



# NEWS REVIEW

4 FEBRUARY 2009

10 SHVAT 5769

## IN THIS ISSUE

**Why the Israelis have finally had enough**  
Independent, Ireland

**'Dear Prime Minister Erdogan'**  
The Jerusalem Post

**Why Israel still shuts Wagner out**  
The Wall Street Journal

**UN disseminates lies and the media swallows them**  
The Australian

## Why the Israeli people have finally had enough

Ian O'Doherty | Independent Ireland | January

So, it's genocide now, is it? Or is it actually another holocaust, something which one typically restrained Palestinian analyst described as "worse than Hitler's war against the Jews"? Are we watching the ethnic cleansing of an entire people? Are we witnessing the deliberate eradication of a race?

Well, no actually, we're not.

Yet the conventional dinner party wisdom which we've had to put up with in the media, both here in Ireland and generally across Britain is that somehow Israel is the aggressor in the rapidly worsening situation in Gaza.

Footage of air strikes with the ensuing photogenic explosions and dramatic plumes of smoke, quickly followed by clips of collapsed buildings and enraged mourners, makes far better copy than actually looking at the reasons why Israel has done what it's done.

Anyone who devotes only a cursory glance at the news, both print and television would be forgiven for thinking that, out of spite, might and malice, Israel has decided to destroy the Palestinian people.

The problem with that conclusion - and it's not something you're going to learn from the BBC and most other outlets - is that, contrary to the currently popular belief, Israel is actually acting with a ridiculous degree of restraint.

Over the last couple of years, thousands of rockets have been landing on Israeli soil and, finally, they have had enough. But behind that statistic there is a human dimension which tends to be rather ignored.

I know many people in the southern Israeli town of Sderot and what is remarkable about their stories is not the number or make of rockets which have fallen on them on a daily basis for years, but the psychological carnage this wreaked upon them.

One woman freely admitted to me that she hasn't had a proper night's sleep in more than two years as she and her family now basically live in their bomb shelter and it's hard to tell who she hates more - the Muslim terrorists of Hamas or the Israeli government which she thinks has abandoned them.

It's a common feeling amongst residents of southern Israeli towns who have been the silent victims of a long campaign of violence, intimidation and murder carried out by Hamas. And now, finally, that the Israelis have said that enough is enough, they are somehow meant to be the aggressors?

There are people of good conscience on both sides of this argument, but one of the main problems in this debate lies in the cowardly tendency of the Western media to apply equivalence to both sides.

Thus, Hamas is seen to be as legitimate a government as the Israelis, and its rocket attacks across the border from Gaza are seen as being part of a yet another, intractable, interminable Middle Eastern dispute.

There's just one problem with that approach - it's completely wrong.

Hamas is a fundamentalist Islamic organisation intent on the eradication of the state of Israel and all its citizens; a violent fascist regime that allows honour killings and the execution of homosexuals to continue in its sphere of influence. Bankrolled by Iran, it manages to make even Hezbollah look like a moderate organisation.

But Hamas is clever.

As a friend of mine from Sderot pointed out, one of its favourite tactics is to launch Qassams from Palestinian schoolyards - while the schools are still in session.

Hamas does this, you see, knowing that the IDF can't immediately strike back (they can vector a rocket launch site within 90 seconds) because the last thing the Israelis need is footage of a devastated Palestinian school with dead kids.

And, over the last week, we have seen carefully manipulated footage of dead civilians, with the fact that they were effectively used as human shields conveniently ignored. When Israel pulled out of Gaza - ironically, the last battalion of IDF troops to leave Gaza contained some people from Sderot - they were acceding to international and internal pressure. The doves on the Left said it was to prove to Palestinians that they wanted to give Palestinians independence, the hawks on the Right - and there are some truly scary right-wingers in Israel, even as ardent a supporter of the country as I am will freely admit that - prophesied that it would lead to carnage.

And, lo and behold, virtually as soon as the last jeep left Gaza the rockets started. And then the blockade began, and the whole damn mess started all over again.

