last 40 years to the occupied West Bank: Palestinian children scampering down a dirt road, followed at a snail's pace by a protective Israel Army jeep.

This was an unusual and unique scene. In all other places on the West Bank Palestinian children and Israel Army jeeps are adversaries,

I witnessed this scene in the hill village of At-Tuwani, about a dozen miles south of Hebron, to which I was taken in a B'Tselem car during my recent Passover visit to Israel. At-Tuwani is famous because the Army had declared it a closed military zone and had forced many of its 150 residents to leave. A subsequent Israeli court order allowed them to return.

The village is also famous for its seven-year struggle with the Army's civil administration to connect with the Israeli electric grid that passes near their village en route to Beersheba.

The story of its unsuccessful application can be found on YouTube. So far they have electric power only four hours a day from a generator.

At-Tuwani contains a regional school which serves six villages in the area, no more than a hike of an hour or two.

The school contains nine grades with 106 boys and girls. Twenty of the children live in or near Tuba, almost two miles away. On the hill above the dirt road between At-Tuwani and Tuba, religious Jewish settlers had placed an illegal outpost of the Moan settlement, named Havat Maon.

The Have Maon settlers built henhouses directly on the road. They attacked the Tuba school kids as they passed by. Christian Peacemakers Team adults from the United States and Doves for Peace from Italy came to the rescue of the Palestinian children who were attacked while walking to school.

But the adult escorts themselves were repeatedly attacked by the religious thugs of Havat Maon.

The Israel Army, which governs the West Bank, was not helpful. The function of the Israel Army in Area C, which is the largest part of the West Bank, is to protect the Jewish settlers. I was repeatedly told this by Israel Army officers during my many visits to the West Bank and Gaza.

B'Tselem has videotapes of Jewish settlers in Hebron attacking their Palestinian neighbors. Jewish soldiers saw the attacks and did nothing. It was not their job to protect the Palestinians.

Except in At-Tuwani.

In 2004 the High Court, Israel's bastion of democracy, stepped in. The court ordered the Army to escort the Tuba children to and from their school in At-Tuwani.

The army obeyed. And so for six years, six days a week, the Tuba kids have been protected.

On the Tuesday after Passover at 1:30 in the afternoon, I stood with 20 kids from Tuba and a neighboring village, waiting for the army. Together with Sophie (not her real name, to protect her from questioning at

the airport when she leaves Israel) from Wisconsin, a member of the Christian Peacemakers Team, and Gila Svirsky, the chair of B'Tselem, and Karim, our driver-guide, we waited on the road.

At 1:38 the children sighted the armored jeep. With the cry of *Tsava!*, they moved quickly onto the road in front of the jeep, which never stopped. They scampered down the road, up a hill and around a curve, out of sight. Sophie waited. A member of her team watched with binoculars from a nearby hill. Thirty-five minutes later her phone rang. A third CPT member reported that the children were past the danger point and were on their way home.

We waited a few moments for the army jeep to reappear and perhaps interview the soldiers. They did not appear. They had probably stopped in Havat Maon for coffee.

Back home in the U.S. eight days later, I had the privilege of introducing Alan Sagner, a member of the executive board of J Street, to my breakfast club. His message of the benefits of a two-state solution received a cool reception from more than a hundred retired American Jews.



*Aller à l'école à at-Tuwani (Going to school in at-Tuwani).*

Photo: CL/Association France-Palestine Solidarité



The myths propounded in the so-called question period revealed the vast distance between many American Jews and the shepherds of At-Tuwani in their fight for electric power.

One audience member voiced a diatribe against Jimmy Carter for calling Israel an apartheid state. Carter did no such thing and the attorney never got past the unfortunate title of Carter's book, which repeatedly described Israel as a liberal democracy in contrast to its apartheid occupation of the West Bank.

Yes, the West Bank is very much an apartheid society that favors Jewish settlers over the Palestinian majority. In our trip to At-Tuwani we took Route 60 from Jerusalem and reached At-Tuwani an hour later. Much of the route is forbidden to Palestinian traffic. Sophie told us that it took her three hours on back roads to travel from Hebron to At-Tuwani by Palestinian public transportation.

A couple of speakers found it unreasonable that President Obama should make demands on Israel, such as freezing construction of settlements, and not making equivalent demands on the Palestinians.

