

Jenin: A New Holocaust Unfolds

by Dean Andromidas

The stench of decomposing corpses in the devastation of the Jenin refugee camp on the West Bank, is matched only by the stench of the moral failure of the Bush Administration to stop the genocide Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is inflicting on the Palestinian people. This failure will lead not only to the further destruction of the Palestinians, but will also destroy Israel as a state and a people.

Reports of the handful of journalists and international aid officials who have been able to enter the camp have confirmed a war crime, rivaled only by that of the crushing by the Nazis of the Warsaw Ghetto. One journalist referred to the “lunar landscape” of Jenin, home to 13,000 souls. Another wrote of a “*monstrous* war crime . . . where thousands of people are still living amid the ruins,” where the stench of decomposing corpses is everywhere.

World outrage was expressed by British Labour Party parliamentarian and Britain’s leading Jewish political figure, Gerald Kaufman. Speaking to the House of Commons, Kaufman denounced Sharon as a “war criminal,” charging that Sharon had “ordered his troops to use methods of barbarism against the Palestinians. . . . It is time to remind Sharon that the Star of David belongs to all Jews and not to his repulsive government. His actions are staining the Star of David with blood.” Kaufman went on: “Sharon is not simply a war criminal; he is a fool. He says Jerusalem must never again be divided, yet it is divided in a way that it has not been for 35 years. . . . Now the State of Israel is a ghetto, an international pariah. . . . More Israeli soldiers are being killed than at any time since Sharon tricked [Prime Minister Menachem] Begin into invading Lebanon 20 years ago.”

While denouncing Palestinian suicide bombers, Kaufman said, “We need to ask how we would feel if we had been occupied for 35 years by a foreign power which denied us the most elementary human rights and decent living conditions.”

In contrast, U.S. President George W. Bush told a press conference on April 18 that Sharon is “a man of peace. I’m confident he wants Israel to be able to exist at peace with its neighbors.” Bush even expressed “understanding” for Israel’s occupation of Bethlehem, with its outrageous encirclement of the Church of the Nativity, which stands on the birthplace of Christ. Israel is demanding that the church violate holy laws of sanctuary, which it is giving Palestinians who are seeking refuge there.

Palestinian Cabinet Minister Nabil Shaath demanded an inquiry into the massacre in Jenin, saying, “The Israeli Army took six days to complete its massacre in Jenin and six days to clean it up. . . . There is a crime here demanding an immediate investigation.”

Palestinian Masada or Warsaw Ghetto?

Israeli military officers in charge of pacifying the Jenin refugee camp called the two-week battle the Palestinians’ “Masada,” to justify Israel’s massive use of force. The reality was better expressed by U.S. Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche, who told an Egyptian journalist that while he didn’t support “some of the tactics of resistance by the Palestinians, nonetheless, I compare this to what the desperate Jews in the [Warsaw] Ghetto were doing, with a few pistols and carbines, against the entire Nazi force. It’s a resistance, and the people said of those Jews who died as fighters against the Nazis: They said they saved the reputation of Judaism, by standing up as heroes against hopeless odds, because they see nothing else they can do as a purpose in life, but to leave a mark which may be useful for the future of the people.”

Israeli military forces launched their attack on Jenin on April 3, and for the next two weeks, no ambulances, no international humanitarian organizations, nor even journalists were allowed near the camp. Using tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, and attack helicopters, Israel assaulted a refugee camp no larger than one square kilometer. What was the “infrastructure of terror,” except a handful of armed Palestinians facing their attackers with rifles and some home-made explosives. While the Israelis called Jenin a “fortress” from which terrorists were deployed, the only “bunkers” were the living rooms and bedrooms where thousands of men, women, and children live. In fact, half of the estimated 13,000 residents of this refugee camp are under the age of 15.

For two weeks, any man, woman, or child who dared to leave their home in violation of the Israeli curfew was shot dead. The bodies of old men and women and children testify to the truth of the charge. The bodies of those killed were left for two weeks where they fell. The hospital in Jenin was forbidden to carry out its duties, its ambulances confiscated by the Israeli military.

In an absurd attempt to escape the onus of their crime, the Israeli military claimed that the fact that 23 of their soldiers were killed, was a result of their “humanitarian” concern to avoid civilian casualties. One Israeli officer said, “We could have used F-16s and bombed the entire camp”! Instead, they used helicopter gunships to launch anti-tank missiles into the camp. Their humanitarian concern did not prevent them from sending bulldozers to cut through the narrow streets of the camp, knocking down the fronts of the homes so that tanks and armored personnel carriers could be deployed.

Despite the deployment of well-armed and -trained assault troops, the Israelis lost 14 men in one engagement, bring-

ing back bitter memories of Sharon's 1982 Israeli-Lebanese war.

The Palestinian Authority announced that at least 500 Palestinians were killed, including women and children; Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer claimed that only a "few dozen" Palestinians were killed. The military claims 70, "at most." Yet, the same Israeli sources claim that the fighting in Jenin was the fiercest in the West Bank. In Nablus, where the fighting was reportedly far less intense, 66 Palestinians were "officially" killed. Journalists and aid workers who have been in Jenin report that what they have seen with their own eyes confirms what the Palestinians have charged.