But there's a bigger picture here, something which Israelis have been trying to broadcast to the world, but which, thanks to their spectacular inability to accurately and sympathetically portray their point of view, has not been properly transmitted. It's this - Israel is the front line of the war between democracy and Islamic fascism.

Would you rather live in a society with a free press, equal rights for women - and anyone who knows an Israeli woman will know that they're not easily suppressed, anyway - equal rights for gay people and a proud and stubborn belief in the right of the individual to lead their life in the way that they see fit or would you rather exist in a society where women who dare to speak their mind are executed, where gay people are not just shunned but murdered and where having a dissenting thought marks you out for death?

The civilian deaths in Gaza are to be mourned, and anyone who says otherwise is reprehensible. But in a sick and twisted irony, they are mourned more by Israelis than by Hamas, who know that every dead Palestinian kid is worth another piece of propaganda.

Here in the West, where we share the same values as Israel, we need to start standing shoulder with this tiny oasis of democracy in a vast desert of savagery.

To do otherwise is moral cowardice of the most repugnant kind.

## **"Dear Prime Minister Erdogan"**

**David A. Harris | The Jerusalem Post | 1 February**

Dear Prime Minister Erdogan,

I write as a friend of Turkey.

These days, though, I'm finding it harder to feel well-disposed. I've been stunned by things I've heard, seen, and read in recent weeks. The outburst of animosity for Israel and the anxiety awakened in the Turkish Jewish community make me wonder what's going on and what the future holds.

If this only emanated from the "street" or from an extremist fringe, it would be worrisome enough. But it goes deeper - and higher. It starts at the very top. Yours has been the loudest voice, and you have used it to attack Israel in a manner that is not only vicious, but also disconnected from the facts.

Let me step back for a moment.

I have long admired Turkey. Like all countries, it's not perfect, but there is much to appreciate.

As an American, I have valued Turkey's strategic partnership with the U.S. and the close ties that have linked our two countries.

As a Jew, I have always remembered the Ottoman Empire's warm welcome to Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition and the rich history of the Jewish presence in Turkey.

As a democrat, I have appreciated Turkey's commitment to many values I cherish, including its participation with the Allied nations in the Korean War and its front-line role in NATO.

As a friend of Israel, I have witnessed the strengthening of bilateral links between Ankara and Jerusalem over the years, serving the vital interests of both nations, as many Turks and Israelis have learned to appreciate.

As a peace-seeker, I have been grateful for the role of Turkish peacekeeping forces, including in southern Lebanon, not to mention the facilitation of indirect talks between Israel and Syria.

In that spirit, I have acted on the assumption that friends help friends.

When Ankara has needed assistance in Washington, or even in European capitals, Turkish officials have often turned to American Jewish groups, ours among them. Whenever we could, as you know, we have been there to help.

When Turkey was struck by a major earthquake in 1999, we were there to build a school in the devastated region of Adapazari as a gesture of solidarity and friendship.

And when Turks in Germany were targeted by hate crimes, we spoke up. Indeed, in 1993, we traveled from New York solely to attend the funeral service at the Cologne mosque after an arson attack killed five Turkish women in nearby Solingen.

I don't say these things to pat ourselves on the back, but to underscore our deep commitment to the relationship - in many ways, over many years.

Which brings us to the present.

Mr. Prime Minister, you have described Israeli policy in Gaza as a "massacre" and a "crime against humanity" that would bring about Israel's "self-destruction" through divine punishment. These words are inflammatory, and they are wrong.

You seem to believe that Israel had other ways to deal with the relentless barrage of missiles and mortars fired at its civilians, even though months of restraint accomplished nothing.

You contend that Hamas is a reasonable negotiating partner. You even invited its leaders to Ankara, though it had not met the Quartet's demands to recognize Israel, renounce violence, and abide by previous agreements. It still has not done so, and it still seeks Israel's destruction with weapons imported from your neighbor, Iran.