The fact is that the president and Secretary of State Hillary



Clinton revived an agreement that former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon signed years ago, in which he agreed to freeze the settlements and begin to remove illegal outposts such as Havat Maon if the Palestinians ended all violence. The Palestinians on the West Bank ended violence years ago and Hamas has reined in the Islamic Jihad rockets, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to only a 10-month freeze and not a single illegal outpost has been touched.

It is my hope that the myths that prevail among American Jews, such as those aired in my breakfast club, will not affect the gradual but persistent movement by the Obama administration towards a two-state solution.

Meanwhile, I found a marked improvement on conditions in the occupied West Bank. The Palestinian police and security institutions are working successfully on mutual security. The Hope Flower School for Peace in area C outside of Bethlehem is thriving.

The earthen dam which obstructed At-Tuwani cars from reaching the highway has been removed. But the villagers may only cross the highway. They are not allowed to travel on it. Apartheid still prevails. ☆

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Ira Chernus

## Conflicting Israeli Narratives Compete in the U.S., Too

*Ira Chernus is professor of religious studies at the University of Colorado. His writings about Israel, Palestine and the U.S. are on his blog at <http://chernus.wordpress.com>.*

**P**ROCRASTINATION CAN BE A VIRTUE, ESPECIALLY FOR a writer who has a looming deadline. I kept getting e-mails from Murray Polner, saying: "You promised us an article for *SHALOM* by April 24th. How's that article coming along?" Now, here it was April 23rd. Not only had I not written a word, I had no idea what I might write about.

Looking for inspiration, I spent a few minutes scanning the morning newspapers and found a most revealing concatenation of words and phrases. All the quotes below come from the press on that one, rather typical, day.

I started off, as usual, with *The New York Times* — once a dependable supporter of the Israeli policy du jour, but no longer. Here was Jewish foreign affairs columnist Roger Cohen lamenting that "the threat has morphed since 1948 — from Arab armies to Palestinian militants to Islamic jihadists — but not the Israeli condition. The nation 'wallows in a sense of existential threat that has only grown with time,' the daily Haaretz commented." [*The New York Times*, April 22, 2010; <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/23/opinion/23iht-edcohen.html>.]

Cohen said that he'd recently interviewed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and heard this comment: "Concessions lead to insecurity." But Cohen also heard quite the opposite from Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, who said, "We are the ones that have to live through an agreement and survive afterward. Of course we want peace but not at the price of our existence." Translation: Insecurity leads to a refusal to make concessions.

Part of the Israeli insecurity now, Cohen observed, stems from a changing relationship with the U.S. government: "What is really bothering Israelis, the root of the troubles, is that Obama is not buying the discourse, the narrative." And Cohen summed up the narrative that controls Israeli policy quite neatly in his headline: "Israeli Unassailable Might and

Unyielding Angst."

This is a crucial and far-too-often ignored insight: Beneath all the debates about particular issues, a narrative of angst and existential fear is at the root of the unyielding Israeli policy that rebuffs President Obama's moves toward peace and perpetuates the conflict.

In *The Jerusalem Post*, a rather dependable messenger for its nation's prevailing narratives, Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz spelled it out once again: "Israel, a nation that Obama has himself acknowledged was built on the ashes of one Holocaust, certainly has the right to take military action to prevent a second Holocaust. ... The world ignored the explicit threats of one tyrant who threatened to destroy the Jewish people in the 1930s, and he nearly succeeded in the 1940s. Israel cannot be expected to ignore Hitler's successor, who while denying the first Holocaust, threatens a second one. ... Elie Wiesel put it well when he said that the Holocaust has taught the Jewish people to 'believe the threats of our enemies more than the promises of our friends.' "

[*The Jerusalem Post*, April 22, 2010; [http://cgis.jpost.com/Blogs/dershowitz/entry/the\\_obama\\_administration\\_s\\_conflicting](http://cgis.jpost.com/Blogs/dershowitz/entry/the_obama_administration_s_conflicting).] The "second Hitler," of course, is Iran's leader

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

But *The Jerusalem Post* also let its token peace-oriented columnist, Larry Derfner, rebut Dershowitz' call for militant violence. Derfner's particular issue of the day was the vilification of a now-famous critic of Israeli violence, Richard Goldstone. "Neither Dershowitz nor any of the legions of other proud, patriotic Zionist Jews who've ganged up on Goldstone are worthy of carrying his briefcase. He is the absolute best of the Jewish tradition. He stands up for justice, he stands up for the oppressed and he speaks truth to power — no matter who holds the power and no matter what it costs him." [*The Jerusalem Post*, April 22, 2010; <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=173623>.]

