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Israel's War Of Deceit, Lies And Propaganda

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Nearly 70 years ago, in the course of the Second World War, a heinous crime was committed in the city of Leningrad. For more than a thousand days, a gang of extremists called "the Red Army" held the millions of the town's inhabitants hostage and provoked retaliation from the German Wehrmacht from inside the population centres.

The Germans had no alternative but to bomb and shell the population and to impose a total blockade, which caused the death of hundreds of thousands.

Some time before that, a similar crime was committed in England. The Churchill gang hid among the population of London, misusing the millions of citizens as a human shield. The Germans were compelled to send their Luftwaffe and reluctantly reduce the city to ruins. They called it the Blitz.

This is the description that would now appear in the history books - if the Germans had won the war.

Absurd ? No more than the daily descriptions in Israeli media, which are being repeated ad nauseam : the Hamas "terrorists" use the inhabitants of Gaza as "hostages" and exploit the women and children as "human shields", they leave Israel no alternative but to carry out massive bombardments, in which, to Israel's deep sorrow, thousands of women, children and unarmed men are killed and injured.

In this war, as in any modern war, propaganda plays a major role. Almost all the Western media initially repeated the official Israeli propaganda line. They almost entirely ignored the Palestinian side of the story, not to mention the daily demonstrations of the Israeli peace camp. The rationale of the Israeli government ("The state must defend its citizens against the Qassam rockets") has been accepted as the whole truth. The view from the other side, that the Qassams are a retaliation for the siege that starves the one and a half million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, was not mentioned at all.

Only when the horrible scenes from Gaza started to appear on Western TV screens, did world public opinion gradually begin to change.

War - every war - is the realm of lies. Whether called propaganda or psychological warfare, everybody accepts that it is right to lie for one's country. Anyone who speaks the truth runs the risk of being branded a traitor. The trouble is that propaganda is most convincing for the propagandist himself. And after you convince yourself that a lie is the truth and falsification reality, you can no longer make rational decisions.

Falsification

An example of this process surrounds the most shocking atrocity of this war so far : the shelling of the UN Fakhura school in Jabaliya refugee camp.

Immediately after the incident became known throughout the world, the army "revealed" that Hamas fighters had been firing mortars from near the school entrance. As proof they released an aerial photo which indeed showed the

school and the mortar. But within a short time the official army liar had to admit that the photo was more than a year old. In brief : a falsification.

Later the official liar claimed that "our soldiers were shot at from inside the school". Barely a day passed before the army had to admit to UN personnel that that was a lie, too. Nobody had shot from inside the school, no Hamas fighters were inside the school, which was full of terrified refugees.

But the admission made hardly any difference anymore. By that time, the Israeli public was completely convinced that "they shot from inside the school", and TV announcers stated this as a simple fact.

So it went with the other atrocities. Every baby metamorphosed, in the act of dying, into a Hamas "terrorist". Every bombed mosque instantly became a Hamas base, every apartment building an arms cache, every school a terror command post, every civilian government building a "symbol of Hamas rule". Thus the Israeli army retained its purity as the "most moral army in the world".

The truth is that the atrocities are a direct result of the war plan. This reflects the personality of Ehud Barak - a man whose way of thinking and actions are clear evidence of what is called "moral insanity", a sociopathic disorder.

The real aim (apart from gaining seats in the coming elections) is to terminate the rule of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In the imagination of the planners, Hamas is an invader which has gained control of a foreign country. The reality is, of course, entirely different.

A top priority for the planners was the need to minimise casualties among the soldiers, knowing that the mood of a large part of the pro-war public would change if reports of such casualties came in. That is what happened in Lebanon Wars I and II.

This consideration played an especially important role because the entire war is a part of the election campaign. The planners thought that they could stop the world from seeing these images by forcibly preventing press coverage. But in a modern war, such a sterile manufactured view cannot completely exclude all others - the cameras are inside the strip, in the middle of the hell, and cannot be controlled. Al Jazeera broadcasts the pictures around the clock and reaches every home.

Hundreds of millions of Arabs from Mauritania to Iraq, more than a billion Muslims from Nigeria to Indonesia see the pictures and are horrified. This has a strong impact on the war. Many of the viewers see the rulers of Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority as collaborators with Israel in carrying out these atrocities against their Palestinian brothers.

If the war ends with Hamas still standing, bloodied but unvanquished, in face of the mighty Israeli military machine, it will look like a fantastic victory, a victory of mind over matter.

What will be seared into the consciousness of the world will be the image of Israel as a blood-stained monster, ready at any moment to commit war crimes and not prepared to abide by any moral restraints. This will have severe consequences for our long-term future, our standing in the world, our chance of achieving peace and quiet.

In the end, this war is a crime against Israelis too, a crime against the State of Israel.

Uri Avnery is an Israeli writer and peace activist with Gush Shalom. He is a contributor to Counter Punch's book 'The Politics of Anti-Semitism'.