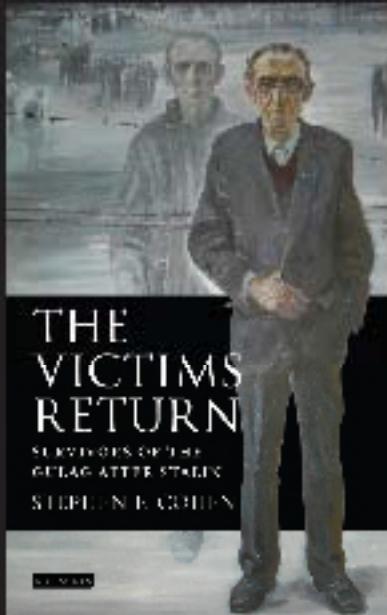


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Letters

Can Israel Do No Right?

NEW YORK CITY

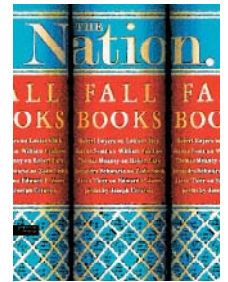
There’s something I don’t understand about Phyllis Bennis’s editorial “Israel’s War on Gaza” [Dec. 10] regarding Israel and Hamas. The latter is a totalitarian organization devoted to terrorism, Jew-hatred, kidnapping, the oppression of women and the destruction of Israel, and was lobbing hundreds of rockets into Israel proper (not the West Bank). This led, as we know, to Israel’s attack on Gaza, where Hamas rules.

Now, one may not approve of Israel’s reaction—I sure don’t. Indeed, I believe it to be profoundly counterproductive, just as I believe Israel’s occupation policy to be so. But in Bennis’s editorial you will find no mention of any of the above. Israel, once again, appears to be attacking and oppressing Palestinians for no good reason. Or perhaps because it’s just fun. Who knows? The issue is never engaged.

I have to wonder. Who are such editorials supposed to convince? Certainly nobody in Israel is going to listen to a voice that evinces no concern for the safety of its citizens. And why is Hamas given a pass for its horrific behavior and rhetoric? A recent report by Human Rights Watch, for instance, details cases of alleged torture and death in detention, a lack of due process and trials of civilians in military courts. A man named Abdel Karim Shrair was executed by firing squad in May 2011 for allegedly collaborating with Israel, based, according to HRW, on confessions apparently obtained through torture. In the words of Joe Stork, HRW’s deputy Middle East director, “After five years of Hamas rule in Gaza, its criminal justice system reeks of injustice, routinely violates detainees’ rights and grants impunity to abusive security services.” Where, pray tell, is the outrage?

And what about what its leaders say about Jews—not “Israeli” Jews? I could give thousands of examples, but how about this one: “Our struggle against the Jews is extremely wide-ranging and grave,” according to the organization’s charter. “Israel,

letters@thenation.com



by virtue of its being Jewish and of having a Jewish population, defies Islam and the Muslims.” Does that sound like a party with whom one might negotiate a lasting peace? One can disagree with the degree of importance one attaches to such statements, but to ignore them entirely is to ignore reality and, in this view at least, morality. Just what practical value it has also escapes me.

ERIC ALTERMAN
Nation columnist

BRISTOL, PA.

I have been reading *The Nation* since the 1920s. Now I know why—again! Ahead of *The New York Times*, where I “copy-boyed” in 1946, Phyllis Bennis lays out *all* I’ve been feeling for so long.

ARTHUR B. SHENEFELT

Bennis Replies

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Eric Alterman is angry that I gave “no good reason” for Israel’s recent assault on Gaza. Israel had very clear motivations—but I guess Alterman didn’t like my explanation of them. I don’t know why; I quoted Israel’s army chief of staff. I would have thought Alterman would like that. Maybe he didn’t like my saying the timing was likely linked to Netanyahu’s January re-election plans.

But not to worry. Apparently it doesn’t matter whether I got the reasons right. Alterman knows exactly what caused Israel’s most recent escalation. Actually, “we” all know. It’s because Hamas is a “totalitarian organization, devoted to terrorism, Jew-hatred, kidnapping, the oppression of women and the destruction of Israel, and was lobbing hundreds of rockets into Israel proper (not the West Bank).” Really.

That’s a lot to be “devoted” to. It’s also straight out of AIPAC-style talking points, resting on the longstanding Islamophobic assumptions about Hamas so popular in the West. And even for mainstream American media—which too often blithely accept gov-

(continued on page 26)

test vigil at the construction gate around the clock, through snowy nights and continual police attacks. Meanwhile, the right-wing pro-military candidate Park Geun-hye, daughter of former dictator Park Chung-hee, won the Korean presidential election on December 19. Thus, the Gangjeong villagers' life-or-death battle continues.