That's a very different narrative about the essential meaning of Israel, one that goes back to the very beginnings of Zionism. It has always been a minority voice among Zionists.



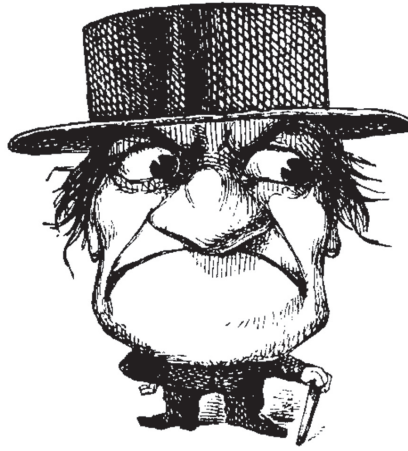
But Derfner's column is one more sign that it will not stop whispering, at least, to the conscience of the Jewish community.

Among major Israeli news outlets, that alternative narrative is heard most often in *Haaretz*. But as columnist Nehemia Shtrasler showed, the two seemingly contradictory narratives can actually be combined: "The Nazi death machine was killing and burning the bodies of 12,000 Jews each day. The cruel truth is that no one really cared. ... This evil has not ceased to exist. ... We must continue trying to strengthen the Israel Defense Forces ... The world must know: Never again will Jewish blood be spilled with impunity." [*Haaretz*, April 13, 2010; <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1162668.html>.] At this point, Dershowitz would no doubt be nodding his head furiously in agreement.

But Shtrasler developed the story further, making it more complicated than right-wingers like Dershowitz would want: "The Holocaust flak jacket won't last forever. It is cracking as we watch, and soon it will no longer be able to protect us. ... The world's guilt feelings are gradually becoming dulled, making it possible for the global criticism of the occupation of Palestinian territories to strengthen. ... More and more voices in Europe say to Israel: No more. ... And because in the West it is public opinion that ultimately determines how governments act, we must reach an agreement that will get us out of those territories and make Israel a moral and just country once again."

There's a very real option for Israelis today: Reduce the Holocaust-inspired (or Holocaust-legitimated) fear in the national narrative, and increase the morality and justice, in order to retain support from the U.S. and the Europeans. Speak truth to power in order to curry favor with the powers. It's sad but perhaps true that this pragmatic appeal is most likely to revive the sagging fortunes of the narrative of Jewish morality as the *raison d'être* of the Jewish state.

Israeli attention is focused intently on the great powers, and especially on the greatest power of all, the United States. If, as Roger Cohen claims, Obama is not buying the narrative of fear, Anshel Pfeffer thinks that this does not make the current president different from his predecessors: "There is nothing new about the policy differences between Israel and the United States regarding settlements and the future of the West Bank. They have existed for decades. Bibi's [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's] mistake has been to allow this dispute to turn into a personal quarrel between him and Obama. Into this quarrel he has continuously tried to pull both Israel's allies in Congress and the American Jewish leadership, in effect trying to show that the Israeli prime minister



has more power in Washington than the American president." [*Haaretz*, April 24, 2010; <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1164827.html>.]

Displaying Jewish power is a crucial element in the narrative of "unassailable might and unyielding angst." But it plays a double-edged role. On the one hand, the insistence on Jewish power summed up in the "never again" slogan is an understandable — even if ultimately self-defeating — response to fear. That point is often observed. What goes less noticed is the opposite dynamic: Fear can be

created as a way to justify the amassing of power.

Zionism began among Jews who wanted power not merely to fend off attack but to build up a sense of pride and self-respect. For them, national power was an end in itself. But that narrative ran head-on into the narrative of Jewish morality. Some Jewish consciences were dulled enough to dismiss ethical concerns altogether. But many were uneasy enough that they wanted some moral legitimation for the use of power. Angst — the seemingly justified fear of a supposedly eternal anti-Semitism — gave them the answer they were looking for. That's one big reason the fear has not disappeared, despite the overwhelming Israeli military might, and it shows no signs of disappearing soon.

If the Israeli narrative is now in flux, full of ambiguous views about the uses of power, so is the U.S. government's narrative about Israel, according to *Haaretz* writer Yossi Verter. He noted that Martin Indyk, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel and now an advisor to Obama's envoy George Mitchell, had just written an article critical of Israel. Yet the day before that, Rahm Emanuel, who is much closer to Obama, gave an interview and "said exactly the opposite, in both style and substance, about the relations between the two countries and the two leaders." [*Haaretz*, April 23, 2010; <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1164827.html>.]

