

The Evil Israel Does is the Evil Israel Gets

Israel's settler colonial project perpetuates the cycle of violence against the indigenous inhabitants of historic Palestine. Palestinians have been forced to speak back in the language Israel speaks.

By Chris Hedges

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I knew Dr. Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, the co-founder of Hamas, along with Sheikh Ahmed Ismail Yassin. Al-Rantisi's family were expelled to the Gaza Strip by Zionist militias from historic Palestine during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. He did not fit the demonized image of a Hamas leader. He was a soft spoken, articulate and highly educated pediatrician who had graduated first in his class at Egypt's Alexandria University.

As a nine-year-old boy, he witnessed executions in Khan Younis of 275 Palestinian men and boys, including his uncle, when Israel briefly occupied the Gaza Strip in 1956, the subject of Joe Sacco's magisterial book [Footnotes in Gaza](#). Scores of Palestinians were also executed by Israeli soldiers in the neighboring town of Rafah, where tens of thousands Palestinians are currently being forced to flee now that Khan Younis has come under attack.

"I still remember the wailing and the tears of my father over his brother," al-Rantisi told Sacco and me when we visited him at his home. "I couldn't sleep for many months after that...It left a wound in my heart that can never heal. I'm telling you a story and I'm almost crying. This sort of action can never be forgotten...[T]hey planted hatred in our hearts."

He knew he could never trust the Israelis. He knew that the goal of the Zionist state was the occupation of all of historic Palestine – Israel seized Gaza and the West Bank in 1967 along with Syria's Golan Heights and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula – and the eternal subjugation or extermination of the Palestinian people. He knew he would avenge the killings.

Al-Rantisi and Yassin were assassinated in 2004 by Israel. Al-Rantisi's widow, Jamila Abdallah Taha al-Shanti, had a doctorate in English and taught at the Islamic University in Gaza. The couple had six children, one of whom was killed along with his father. The family's home was bombed and destroyed

during the 2014 Israeli assault on Gaza known as Operation Protective Edge. Jamila was killed by Israel on Oct. 19 of this year.

Israel's genocide in Gaza is rearing a new generation of enraged, traumatized and dispossessed Palestinians who have lost family members, friends, homes, communities and any hope of living ordinary lives. They, too, will seek retribution. Their small acts of terrorism will counter Israel's ongoing state terror. They will hate as they have been hated. This lust for vengeance is universal. After World War Two, a clandestine unit of Jews who served in the Jewish Brigade of the British Army, called "Gmul," - Hebrew for "Recompense" - hunted down former Nazis and executed them.

"I and the public know/What all schoolchildren learn," W.H. Auden wrote. "Those to whom evil is done/Do evil in return."

Chaim Engel, who took part in the uprising at the Nazis' Sobibor death camp in Poland, described how, armed with a knife, he attacked a guard in the camp.

"It's not a decision," Engel said. "You just react, instinctively you react to that, and I figured, 'Let us to do, and go and do it.' And I went. I went with the man in the office, and we killed this German. With every jab, I said, 'That is for my father, for my mother, for all these people, all the Jews you killed.'"

What Engel did to the Nazi guard was no less savage than what Hamas fighters did to Israelis on Oct. 7, after escaping their own prison. Taken out of context, it is inexplicable. But set against the backdrop of the extermination camp, or the 17 years trapped in Gaza's concentration camp, it makes sense. This is not to excuse it. To understand is not to condone. But we must understand if this cycle of violence is to be stopped. No one is immune to the thirst for vengeance. Israel and the U.S. are foolishly orchestrating yet another chapter in this nightmare.

J. Glenn Gray, a combat officer in World War Two, wrote about the peculiar nature of vengeance in "The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle:

When the soldier has lost a comrade to this enemy or possibly had his family destroyed by them through bombings or through political atrocities, so frequently the case in World War II, his anger and resentment deepen into hatred. Then the war for him takes on the character of a vendetta. Until he has himself destroyed as many of the enemy as possible, his lust for vengeance can hardly be appeased. I have known soldiers who were avid to exterminate every last one of the enemy, so fierce was their hatred. Such soldiers took great delight in hearing or reading of mass destruction through bombings. Anyone who

has known or been a soldier of this kind is aware of how hatred penetrates every fiber of his being. His reason for living is to seek revenge; not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but a tenfold retaliation.

To the brutalized, numb with trauma, convulsed by rage, those who relentlessly attack and humiliate them are not human beings. They are representations of evil. The lust for vengeance, for tenfold retaliation, spawns rivers of blood.

