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Blockading the Truth: Obama's Big Lie About Gaza

BY CHRIS FLOYD
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It is simply a lie that Israel's slaughter in Gaza is a response to an "unprovoked attack" by Hamas. Not only is it a lie, it is a transparent, brazen lie, whose falsehood is glaringly apparent to anyone who had given even a cursory look at coverage of the Israeli government's response to the murder of three Israeli teenagers in June.

At that time, we were told in many news reports about an Israeli "crackdown" in Gaza, including mass arrests, military operations and, finally, the killing of six Hamas members. It was *after* these operations and these killings -- which were clear breaches of a ceasefire which Hamas had been honoring for 19 months -- that Hamas began its retaliation against Israel's unprovoked attacks.

(And no, the murder of the teenagers was not a "provocation" by Hamas, which disclaimed all connection to the crime. It was almost certainly carried out a rogue clan which has often -- conveniently -- staged provocations whenever it seems that some small movement toward peace might be made, and has been a thorn in Hamas' side for a long time. What's more, as Max Blumenthal reported, the Israeli government knew the teenagers had been murdered almost immediately, and who the likely culprits were; but the Netanyahu regime chose to wage a worldwide campaign of mendacity -- and torment the boys' parents -- by claiming they might still be alive, and launching "search" missions for them.)

These are all undisputed facts. The narrative that dominates the Washington media and political discourse -- "plucky Israel attacked without motive by demonic foes" -- is, again, an obvious lie. But that has not stopped it from being repeated endlessly, all across the political spectrum and in every form of media, day after day after day.

It is impossible that Barack Obama does not know these undisputed facts. Standing at the apex of history's most all-pervasive intelligence system -- and receiving daily digests of news reports on volatile areas like the Middle East -- he of all people knows that the Hamas rocket fire was a response to an Israeli military action, an Israeli violation of a long ceasefire.

It is also impossible that a majority, if not all, of the 100 U.S. Senators who voted to endorse the Israeli slaughter in Gaza -- including stalwart "progressives" like Al Franken and "socialist" Bernie Sanders -- did not know the truth when they cast their ballots. It is impossible that the editors and reporters of the nation's leading media organizations do not know these facts -- which they themselves reported only a few weeks ago.

Yet day after day after day, from the commanding heights of our "culture" (if the debased goon show of our public discourse deserves such a word), the Big Lie thunders forth. What's more, Obama is putting his money (or rather, our money) where his mendacious mouth is, tacking \$225 million for Israel's "Iron Dome" missile defense system into a bill ostensibly meant to deal with the influx of child immigrants. Obama and the Senate Democrats are making political pawns out of these children -- most of whom are fleeing Central American hellholes created in no small part by decades of bipartisan military and political backing for repressive oligarchs. (Including, of course, Obama's support for an oligarch-militarist "regime change" coup in Honduras early in his presidency.) With the new money for Israel's military, the Democrats hope to sucker the Republicans into voting for the emergency immigration bill (from which they cut \$1 billion -- hey, you don't want to coddle those kids!), or else put them in a political bind if the immigrant-hating GOP votes against the bill: "You aren't supporting plucky little Israel!"

A very cynical ploy, yes, but no matter: even if it fails and the children are left to languish, some other way will be found to get the money to Israel and, most importantly, show the world that America fully supports the massacre -- more than 800 Palestinians killed so far, including whole families, refugees at a UN shelter, patients in hospitals and other prime military targets.

Eight hundred dead -- and Obama gives the IDF a \$225 million bounty. Maybe when the death count reaches a thousand, he'll buy Netanyahu a pony or something.

2.

James Marc Leas lays out the timeline leading up to the operation in this succinct marshaling of the facts in CounterPunch. You should read the whole thing, but here are a few excerpts:

The July 8 ITIC report also divulged why Hamas launched its first rocket fire at Israel in more than 19 months on July 7: On that night Israeli forces had bombed and killed 6 Hamas members in Gaza. The ITIC report includes a picture of the six Hamas members. Thus, a report from an authoritative Israeli source described the provocation for the resumption of rocket fire: Hamas rocket fire began only after Israeli forces had engaged in nearly a month of military operations in

violation of the ceasefire agreement and had killed 6 Hamas members in Gaza. ...