Why the contradiction? "The Americans are sophisticated enough to play the good cop-bad cop game," Verter explained. "In the end, it will be Netanyahu who feels the blow of the truncheon on his head."

That may be giving too much credit to the strategic craft of the Obama administration. It's just as likely — perhaps more likely — that the U.S. administration is muddling through, improvising as it goes along, sorting out its own aims.

The process is taking so long because the various Israeli narratives all have their supporters inside the administration. So the debate about the U.S. narrative is still far from resolved in the White House. To stall for time, the administration is spinning different stories on different days

*"Into this quarrel [Netanyahu] has continuously tried to pull both Israel's allies in Congress and the American Jewish leadership, in effect trying to show that the Israeli prime minister has more power in Washington than the American president."*



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— talking out of both sides of its mouth — to satisfy competing constituencies and avoid making any irrevocable commitments.

Ultimately, the Obama administration will have to choose a narrative of its own. The alternative is to look weak and irresolute on the world stage — something no leader of the world's greatest superpower can afford to do if he hopes to retain his own political power. No doubt Obama and his advisors are seriously trying to figure out how best to enhance American power on a global scale. But they always have one eye fixed firmly on the domestic scene, worrying constantly about the political fortunes of the president and his party.

For those of us who can still imagine an Israel — and a world Jewish community — building its life on the narrative of Jewish moral values, the overriding goal must be a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the creation of a viable, contiguous Palestinian state — which is the Obama administration's stated policy. As long as Israel goes on inflicting violence and occupation upon the Palestinians, the twist-

ed narrative that entwines fear and power in so many complex ways will continue to dominate Israeli and Jewish life. The escape route is now clearly marked, and it leads directly through the White House.

With enough political support from the voices of peace and justice, the administration will have the courage to choose its own narrative of peace and justice and then use its power to persuade Israelis, as well as Palestinians, to fall in line. To reach that goal, though, the voices of peace and justice — especially from the American Jewish community — must grow ever louder, telling a Jewish story that most Americans have yet to hear, a narrative that says Israelis will not live in security until Palestinians, too, are living in a secure and truly independent state of their own.

That's the lesson I was reminded of by scanning the press on an ordinary, average day. It's the same lesson I'm reminded of by scanning the press every day. The details change. But it's surprising how much is repeated day after day. The fundamental truths, and the fundamental challenge, remain the same. ☆

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## David Cronin

# Gideon Levy: A Rare Voice of Courage

*David Cronin is a contributor to The Electronic Intifada, in which this interview originally appeared.*

**G**IDEON LEVY IS A RARE VOICE OF COURAGE IN AN Israeli media generally supportive towards the political establishment. Since 1988, he has written the “Twilight Zone” column for the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, documenting unflinchingly the myriad cruelties inflicted on the Palestinian people under occupation. In his new book *Gaza*, a collection of articles which has just been published in French, Levy utters phrases that, by his own admission, are considered “insane” by most of his compatriots. *The Electronic Intifada* contributor David Cronin spoke with Gideon Levy about his background and journalism.

*David Cronin:* You were born in Tel Aviv in the 1950s. Were your parents survivors of the Holocaust?

*Gideon Levy:* They were not Holocaust survivors; they just left Europe in 1939. My father was from Germany, my mother was Czech. Both were really typical refugees because my father came on an illegal ship, which was stopped for half a year in Beirut by the British, and only after half a year on the ocean could it make it to Palestine. My mother came on a project with Save the Children. She came without her parents directly to a kibbutz.

My father always said he never found his place in Israel. He lived there for 60 years but his life was ruined. He had a Ph.D. in law but never practiced it in Israel. He never really spoke proper Hebrew. I think he was really traumatized all his life.

At the same time, he never wanted to go back [to Europe] even for a visit. He came from Sudetenland, which became Czechoslovakia. All the Germans were expelled.

*DC:* How did your parents’ history affect you when you were growing up?

*GL:* I was a typical first-generation immigrant. When my mother used to talk to me in German, I was so ashamed that she spoke to me in a foreign language. Her name was Thea; I always said it was Lea. Thea is a Greek name from mythology.

It is a beautiful name but as a child I always said Lea just to cover up the fact they were immigrants.