You have accused Israel of deliberately seeking to kill civilians. In reality, as British Colonel Richard

Kemp told the BBC, "I don't think there has ever been a time in the history of warfare when any army has made more efforts to reduce civilian casualties. ... Hamas has been trained extensively by Iran and by Hezbollah to use the civilian population in Gaza as a human shield."

Even if you disagreed, you might have been respectful of such public criticism of Hamas, whether from Col. Kemp, EU official Louis Michel, Egyptian and Saudi leaders, or, in more hushed tones, some Gaza residents themselves. Instead, you accused "Jewish-backed media" of spreading falsehoods.

Mr. Prime Minister, Israel yearns for a secure and lasting peace. No one has more fully embodied that hunger for peace, or worked more tirelessly to achieve a new start for the Middle East, than Shimon Peres - Israel's president, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, and your fellow panelist at Davos last week.

Yet, in your remarks, you essentially called him a child-killer. And, inexplicably, you quoted an obscure ex-Israeli who has turned into a rabid anti-Semite.

And then you left, claiming that the moderator had been unfair. We hope the conciliatory phone call between you and President Peres helped to repair the breach, but, make no mistake, damage has been done. By storming off the stage, you not only insulted him, but you harmed the image of Turkey. Maybe you gained popularity in the Turkish street, where anger against Israel and Jews has been stoked in recent weeks, but you did your country no service by your unstatesmanlike behaviour.

Mr. Prime Minister, I wonder what Turkey would do if its population were targeted, day after day, by merciless enemies determined to wreak havoc, terrorize, and intimidate.

But wait. We know exactly how Turkey would act if it saw its national interests endangered.

When Turkey feared union between Greece and Cyprus, it rushed troops to the northern part of the island in 1974. A new government was declared. The UN Security Council later "deplore[d] the declaration of the Turkish Cypriot authorities of the purported succession." Only Turkey recognized the new state. And over the years, the population of the Turkish part of the island markedly increased. Where did the growth come from? Observers insisted that it was a policy of settlement from Turkey.

Now, however, you assert that Israel should not be "allowed to enter through the gates of the UN" because it has defied the Security Council.

Turkey knows something about terrorism. The PKK has targeted your country for years, initially seeking an independent Kurdish state that included part of Turkey. Now it claims to seek greater autonomy for the millions of Kurds living in Turkey. Even as the PKK has apparently lowered its demands, has Turkey pursued talks with that murderous group?

Absolutely not.

Indeed, I recall a rather blunt threat from Ankara to neighboring Syria in the late 1990s: If the PKK continued to receive protection there, the Turkish army would cross the border and take matters into its own hands. Luckily for Turkey, Syria was smarter than Hamas. It got the message. I also remember last year's incursion of Turkish forces into northern Iraq to stem PKK attacks from there.

But now, you demand that we "redefine terror and terrorism in the Middle East."

And wasn't it Turkey, objecting to Armenian policy toward Azerbaijan, that chose to close its border with landlocked Armenia from 1993 to today? Yet you now accuse Israel of creating "an open-air prison" by sealing its own frontier with a hostile territory.

Please understand me. I am not - I repeat, not - seeking here to pass judgment on Turkey's actions. Rather, I am simply recounting them to show what happens when the shoe is on the other foot.

It's so easy to tell another country what it should or shouldn't do in the face of threats, especially when one's own country is ten times more populous and 38 times larger. But ultimately, Israel, like its friend Turkey, must make tough choices to protect its citizens.

Mr. Prime Minister, only you know how far you want to take your belligerent posture. It has already resulted in damage to your country's reputation in the United States, concern for the well-being of the Turkish Jewish community, and, no doubt, joy in Iran and Hamas' radical circles.

The Turkey I know and admire would recoil from partners like Iran and Hamas. Their central beliefs are antithetical to everything that modern, democratic Turkey ought to stand for.

And so, even as I worry, wonder, and despair, I'll be watching, waiting, and, yes, hoping.

