

Echoes of the Warsaw Ghetto In Gaza and the West Bank

by Dean Andromidas

EIR on Feb. 8 reported the shocking admission, first revealed in the Jerusalem daily *Ha'aretz* on Jan. 31, that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) were studying the operational tactics used by the Nazis to destroy the Warsaw Ghetto in April-May 1943. The IDF is now applying these "lessons" in its brutal attacks begun on Feb. 28 on two Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank and a third in the Gaza Strip. As of this writing, these operations continue. Over 40 Palestinian men, women, and children have been killed and hundreds wounded in a matter of days; and Palestinian attacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians escalated as well.

The attack on the camps signifies that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon—who gained notoriety in the 1982 liquidation of thousands of Palestinians in the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps in Lebanon—has crossed the red line and is willing to resort to a mass murder to crush Palestinian resistance. If the lack of international outcry, especially from the United States, continues, Sharon or his successor may go for a "final solution."

But rather than crushing resistance, the conflict, on the ground and in the minds of the Palestinians, is taking on the form of a national liberation movement with the same fanatical resistance as those of Vietnam and Algeria. On the other hand, there is an awakening within broader numbers of Israelis, to the fact they can no longer tolerate becoming accomplices to war crimes, on the one hand, or victims of brutal attacks by a people fighting for national rights, on the other. More and more Israelis are seeing themselves in light of the French colonialists during the Algerian War or the Americans during Vietnam.

Nazi Gen. Jürgen Stroop Lives

The IDF launched coordinated attacks against the Balata and Nar A-Shams refugee camps on Feb. 28, exactly four weeks after *Ha'aretz* reported that the IDF was studying the "operational lessons" of how the Nazi SS units crushed the Jewish resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto—a fact nonchalantly acknowledged on March 3 by Sharon's spokesman Ra'anana Gissen. The planning and execution of assaults at Balata and the other Palestinian camps may have followed study of the after-action report of SS Warsaw commander, Brigadeführer Jürgen Stroop. Although the death rate, so far, is far fewer than the 2,000 massacred when Sharon was Defense Minister

at Sabra and Chatila in 1982, the IDF operations continue and the casualties increase.

The study of the notorious "Stroop Report" would have been necessary, because no military establishment which considers itself civilized has attacked a refugee camp; thus the lack of "operational literature." The only other documentary evidence would be Sharon's own after-action reports following the Sabra and Chatila massacres, but these are still "top secret." No doubt fearing the prospect of facing a war crimes tribunal, at least two senior IDF commanders refused to support this current operation, citing danger of a massacre, and its dubious prospect for stopping "Palestinian terror."

The Balata camp is just outside of the West Bank city of Nablus, and is home to 30,000 Palestinians living in an area no more than 500 meters square. It is where the Intifada ("uprising") began on the West Bank in 1987, and where the current hostilities began in the Fall of 2000. The Nar A-Shams camp, outside of the West Bank city of Jenine, is of similar density, with 17,000 souls.

In his Warsaw report, SS General Stroop described his mission to crush the Jewish resistance fighters, calling them "terrorists" and "bandits." The IDF described its mission, which also involved knocking down homes in the camps, as eliminating the "terrorist infrastructure," while calling the Palestinian fighters in these camps, "terrorists" and "gangs." Like Stroop, the IDF first surrounded the camp with tanks and armored personnel carriers and used bulldozers to cut broad, deep ditches across the roadways leading into the camps, severing the water mains in the process. Avoiding Stroop's 1943 mistake in his first costly assault wave through the main streets, the IDF did not launch its assault through the narrow alleyways of the dense camps, but entered through the corners, by using engineering troops to cut through the walls of houses, going from house to house. The homes were filled with terrified woman, children, and old people, since most Palestinian fighters had left. When the waves of IDF troops withdrew from Balata, the fighters returned.

As Stroop had stressed dismantling the weapons factories operating in the Warsaw Ghetto which used Jewish labor, and also provided the Jewish resistance with its weapons, so the IDF spoke of capturing "weapons factories" in Balata that produce improvised rockets and explosives. In another mission approach adopted from Stroop, the IDF also sought out



A soldier in the Israeli Defense Forces during the IDF operation to “destroy all resistance” in the Palestinian refugee camp at Balata on the West Bank, on March 2.

secret underground bunkers used as hideouts by the Hamas fighters.

‘Fulfilling Their Duty’?

An article in the March 3 *Jerusalem Post* quoted the IDF commander and soldiers involved in the operation, whose remarks were a disturbing echo of Stroop’s triumphal final report, “The Warsaw Ghetto Is No More!” In it, Stroop said that his SS troops “fulfilled their duty indefatigably in faithful comradeship and stood together as models and examples of soldiers.” Said IDF paratroop commander Aviv Kohavi, “This place called Balata, which appeared impregnable . . . has no more resistance. You can sense a surrender even if there wasn’t a collective decision by the commanders in the camp. The tiger known as Balata has turned out to be a pussy cat. . . . There isn’t a place in the camp where our forces did not set foot. The message is clear. IDF forces will get to all sources of terror.” Another IDF paratrooper gloated, “The

combat in the Balata refugee camp raised the morale, because we feel that this battle has a purpose. . . . Every soldier has a mission to sweep through this village house by house. It is more satisfying.”