My father’s family name was Loewy and for so many years I was called Loewy. But then I changed it to Levy and now I regret it so much.

*DC:* Tell me about your military service in the Israeli army.

*GL:* I did my military service in the [army’s] radio station. I was always a good Tel Aviv boy; I had mainstream views; I was not brought up in a political home.

I was at the radio station for four years instead of three [the standard length of military service], but for the fourth year as a civilian. It’s a very popular radio station; the army finances it but it is totally civilian.

I was totally blind to the occupation. It was a word I didn’t dare to pronounce. I was a typical product of the Israeli brainwash system, without any doubts or questions. I had a lot of national

pride; we are the best.

I remember my first trip to the occupied territories. There were a lot of national emotions visiting Rachel’s Tomb and the mosque in Hebron. I didn’t see any Palestinians then; I just remember the white sheets on the terraces. I was even convinced that they were happy we had conquered them, that they were so grateful we released the Palestinians from the Jordanian regime.

*DC:* What was the turning point that caused you to criticize the occupation?

*GL:* There was no turning point. It was a gradual process. It started when I began traveling to the occupied territories as a journalist for *Haaretz*. It is not as if I decided one day, “I have to cover the occupation.” Not at all. I was attracted gradually like a butterfly to a fire or to a light.

My political views were shaped throughout the years; it’s not that there was one day that I changed. It was really a gradual process in which I realized this is the biggest drama: Zionism, the occupation. And at the same time I realized there was no one to tell it to the Israelis...

In the first [Palestinian] intifada, there was more interest



*Gideon Levy*

in the Israeli media. But between the first intifada and the second intifada, I really found myself almost alone in covering the Palestinian side.

DC: Have you completely rejected Zionism?

GL: Zionism has many meanings. For sure, the common concept of Zionism includes the occupation, includes the perception that Jews have more rights in Palestine than anyone else, that the Jewish people are the chosen people, that there can't be equality between Jews and Arabs, Jews and Palestinians. All those beliefs which are very basic in current Zionism, I can't share them. In this sense, I can define myself as an anti-Zionist.

On the other hand, the belief about the Jewish people having the right to live in Palestine side by side with the Palestinians, doing anything possible to compensate the Palestinians for the terrible tragedy that they went through in 1948, this can also be called the Zionist belief. In this case, I share those views.

DC: If somebody was to call you a moderate Zionist, would you have any objections?

GL: The moderate Zionists are like the Zionist left in Israel, which I can't stand — such as Meretz and Peace Now, who are not ready, for example, to open the "1948 file" and to understand that until we solve this, nothing will be solved. Those are the moderate Zionists. In this case, I prefer the right-wingers.

DC: The right-wingers are more honest?

GL: Exactly.

DC: As an Israeli Jew, have you encountered hostility from Palestinians during your work in the occupied Palestinian territories?

GL: Never. And this is unbelievable. I've been traveling there for 25 years now. I've been to [the scene of] most of the biggest tragedies one day after they happened. There were people who lost five children, seven children in one case.

I was always there the morning after and I would have appreciated if they told me, "Listen, we don't want to talk to an Israeli. Go away." Or if they would tell me: "You are as guilty as much as any other Israeli." No, there was this naïve belief or hope that if they tell it to the Israelis through me, the Israelis will change, that one story in the Israeli media might also help them.

They don't know who I am. It's not like I have a name there. The only time we were shoot at in our car was by Israeli soldiers. That was in the summer of 2003. We were traveling with a yellow-plate taxi, an Israeli taxi. It was



bullet-proof, otherwise I wouldn't be here now. It was very clear it was an Israeli taxi. We were following a curfew instruction. An officer told us, "You can go through this road." And when we went onto this road, they shot at us. I don't think they knew who we were. They were shooting at us as they would shoot at anyone else. They were trigger-happy, as they always are. It was like having a cigarette. They didn't shoot just one bullet. The whole car was full of bullets.

DC: Have you been in Gaza recently?

GL: I have been prevented from going there. The last time I was there was in November 2006. As I mention in the foreword of my book, I was visiting the Indira Gandhi kindergarten in Gaza the day after a nurse [Najwa Khalif], the teacher in the kindergarten, was killed in front of all her children [by an Israeli missile]. When I came in, they were drawing dead bodies, with airplanes in the sky and a tank on the ground. I just went to the funeral of the nurse. It was called the Indira Gandhi kindergarten not because [assassinated Indian Prime Minister] Indira Gandhi was involved but because the owner of this kindergarten was named Indira Gandhi as an appreciation of Indira Gandhi.