The London *Independent* on April 16 reported that residents pointed to a pile of rubble and described how Israeli soldiers, using bulldozers, piled 30 corpses, covered them with rubble, and proceeded to crush the pile using 70-ton tanks. The *Independent* journalist wrote, "We could not see the bodies, but we could smell them." Other journalists saw one Palestinian youth who had been buried alive under the rubble for several days, being rescued by residents who dug him out using their bare hands.

Crude Cover-Up

The number of those killed will most likely never be known, because of what is a planned cover-up. The Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* reported that the military had planned to remove the bodies and bury all the "terrorists" in an Israeli-controlled cemetery in the Jordan Valley. Because no journalist or aid worker had been allowed in the camp during the operation, it is not known how many bodies had already been removed. The other problem is the immense destruction of homes, reduced to piles of rubble. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies made official complaints that the Israelis are preventing them from searching these wrecked homes.

Residents all had the same message as one Rajeb Ahmed, who was quoted in the London *Daily Telegraph*: "Murder; this is murder. Sharon is a murderer."

Richard Cook, the head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency responsible for aiding Palestinian refugees, upon visiting the camp on April 17, said, "I was absolutely appalled. I anticipated it to a degree, but the devastation was much greater than expected." Another UN official described the scene of destruction as the "Palestinians' Ground Zero." These observations have been repeated by every humanitarian organization representative who entered the camp. In Jenin the fighting has stopped, but the death toll continues to rise. Relief workers who have entered the camp report seeing women and children severely dehydrated and hungry. For two weeks, most of the population was cut off from water and electricity because of the damage done by Israeli tanks, and



The UN Food and Agriculture Organization said "a major catastrophe is under way" due to the incredible killing and destruction wrought by the Israeli Defense Forces in Jenin and other refugee camps. They now lack water, food, sanitation, and electricity—but IDF forces are blocking relief efforts.

unable to get supplies of food or bottled water because of the curfew and fighting. These are the victims of the slow death that the Israeli occupation has become.

While the Israelis have begun to withdraw from the centers of Jenin and Nablus, they have maintained a very tight siege around the towns. This "withdrawal" has nothing to do with complying with President Bush's feeble demands, but relieves the Israeli military from responsibility, as the occupying army, from ensuring that the population has enough food and water. Thus, they threaten to turn these ghettos into concentration camps.

The European Union's humanitarian aid commissioner, Poul Nielson, denouncing Israel's gross violation of humanitarian law, charged in an official statement, "I am deeply concerned about the way in which basic principles of humanitarian law—in particular regarding access to civilian casualties of violence—are being flouted."

The horrors that are coming to light in Jenin are not unique. Other cities, particularly Ramallah and Nablus, report similar horrors. They may be less intense, because Palestinian resistance was not as strong; the whole truth has not yet come out because of the press censorship imposed by Israel.

The Israeli-Palestinian Physicians for Human Rights petitioned Israel's Supreme Court in a futile attempt to force the Israeli military to allow Palestinian hospitals and medical crews to operate, especially in Jenin. One of the organization's directors, Prof. Ravi Valdan, also director of surgery at Israel's Sheba Medical Center, said, "Even in times of war there are laws and morality; and the stronger side has a moral and ethical obligation that cannot be ignored. Part

of this obligation is evacuating casualties and attending to the wounded, and the Israeli Defense Forces is not fulfilling its obligation.” The organization’s chairman said that the medical situation in the West Bank is “bordering on a catastrophe.”

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians remain under curfew throughout the West Bank. Mothers are forced to give birth to children in their besieged homes while being given instructions over the telephone.

The heads of the aid agencies held a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, confronting him with the criminal behavior of the Israelis, and telling him if Israel doesn’t stop hindering aid operations, then the world must be informed.

Powell’s Mission: A Moral Failure

The Jenin massacre, and Sharon’s war against the Palestinians throughout the West Bank, are every bit as criminal as Sharon’s infamous massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon in 1982. But 20 years ago, when that horror was exposed to the world, 400,000 Israelis took to the streets demanding an end to the Lebanese war and the ouster of Sharon, then Defense Minister, from the political stage.

While the Israeli peace movement—whose moral conscience is led by those 422 reserve soldiers and officers who have signed the Combatants Letter of refusal to serve in the occupied territories—continues to grow, it lacks the support within the Israeli political class to stop Sharon.

During Secretary Powell’s ten-day mission to the region, Sharon continued his military operations unhindered. The world witnessed Powell meeting Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat in his bombed-out headquarters, where he is a prisoner of the Israeli military, demanding that he do more against terror. This so outraged the Arab world, that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak cancelled his meeting with Powell, claiming a diplomatic “sickness.”

Through the predictable failure of Powell’s mission, the Bush Administration has admitted its complicity in Sharon’s war crimes. This complicity is not attributable only to the administration’s failure to stop Sharon, but more directly to those within the administration such as the hard-liners around Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. This circle is applauding Sharon, and see his vanquishing of Arafat as prelude to a war against Iraq.

LaRouche summed up the danger of a wider war posed by Sharon and his backers in the United States in answer to a letter from an individual deeply concerned about Sharon’s war against the Palestinians. “The danger is that [the Israeli command] attempt to escape from the logic of their butchery of the Palestinians, by reaching out to strike a target at a distance. The danger is that if the U.S. can not be pushed into attacking Iraq very soon, that Israel will, and, if it does so, it is not improbable that they will use nuclear weapons.”