New Resistance: *Moana Nui*

As the Pacific Pivot advances across the region, local resistance movements like Jeju's are growing rapidly. Communities are increasingly refusing to be sacrificed by their governments as tribute to a superpower benefactor. For example, in Okinawa, 100,000 protesters have repeatedly taken to the streets, fed up after decades of "bearing Japan's burden" of the US military presence, including violence and rapes of local citizens. Now, the people are protesting deployment of loud, menacing Osprey hybrid aircraft, which fly low over neighborhoods and are infamous for crashing. In the Philippines, protests are building against the increasing US military presence, particularly over toxic dumping. Similar resistance is developing among smaller Pacific island nations—especially from indigenous populations in Melanesia, and in the Marshall Islands, where US missile tests are proceeding. (Marshall Islanders feel that the US nuclear bombing of Bikini and other atolls in the 1940s and '50s sacrificed them enough.) The latest blowback comes from the far southerly pastoral Japanese island of Yonaguni, only sixty-nine miles from Taiwan. The United

States is pressuring Japan to build a China-threatening base there, but local resistance is mounting.

Now something really new has developed: the heretofore disparate peoples of the Asia-Pacific region are unifying into larger coalitions for mutual aid and action. Fourteen months ago, when nineteen heads of state (including Obama) gathered in Honolulu for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meetings and the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations, an unprecedented parallel event was under way across town at the University of Hawaii. Some 300 anti-militarism, anti-globalization, and environmental and indigenous-rights activists from across the region met for the first *Moana Nui* (Polynesian for "Big Ocean") gathering. They collaborated for three days of private planning, coalition building and public meetings, concluding with a spirited march through Waikiki and a large protest demonstration outside the TPP negotiations. The gathering was widely reported in the Pacific but not on the US mainland. The second *Moana Nui* is being organized for San Francisco this spring. Its first goal will be to awaken mainland Americans to all that's at stake in the Pacific.

The question, finally, is this: At a time of economic and ecological crisis, do Americans really want to ramp up costly and dangerous Cold War programs in hundreds of places, thousands of miles away, nearly always against the will of the people who live there and with awful environmental effects? If not, then now's the time for wide debate on the Pacific Pivot and all its ramifications. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

ernment definitions of Hamas = Terrorists—it's hopelessly out of date.

Israel began this escalation with the assassination of Ahmad Jaabari, the military chief of Hamas. Was he responsible for attacks violating the limitations that international law places on legitimate resistance to occupation? Almost certainly. But he was also negotiating peace with Israel at the moment he was murdered.

I guess Alterman didn't read enough of my editorial to learn how Hamas's strategic positioning has changed in the new Middle East: having broken with Syria, and distanced itself from Iran, Hamas has among its closest supporters these days Egypt and Turkey, the same governments Washington so desperately needs as allies in the region. Maybe it's those changing relationships pushing Hamas in new directions—such as when Hamas leaders recently condemned the killing of six alleged collaborators in Gaza. Maybe they'll also help Hamas create a more transparent and accountable legal system.

And by the way, Eric, don't worry if "nobody in Israel" reads or agrees with my articles. Sorry if you think Israelis are the only

ones who matter, but they're not the ones I'm writing for. Unofficially, Israelis actually talk to Hamas. I write for people in this country who pay the taxes and vote in the politicians that finance and enable Israel's assault in the first place.

PHYLLIS BENNIS

Chicken Wire & Nietzsche

SANTA CLARA, CALIF.

Regarding Thomas Meaney's review of Robert A. Caro's *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* ["Chicken Wire and Telephone Calls," Dec. 10], he uses the terms "antiquarian," "monumental" and "critical" to describe Caro's treatment of Johnson's history. These are not his terms, but were borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche's "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874). Because the meaning of these terms is not intuitively obvious, especially the first two, Meaney could have explained how Nietzsche used them and then how they apply to Caro's book. Briefly, the monumental consists of glorifying past events at the expense

of the present, the antiquarian preserves details that define identity and local communities, and the critical interrogates the past seen as anti-life. All three approaches are valuable in their own way but have their limitations. Not being a historian, I do not know if these terms have become standard usage in the field, but since they were highlighted on page 31, they invite additional consideration.

ALFRED JAN

Meaney Replies

LONDON

Alfred Jan is right that I borrowed those historical categories from Nietzsche. I expected readers familiar with Nietzsche, like Mr. Jan, to pick up on that. I did not want to burden other readers with a digression on how Nietzsche himself understood those terms. In any case, Nietzsche did not think monumental history was "glorifying past events at the expense of the present." He thought the past could often be of service to the present.

THOMAS MEANEY