DC: You have often talked about how you enjoy complete freedom to write anything you wish. But do you get the impression that life is getting more difficult for people with critical voices in Israel and that the government is actively trying to stifle dissent?

GL: Me, no. Writing for *Haaretz*, appearing on TV ... I appear every week on Israeli TV on a discussion program. There were years in which I had to be more cautious, there were years in which the words "crimes of war" were illegal, even in *Haaretz*. Today I'm totally, totally free. No pressure from the government or army — nothing.

But in the last year there have been real cracks in the democratic system of Israel. [The authorities have been] trying to stop demonstrators from getting to Bilin [a West Bank village, scene of frequent protests against Israel's separation barrier]. But there's also a process of delegitimizing all kinds of groups and [nongovernmental organizations] and really to silence many voices. It's systematic — it's not here and there. Things are becoming much harder. They did it to "Breaking

the Silence" [a group of soldiers critical of the occupation] in a very ugly but very effective way. Breaking the Silence can hardly raise its voice any more. And they did it also to many other organizations, including the International Solidarity Movement, which are described in Israel as enemies.

DC: Did you ever meet Ra-

*"... in the last year there have been real cracks in the democratic system of Israel ... [T]here's also a process of delegitimizing all kinds of groups and [nongovernmental organizations] and really to silence many voices. It's systematic.... Things are becoming much harder."*



chel Corrie, the American peace activist killed by an Israeli bulldozer seven years ago?

GL: I never met her, unfortunately. I just watched the film about her last week. Rachel, James Miller and Tom Hurndall were all killed within six or seven weeks, one after the other, in the same place in Gaza, more or less. It was very clear this was a message.

DC: What do you think of her parents' decision to sue the State of Israel over her killing?

GL: Wonderful. I saw them both when they were in Israel. They are really so noble. They speak about the tragedy of the soldier who killed their daughter, that he is also a victim. And they are so low-key. I admire the way they are handling it and I hope they will win. They deserve compensation, apologies, anything. Their daughter was murdered.

I participated in a film about James Miller, a documentary by the BBC. James Miller's story is even more heart-breaking. There was a real murder. They knew he was a journalist, he was a photographer, he had his vest saying "Press." It was very clear he was a journalist. And they just shot him.

DC: How do you feel about Israel's so-called insult toward the U.S., when it announced the construction of new settlements in East Jerusalem during a visit to the Middle East by U.S. Vice President Joe Biden?

GL: I really think it is too early to judge. Something is happening. There is a change in the atmosphere. For sure, [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu is sweating. And the question is: Do the Americans have a clear program?

One thing must be clear: Israel has never depended so much on the United States like it does today. Until now President Obama has made all the possible mistakes. His first year was wasted. But still we have to give them [the Americans] a chance because there is a change in the tone. But I'm afraid their main goal now is to get rid of Netanyahu. And if this is the case, it will not lead anywhere. Anyone who will replace him will be more of the same, just nicer. It will be again this peace process masquerade, of photo opportunities, of niceties which don't lead anywhere. From this point of view, I prefer a right-wing government. At least, what you see is what you get.

DC: Spain, the current holder of the European Union's (EU) rotating presidency, appears keen to strengthen the EU's relationship with Israel. What signal would deeper integration of Israel into the EU's political and economic programs send?



GL: I think it would be shameful to reward Israel now. To reward it for what? For building more settlements? But I think also that Europe will follow changes in Washington as it follows almost blindly anything the Americans do.

DC: There was a minor controversy recently about the fact that Ethan Bronner, *The New York Times*' correspondent in Jerusalem, has a son in the Israeli army. Do you have any children in the army and do you think that Bronner was compromised by this matter?

GL: My son is serving in the army. My son doesn't serve in the territories but I have always disconnected myself from my sons.

They have their own lives and I haven't tried to influence them.

About Ethan Bronner, it's really a very delicate question. The fact there are so many Jewish reporters, Zionist reporters, who report for their national media from the Middle East, for sure is a problem. On the other hand, I know from my own experience you can have a son serving in the army and be very critical yourself. I wouldn't make this a reason for not letting him cover the Middle East for *The New York Times*, even though I must tell you that I don't see any possibility where *The New York Times*' correspondent in Jerusalem has a son is serving in the [Palestinian resistance organization] al-Aqsa Brigades, for example.