The facts show that Israeli forces had to work quite hard to get Hamas to end its cease-fire. The killing of the six Hamas members was not an isolated event. Israeli forces and settlers had gone wild on the West Bank starting on June 12 after the kidnaping of three Israeli teens. Israeli forces had also attacked 60 targets in Gaza during those three weeks of June. Then, on the night of July 7, 2014, the Israeli Air Force had attacked approximately 50 more "terrorist targets" in the Gaza Strip, as described in the ITIC report.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on July 3:

Israel's military operations in the West Bank following the abduction and killing of three Israeli teenagers have amounted to collective punishment. The military operations included unlawful use of force, arbitrary arrests, and illegal home demolitions. ... Giving more details, several of the weekly reports from the Palestine Center for Human Rights (PCHR) indicate that Israeli forces and settlers killed 11 Palestinians and wounded 51 during 369 incursions into the West Bank between June 12 and July 2 and that Israeli forces raided hundreds of houses on the West Bank each week.

110 bombing raids, a military incursion, 17 killings, mass arrests -- all before Hamas fired a single rocket. This is what Obama -- and every single member of the United States Senate -- call an "unprovoked attack." They say it with a straight face -- nay, with long, somber, pious faces -- but they know it's a lie.

3.

But let us imagine, just for a moment, that their deceitful narrative was true. What if Hamas just woke up one fine, clear peaceful morning and said, "Hey, let's start firing missiles at Israel, fellas! Won't that be a hoot?" The fact is that even in that scenario, it would not be an "unprovoked attack," but a legitimate act of self-defense.

How do we know this? Because one of Israel's most honored statesmen told us so. As Jonathan Schwarz notes, Abba Eban, one of the founding fathers of Israel, used his renowned eloquence to defend Israel in the UN from charges of aggression for striking first in the 1967 Six-Day War. Rising to address the global body -- where he had once served as vice-president of the General Assembly -- Eban put forth his case. The surprise attack was justified, he said, because Egypt had blockaded an Israeli port:

The blockade is by definition an act of war, imposed and enforced through armed violence. Never in history have blockade and peace existed side by side. From May 24 onward, the question who started the war or who fired the first shot became momentarily irrelevant. There is no difference in civil law between murdering a man by slow strangulation or killing him by a shot in the head. From the moment at which the blockade was imposed, active hostilities had commenced and Israel owed Egypt nothing of her Charter rights. If a foreign power sought to close Odessa or Copenhagen or Marseilles or New York harbour by the use of force, what would happen? Would there be any discussion about who had fired the first shot? Would anyone ask whether aggression had begun?

As Schwarz points out -- and which the entirety of the American political-media establishment perpetually *fails* to point out -- Gaza has been subject to a stringent and ruinous blockade by Israel since 2007. As noted here the other day:

Israel has imprisoned the people of Gaza in a stateless limbo while carefully controlling almost every aspect of their lives, including what medicines they can have, what manufacturing and building materials they are allowed and even, at times, how much food they are allowed to eat to keep the population weakened but just above malnutrition levels. This brutal regimen in daily life is of course punctuated with regular night raids, bombings, kidnappings, "disappearings" and almost weekly civilians deaths at the hands of Israeli overseers. This has gone on year after year.

Eban said Israel was justified in retaliating with military force when Egypt had blockaded a port for a few weeks. How much more justified would the Palestinians be in retaliating against a total blockade -- by land, sea and air -- that has lasted almost eight years?

I don't agree with lobbing missiles into cities. I believe it's wrong. But I also realize that I have the great luxury of pondering these moral and legal and philosophical questions at my leisure, in comfort and safety. I haven't seen my family half-starved, my children's growth stunted, my friends and relatives blown to bits. I haven't been trapped in stateless limbo, with no passport, no freedom, no opportunity, under threat of violent death or arbitrary arrest every moment of my life. I don't know what I would do if that was my reality. I don't know what I'd do if I saw my loved ones suffer that way, year after year. I might somehow hold on to the ideal of non-violent resistance -- or I very well might not.

But I do know that by the terms of the world's great and good -- who speak portentously of the "laws of war" and analyze in great detail the "justifications" for violent conflict -- the Palestinians have a right to resist the "slow strangulation" of the blockade ... and the "shot in the head" (and the missile in the crib) that they are now being subjected to. By Abba Eban's own reasoning, from the very first day of the Israeli blockade of Gaza, "the question who started the war or who fired the first shot became momentarily irrelevant."