Balata is a refugee camp, not an “impregnable” fortress. The actual terror of these attacks was dramatically captured by *Ha’aretz* correspondent Amira Hass, based on interviews with Palestinians and IDF soldiers alike.

“They were afraid when the companies of soldiers ‘came in through the closet’ after cutting a hole in the wall. . . . They were afraid when the soldiers blew up a suspicious car at night in a narrow road surrounded by houses . . . and when the soldiers ordered the dozens of families who lived along the narrow road to leave their homes because there was going to be an explosion. . . . And for a few minutes, the two explosions created a shared sense of fear. A few seconds before the first blast . . . a group of crouching soldiers ran from alley to alley, with weapons drawn. Anyone who was close enough to see their faces could see the fear and panic in their eyes. They were trying to move the dozens of frightened people as far away as possible from the explosion, people who had no idea where to run. . . . It was clear the soldiers were afraid for their lives and also afraid that innocent people would be killed as a result of the explosion.”

Israel military historian Martin van Crefeld was quoted in the press warning that as Israeli tactics become more brutal, they will backfire. “If you do it once, it is a crime, but at least it is over. We are committing an endless series of crimes, day by day, night by night, against the unarmed, against the young, against the pregnant. Even when the Palestinians are armed, they are still just poor fellows. Armies collapse when they can no longer look themselves in the face.”

This operation was planned for mid-February and had no security purpose at all. The talk of going after the “terrorist infrastructure” was simply a lie. According to reporter Amir Oren in *Ha’aretz*, “As in many IDF operations, the purpose is to strike a blow at the Palestinian consciousness, more than at real assests.” Chief of Staff Gen. Shaul Mofaz was reportedly furious that the operation was delayed for two weeks, because he wanted to achieve “a decisive victory” against the Palestinians. One reason for the delay until Feb. 28, Oren points out, is that this was the 48th anniversary of the infamous 1955 “Black Arrow” operation commanded by one Lt. Col. Ariel Sharon. This was a bloody attack on the Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, then part of Egypt. That raid made Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser decide to seek military aid from the Soviet Union.

Two Kinds of Resistance

The most extraordinary aspect of the Palestinian resistance after the camps were attacked, was not the suicide bombings, despite their toll of Israeli civilians, but the killing of seven soldiers and three civilians at an Israeli roadblock by a lone Palestinian sniper. The highly professional attack

lasted for over 25 minutes, and the IDF rescue party did not arrive for 28 minutes, long after the gunman had fled the scene. This failure would raise alarm bells for any commander who considered his army professional and motivated.

Sharon's response to his own failure to protect the lives of Israelis was to call for more punishment of the Palestinian people. Speaking in the Knesset (parliament), he told journalists that the Palestinians "must be dealt a heavy blow, which will come from every direction. Anyone wishing to conduct negotiations with the Palestinians must first hit them hard. . . . If it is not made clear to them that they are overpowered, we will be unable to return to negotiations."

Sharon's security cabinet, which only rubberstamps what he and his generals decide, approved "continuous military operations," the first of which was a return to the refugee camps, this time simply to fire tank shells indiscriminately into the camp. Other, more deadly retaliations were carried out against Gaza Strip refugee camps, and throughout the West Bank. The bloodletting and brutality on both sides has only increased.

This carnage can be stopped only with the active intervention of the Presidency of the United States. In addition, there is also increasing resistance within Israel, to the war policy of Sharon and the IDF generals. In the midst of this most brutal of weeks, a new Israeli peace organization was formed, called "The Seventh Day Movement," which is calling for full withdrawal from the territories occupied in the Six-Day War in June 1967. It is an outgrowth of the famous Four Mothers Movement, which was launched in 1997, and called for the withdrawal from southern Lebanon, a goal that was eventually achieved. The new movement, which has generated a great deal of excitement in peace circles, hopes to become bigger and much more effective, especially now that the peace movement has started to reemerge from its many months of demoralization.

Nonetheless, the most significant development continues to be the "Combatants Letter 2002," signed by 314—as of this writing—reserve soldiers and officers, declaring their refusal to commit war crimes by serving in the occupied territories. Over 25% of the Israeli population now support their right to resist.

Michael Ben-Yair, who served as Attorney General under slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, wrote a commentary in strong support of the soldiers' right to break the law by refusing to serve in the territories. Ben-Yair wrote, "In their eyes, the occupation regime is evil and military service in the occupied territories is evil. In their eyes, military service in the occupied territories, which places soldiers in situations forcing them to commit immoral acts, is evil, and according to their conscience they cannot be party to such acts. Thus, their refusal to serve is an act of conscience that is justified and recognized in every democratic regime. History's verdict will be that their refusal was the act that restored our moral backbone."