The Palestinian attacks of Oct. 7, which left some 1,200 Israelis dead, feeds this lust within Israel, just as Israel's obliteration of Gaza feeds this lust among Palestinians. Israel's blue and white national flag with the Star of David adorns homes and cars. Crowds gather to support [families](#) whose members are among the hostages in Gaza. Israelis hand out food at road junctions to soldiers headed to fight in Gaza. Banners with slogans such as "Israel at war" and "Together we will win" punctuate television broadcasts and media sites. There is little discussion in Israeli media of the slaughter in Gaza or the suffering of Palestinians - 1.7 million of whom have been driven from their homes - but a constant repetition of the [stories](#) of suffering, death and heroism that took place on the Oct. 7 attack. Only our victims matter.

"Few of us ever know how far fear and violence can transform us into creatures at bay, ready with tooth and claw," Gray wrote. "If the war taught me anything at all, it convinced me that people are not what they seem or even think themselves to be."

Marguerite Duras in her book "[The War: A Memoir](#)" writes of how she and other members of the French Resistance tortured a 50-year-old Frenchman accused of collaborating with the Nazis. Two men who were tortured in Montluc prison in Lyon strip the alleged informer. They beat him as the group shouts: "Bastard. Traitor. Scum." Blood and mucus soon run from his nose. His eye is damaged. He moans, "Ow, ow, oh, oh, oh..." He crumples in a heap on the floor. Duras writes that he had "become someone without anything in common with other men. And with every minute the difference grows bigger and more established." She watches the beating passively. "The more they hit and the more he bleeds, the more it's clear that hitting is necessary, right, just." She goes on: "You have to strike. There will never be any justice in the world unless you – yourself are justice now. Judges, paneled courtrooms play-acting, not justice." She notes, "Every blow rings out in the silent room. They're hitting at all the traitors, at the women who left, at all those who didn't like what they saw from behind the shutters."

Israel has abused, humiliated, impoverished and wantonly killed Palestinians, provoking inevitable counter violence. It is the engine behind a century of bloodshed. The genocide in Gaza outdoes even the worst excesses of the [Nakba](#), or catastrophe, which saw 750,000 Palestinians driven from their land in 1948 and 8,000 to 15,000 murdered in massacres by Zionist terrorist militias such as Irgun and Lehi.

The Palestinian resistance has little more than small arms and rocket-propelled grenades to battle against one of the best equipped and most technologically advanced militaries on the planet, the world's [4th strongest military](#), after the U.S., Russia and China. Palestinian fighters, facing these overwhelming odds, have become demigods with huge popular followings not only among Palestinians, but throughout the Muslim world. Israel may be able to hunt down and kill Hamas's second-in-command leader [Yahya Sinwar](#), but if they do, he will become the Middle East's version of Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Resistance movements are built on the blood of martyrs. Israel ensures a continual supply.

The decision by the U.S. to [defend](#), fund and [participate](#) in Israel's carpet bombing, slaughter and ethnic cleansing in Gaza is unconscionable. Its backing for the [genocide](#) has destroyed what remained of its credibility in the Middle East, already in tatters from two decades of wars, as well as most of the rest of the world. It has forfeited its right to act as a mediator; that role will be taken by China or [Russia](#). Its refusal to condemn Israeli aggression and [war crimes](#) exposes its hypocrisy about the Russian invasion of [Ukraine](#). It flirts with the possibility of a regional conflagration. The peace process, a [sham](#) for decades, is irrecoverable. The only language left is the language of death. It is how Israel speaks to the Palestinians. It is how the Palestinians are forced to speak back.

The Biden administration has little to gain from the leveling and depopulation of Gaza, indeed it is alienating huge segments of the Democratic Party, especially as it attacks protestors calling for a ceasefire as "pro-terrorist." Senate Majority leader Chuck Schumer [led](#) chants of "We stand with Israel" and "No ceasefire" at a pro-Israel rally on Nov. 4 in Washington D.C., despite a [Reuters/Ipsos survey](#) indicating 68 percent of respondents believed that Israel should implement a ceasefire and negotiate an end to the war. That number rises to 77 percent among Democrats. Biden has a dismal approval rating of [37 percent](#).

On Friday, the United Nations Security Council [voted](#) 13-1 for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and unconditional release of all hostages. The U.S. voted against the resolution. The U.K. abstained. The draft resolution was not adopted due to the U.S. veto.

Biden's real base is not disenchanted voters but the billionaire class, corporations, such as the weapons industry, which is making huge profits from the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, and groups such as the Israel lobby. They determine policy, even if it means Biden's defeat in the next presidential election. If Biden loses, the oligarchs get Donald Trump, who serves their interests as doggedly as Biden.

The wars do not end. The suffering continues. The Palestinians die in the tens of thousands. This is by design.