

Recalling the Jenin ‘massacre’ libel

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The “Jenin Massacre” proved that the Durban Strategy could be used successfully to wage political war.

Ten years ago, false allegations of a “massacre” and “war crimes” against Palestinian civilians in Jenin provided the first example of a new type of warfare that exploited the principles of human rights. This was the first application of the strategy developed a few months earlier at the NGO Forum of 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism, (the infamous Durban Conference).

In 2009, the “Goldstone Report” on the Gaza War was based on the strategy used in Jenin.

On April 3, 2002, following the horrendous Palestinian attack in Netanya at the Passover seder, and other suicide bombings, the IDF finally launched Operation Defensive Shield – the first major counter-terrorist operation. Palestinian officials immediately accused the IDF of committing a “massacre” in the Jenin refugee camp – the center of the terror operation. In parallel, a number of officials from “human rights” NGOs echoed these allegations, devoid of any independent investigation.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW), which were deeply involved in the UN Durban fiasco, jumped in, immediately repeating the “war crimes” accusations and demanding the appointment of what they referred to as an “independent investigative committee.”

On April 16, Le Monde cited HRW, and on April 18, the BBC quoted Amnesty International (AI) official Derrick Pounder, who repeated the massacre allegations.

Although Amnesty had no information, they issued a statement declaring, “The evidence compiled indicates that serious breaches of international human rights and humanitarian law were committed, including war crimes.” Like HRW and Palestinian officials, AI also called for an “independent inquiry.” Other influential NGOs published similar condemnations.

On May 3, just one month after the operation began, HRW launched a 50-page “investigative report,” “Jenin: IDF Military Operations,” based primarily on unverifiable “eyewitness testimony” from Palestinians. Clearly, no credible analysis could have been produced in this short time, but the goal was entirely political. Only one sentence mentioned the context of mass terror, while the rest consisted of clearly false allegations that “IDF military attacks were indiscriminate... failing to make a distinction between combatants and civilians...and vastly disproportionate...”

Thus, HRW’s acknowledgment that no massacre occurred was negated by the use of this demonizing language. The fact that Palestinian leaders had located this terror center in the middle of a densely populated neighborhood – a clear violation of moral and legal standards – was erased.

HRW and the other political NGOs also ignored the IDF decision to use ground forces in this operation, rather than an air attack, precisely in order to minimize civilian casualties among the Palestinians.

As a result, over 20 Israeli soldiers were killed in booby-trapped buildings. But, in accordance with their blunt ideological agenda, HRW leaders such as Kenneth Roth repeated the false allegations that the IDF had killed civilians indiscriminately.

For the international media, as well as foreign diplomats, political leaders, academics and others, the allegations and faux-research reports of NGOs such as HRW and Amnesty were repeated without question. And every time the allegations were repeated, as occurred in many of HRW's 15 press releases and reports condemning Israel published in 2002, this triggered further rounds of anti-Israel headlines.

In contrast, HRW only managed to publish a single report – at the end of October 2002 – criticizing the Palestinian terror campaign that took hundreds of Israeli lives. And even this publication ignored much of the evidence in order to absolve Yasser Arafat of responsibility for his direct involvement in mass murder.

The NGO campaign accompanied the Islamic bloc's initiative which resulted in the appointment of a clearly biased UN "fact-finding team" to "investigate" the allegations of Israeli war crimes.

As a result, the Israeli government refused to cooperate. The UN report followed the lead of HRW and other NGOs, and, as the Israeli government had anticipated, was similarly one-sided.

This process, from the prejudicial NGO allegations to the unverifiable and false "evidence", and with recommendations of legal and other sanctions against Israel, provided the step-by-step template used by the UN's Islamic bloc, in cooperation with HRW and other NGOs to produce the Goldstone Report.

The "Jenin Massacre" proved that the Durban Strategy could be used successfully to wage political war. The Israeli government and military were unprepared to defeat this attack. Eventually, the facts began to replace the myths, but by then, the demonization campaign had already achieved its goals. On the basis of the Jenin fabrications, the first round of BDS (boycotts, divestment and sanctions) efforts began.

This template was repeated many times afterwards, and perfected in the selection of Judge Richard Goldstone (a confidant of HRW's Kenneth Roth) to head another pseudo-investigation based again on NGO allegations and inventions.

But some things have changed in the past decade. Belatedly, Goldstone had the courage to acknowledge that the framework was biased against Israel, and the NGO "evidence" did not support the allegations.

Some Israeli government officials have developed counter-strategies, including exposing the moral duplicity of the UN-NGO alliance. And a small but growing number of responsible journalists and diplomats acknowledge the serious exploitation of human rights principles.

It took 10 years, but perhaps the lessons of Jenin are finally being learned.

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