## Why Israel still shuts Wagner out

**Terry Teachout | The Wall Street Journal | 31 January**

*An unofficial custom raises hackles, but continues with good reason*

The Israeli Opera has a new music director with plenty of ideas - one of which is six decades old. Asked by a reporter whether he had any plans to program the operas of Richard Wagner in Tel Aviv, David Stern answered in the negative. "I don't think it's such a great loss to Israeli audiences," he added. "I still conduct Wagner in other places around the world, but there are many other things that are worthwhile to conduct here."

Mr. Stern was endorsing a public policy, not expressing a personal preference. Wagner's music is not played in Israel's opera houses or concert halls. This "ban" is not official -- the Israeli Supreme Court ruled a number of years ago that it is not illegal to play Wagner -- but a custom that goes all the way back to the founding in 1948 of the Jewish state. The Wagner ban is said to be unpopular among Israeli musicians, and two prominent conductors, Daniel Barenboim and Zubin Mehta, have sought on more than one occasion to scrap it. Yet it remains in force nonetheless, and Mr. Stern's statement suggests that it will continue to be for some time to come.

Why does the state of Israel insist that its musicians not perform such universally acknowledged masterpieces as "Tristan und Isolde" and "Die Meistersinger"? Because their creator was a notorious anti-Semite - and because Adolf Hitler loved his music. In "Mein Kampf," the book in which he spelled out his plans for world conquest, Hitler called Wagner one of "the great warriors in this world who, though not understood by the present, are nevertheless prepared to carry the fight for their ideas and ideals to their end." Nor was he shrieking just to hear the sound of his voice. Hitler was an aesthete who knew Wagner's operas very well. He was close to the composer's family and, after he came to power in 1933, he made sure that Wagner's music was prominently featured at Nazi Party functions.

Wagner, needless to say, wasn't a Nazi. He died five years before Hitler was born. But his hatred of the Jews, like Hitler's, was more than a mere tic: It lay at the heart of his megalomaniacal vision of the world. Wagner considered himself to be both a great composer (which he was) and a great political philosopher (which he wasn't), and the doctrine he preached was that of German racial purity and triumphalism. To be sure, you won't find explicitly anti-Semitic language in the texts that he wrote for his operas, and he worked closely with a few Jewish musicians. But when it came to Jews in general, Wagner believed that they were a "swarming colony of worms in the dead body of art" and that only one thing could redeem them from "the burden of curse -- total annihilation."

While Wagner's operas are not overtly anti-Semitic, certain of them, "Die Meistersinger" in particular, are intensely nationalistic, and some critics and scholars have argued that their German nationalism has anti-Semitic implications that Wagner expected to be understood by German-speaking audiences. To suggest any such thing, alas, is to run the risk of enraging the hordes of ardent Wagnerites who haunt the world's opera houses and refuse to acknowledge the possibility that their hero might have been less than perfect in his capacity as an artist. (Arguing with a

Wagnerite is like sticking your finger in an electric pencil sharpener.)

Mr. Barenboim, who grew up in Israel but now lives in Berlin, is a passionate Wagnerite who remains unalterably opposed to the ban. "In the end it's not Wagner's music itself that's a problem for people of Jewish belief, but rather the association that the Nazis created," he has said. "Not playing Wagner's music only justifies them after the fact." But in Israel, whose residents need no reminding of the lethal consequences of German nationalism, such lines from "Die Meistersinger" as "I beg of you: honour your German masters, thus you will ban disasters!" can still be guaranteed to set alarm bells clanging loudly in the night.

Should any of this matter to Mr. Stern? Plenty of great artists, after all, have written, said and done things that make us shudder today. (Two words: Pablo Picasso.) Wise critics endeavour to separate their bad behaviour from the beautiful objects of art that they created. To do otherwise is to run the risk of falling victim to retrospective self-righteousness.

Does Israel's informal ban on public performances of Wagner's music fall into that category? I can see why some might think so. Remember, though, that the ban is not about the music of Wagner, or even the man himself: It's about his ideas, which he took as seriously as his music, and which we ought to take seriously as well. So far as I know, nobody has ever been inspired to commit mass murder by hearing a performance of "Götterdämmerung," but the ideas that Wagner deliberately promulgated by publishing "Judaism in Music" are scarcely less horrific. Small wonder that those who fled the Holocaust to build a state, in which Jews could live in safety, should have declined the privilege of enjoying the music of a warped genius who despised them.