DC: What role can journalists play in trying to achieve a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

GL: There is an enormous historic role that the Israeli media is playing. The Israeli media, which is a free media, free of censorship, free of governmental pressure, has been dehumanizing the Palestinians, demonizing them. Without the cooperation of the Israeli media, the occupation would not have lasted so long. It is destructive in ways I cannot even describe. It's not Romania, it's not Soviet Russia. It's a free democracy, the media could play any role but it has chosen to play this role. The main thing is about the flow of information. It is so one-sided, so much propaganda and lies and ignorance. ☆

*The French-language edition of Gideon Levy's book Gaza: Articles pour Haaretz, 2006-2009, is published by La Fabrique. An English edition will be available soon.*

*David Cronin's book, Europe's Alliance With Israel: Aiding the Occupation, will be published later this year by Pluto Press.*

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Moshe Yaroni

## The Assault on Israeli Democracy

*Moshe Yaroni is the pseudonym of a writer who has long been a close observer and commentator about Israeli-Palestinian relations.*

**I**T'S TIME TO ASK THE QUESTION: WHAT IS HAPPENING TO Israel?

While the so-called “mainstream” Jewish-American groups work overtime to deny the frightening direction Israel is taking and screaming to the heavens about the “delegitimizers,” the Jewish state is losing its democratic identity in large steps.

Almost every day, we find more and new examples of this disease that is rotting Israeli democracy. There is, for example, the Anat Kam case, where an Israeli journalist was secretly imprisoned for months for taking classified documents and passing them on to a *Haaretz* reporter. She was jailed for three months and a total gag order was placed around her case, so that even reporters who knew of it were forbidden to mention it, while foreigner journalists and bloggers could. There is also the radical nationalist group Im Tirzu's fanaticism; efforts to delegitimize even the most moderate of progressive groups, and the aggressive attempts to quash the protests in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem — all examples inside of Israeli jurisdiction. The siege of Gaza, the Israel Defense Forces' measures to prevent Israelis and international groups from participating in protests in West Bank towns against the separation barrier, and now new directives which could permit mass expulsions from the West Bank are examples inside the occupied territories.

Sheikh Jarrah is an Arab neighborhood of East Jerusalem which has become the focal point of Israeli leftist protest after a widely disputed court ruling allowing a Jewish group to evict an Arab family that had lived there for generations. It is widely understood that this is part of a broader program to increase the Jewish presence in Arab parts of Jerusalem.

On April 9, in Sheikh Jarrah, the Israeli writer David

Grossman put it better than I ever could:

“I think that we are all beginning to grasp — even those who maybe don't really want to — how 43 years ago, by turning a blind eye, by actively or passively cooperating, we actually cultivated a kind of carnivorous plant that is slowly devouring us, consuming every good part within us, making the country we live in a place that is not good to live in. Not good not only if you are an Arab citizen of Israel, and certainly if

you are a Palestinian resident of the territories — not good also for every Jewish Israeli person who wants to live here, who cherishes some hope to be in a place where humans are respected as humans, where your rights are treated as a given, where humanity, morality, and civil rights are not dirty words, not something from the bleeding-heart Left. No. These are the bread and water, the butter and milk of our lives, the stuff from which we will make our lives, and really make them lives worth living here.”

In part, this can be blamed on Israel having by far the most right-wing government in its history. Certainly always reactionary and nationalistic, parties like those that made up the Likud coalition of old also held members who came with a more humanistic view of civil rights

at least. Likud's rise was predicated in part on its appeal to the Mizrahi (Jews of Middle Eastern descent) sector, which felt completely alienated and betrayed (with good reason) from the Labor Party establishment.

Indeed, I've always been struck by the contrast between the way the early ideologues saw the Palestinians (or, at that time, those who were being called the native Arab inhabitants). Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the father of the Israeli right, saw the Palestinians as people with real attachment to their homes, while Chaim Weizmann and other early leaders of the Labor movement tended to adopt the European-liberal view of the “natives” as ignorant, backward and in need of European help to bring them into the modern age.

There is now, however, a visible trend toward transform-



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ing Israel's democratic structures into nothing more than a veil over the criminalization of dissent and institutionalization of discrimination.

The current government is reflective of these trends, even while the Israeli public remains opposed to them. But one cannot truly blame this state of affairs on the Likud and the ultranationalist Yisrael Beiteinu Party. One must look at the futility of a party like Meretz, and at Kadima, which stands in opposition but has been remarkably silent in the face of attacks on Israeli democracy. And one must look perhaps most of all at what is left of the Labor Party, which Ehud Barak has driven into ruin and which sits in cahoots with the far right just so that Barak can hold the defense portfolio.

American Jews are largely unaware of the depth of the problem. Many have seen the headlines about Anat Kam. Many heard about the attacks on the New Israel Fund by Im Tirzu, though fewer heard that the attacks were based on fabricated evidence. How many, one wonders, will connect those events with the attacks on protesters at Sheikh Jarrah and the legislative attempts to single out progressive groups in Israel to delegitimize them in the public eye and attack their funding?

And as few as might make those connections, even fewer will connect these things to the increasing restrictions on Palestinian rights in the West Bank, much less the horrifying and pointless siege on Gaza. The IDF has confirmed that Hamas is stronger now than it was before Operation Cast Lead, yet the siege continues despite this. How can a democracy justify such a draconian measure if it is not enhancing the security of the state? (Indeed, such a measure would be too much to justify, legally or ethically, unless it was born of the most dire desperation.)

But in the West Bank, where successful terrorist attacks have been stymied for years now, how can Israel justify an order that can criminalize the mere presence of a huge number of West Bank Palestinians?

Nine Israeli human rights organizations wrote a letter to the Defense Minister strongly protesting the measure. Here are some excerpts:

Once the orders enter into effect, every Palestinian in the West Bank may find him or herself in danger of being criminally prosecuted and deported or being deported without a process of appeal or review as required by law.

The wording of the Order regarding Prevention of Infiltration ... defines anyone present in the West Bank ... as an "infiltrator" if they do not possess a permit given by the military commander or on his behalf — a permit whose exact nature is not defined in military legislation at all ... Experience with the current conduct of the military commander raises the concern that ... the orders will be used against Palestinians in the West Bank whose registered address is in the Gaza Strip and against foreign nationals who are in the process of family unifi-

cation. We estimate that this category may include tens of thousands of people.

... From 2000 to this day — with the exception of a onetime gesture at the end of 2007 — Israel has been implementing a "freeze" policy — a complete and blanket refusal to process applications for renewal of visitor permits for foreign nationals or for granting permanent status in the Territories... [There] are individuals who have been living in the West Bank for many years and have had families there, yet, the "freeze" policy has suddenly turned them into "illegal aliens" in their homes. Now the order turns them into criminals facing jail terms..."

I've worked for most of my adult life for an Israel at peace with its neighbors, for the furtherance of the Zionist dream of a Jewish and democratic state, where Jews can call a land home but where the government treats all its citizens as equals. A state which embraces human rights and democracy universally. That was Herzl's vision and it was one that stayed with many Israeli leaders throughout the years of conflict and hardship.

That vision is being lost.

Israel surely has its enemies. But the gravest threat to Israel's future certainly does not come from the movement for boycotts, divestment and sanctions, nor does it come from an anti-Semitic fanatic in Tehran. It is now coming from within. It is visible in the despair of many Israelis in their own democracy and the detachment of many younger Jews worldwide from Israel. It is starkly visible in the way Israel handled Operation Cast Lead, its aftermath, and the way it has dealt with protest inside Israel and the West Bank.

Israel has often been attacked as antidemocratic and racist. I have always been able to defend the essence of Israel, if not many of its practices, in good conscience. Sure, there is racism in Israel, and there have been many actions Israel has taken that I and many other supporters of Israel have criticized, most notably the continuation of the occupation itself. But before now, I could always make a solid case that these things were the result of conflict, of fear, of a history of persecution and the difficulties Israel has faced since well before its birth.

But Israel is out of excuses and is going much farther these days. The path it is going down is disastrous for the Palestinians, but also for the Jewish state. It has always been a tricky proposition to imagine a state both Jewish in character and democratic. I believe that can be accomplished. But right now, the Jewish nature is not just winning, but trouncing the democratic aspect of Israel. The result will eventually be a state with no friends and the support only of the tiny fraction of world Jewry that cares nothing for democracy. It is, to be sure, Israel's choice as a sovereign country whether to go down that road. But it is the responsibility of the world's Jewish citizens, as well as patriotic Israelis, to do what we can to prevent the nationally suicidal course Israel is now pursuing. ☆