The case of Israel is, of course, unique. I don't think that Wagner's anti-Semitism would justify removing his works from the repertoire of, say, the Seattle Opera or the Chicago Symphony. At the same time, though, I do think it fitting that there should be one place in the world where Wagner's music is not played in public solely because of the hateful ideas of the man who wrote it. And while I once thought that the people of Israel might someday change their minds about Wagner, I now have my doubts. In light of the recrudescence of anti-Semitism in parts of Europe that once pretended to be civilized, it strikes me that Israel's Wagner ban serves as a still-useful reminder that ideas have consequences - and that those who spread evil ideas should be held responsible for their evil consequences. Even geniuses.

[Terry Teachout is the Journal's drama critic & an art blogger]

## **UN disseminates lies and a willing media swallows them**

**Cut & Paste | The Australian | 4 February**

**Jason Koutsoukis reports in The Sydney Morning Herald on January 8 on an Israeli war crime that once again wasn't.**

Seventeen hours after the attack on one of his schools killed 40 Palestinians seeking shelter from Israel's war on Hamas, the UN's director of operations in Gaza, John Ging, was certain of at least one thing.

"We have established beyond any doubt that the school was not being used by any militants," Ging told the Herald last night. "They were innocent people."

## Become a Member

Ensure that the voice of your community is heard by supporting the work of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies.

Join us in the work of strengthening Jewish life.

Contact the Board for more information:

### New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies

Level 2

146 Darlinghurst Road  
Darlinghurst 2010

T: 02 9360 1600

F: 02 9331 4712

E-mail:

[pilman@nswjbd.com](mailto:pilman@nswjbd.com)

We're on the Web!

[www.nswjbd.org](http://www.nswjbd.org)

Speaking from the UN's Relief and Works Agency in Gaza, Ging struggled to contain his anger at the attack that has also left more than 50 people with serious injuries, 10 of whom remain critical.

When the attack came on the Prep C Girls school in the Jabaliya camp at 3.45pm on Tuesday, Gaza time, there were about 350 Palestinians inside using the school as a shelter, Ging said.

"The reason they were in the school is because the Israelis had told them to go there. They were doing exactly as they had been told," he said.

To ensure there was no confusion about the school's location, the UN had given specific GPS co-ordinates to Israeli commanders.

"As you can imagine, this was a very distressing attack. It has killed 40 people, and some of those who were injured may yet die," Ging said. "Now we need to know how this happened. A full, transparent and independent inquiry has to be held to determine exactly how this occurred."

**In fact, as Patrick Martin reports in Canada's *The Globe and Mail* on January 29, 2009, Ging of UNRWA knew all along there was no attack on the school but didn't set the record straight:**

Most people remember the headlines: "Massacre of Innocents as UN School is Shelled; Israeli Strike Kills Dozens at UN School."

They heralded the tragic news of Jan 6, when mortar shells fired by advancing Israeli forces killed 43 civilians in the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. The victims, it was reported, had taken refuge inside the Ibn Rushd Preparatory School for Boys, a facility run by the UN Relief and Works Agency. There was just one problem:

The teacher (who witnessed the shelling and), who refused to give his name because he said UNRWA had told the staff not to talk to the news media, was adamant: "Inside (the compound) there were 12 injured, but there were no dead."

John Ging, UNRWA's operations director in Gaza, acknowledged in an interview this week that all three Israeli mortar shells landed outside the school and that "no one was killed in the school".

"Look at my statements," he said. "I never said anyone was killed in the school. Our officials never made any such allegation."

The UN's Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs got the location right, for a short while. Its daily bulletin cited "early reports" that "three artillery shells landed outside the UNRWA Jabaliya Prep C Girls School..." "However, its more comprehensive weekly report, published three days later, stated that "Israeli shelling directly hit two UNRWA schools ..." including the one at issue.

"I know no one was killed in the school," Ging said.