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On Holocaust Remembrance Day We Must Set the Record Straight on Genocide

By Allan Chernoff

A sniper fires at me from the window of an abandoned building. I aim my AR-15 rifle, patiently wait, and then press the trigger to take him out. A new volley of bullets comes from behind a car. As the attacker steps up to shoot again, I am ready to respond when suddenly an unarmed man in a white thawb—an Arabic robe—dashes across the firing zone. As commanded, I hold fire to avoid injuring the civilian.

This firefight is taking place inside a high-tech simulation room at the IDF's Elyakim combat training base, about 30 kilometers southwest of Haifa. While the battle is computer simulated, the instructions are very real. Israeli troops are trained here to avoid attacks on civilians who pose no threat.

In the mess hall, soldiers calmly discuss their battle experience in Gaza. "It's slow-going because we are telling the enemy exactly where we are heading," says a veteran commander, referring to the IDF practice of warning civilians where the fighting will be by dropping leaflets and phoning residents to evacuate, in the process giving Hamas fighters the same advance notice. A soldier who operates an unmanned aerial vehicle for his combat unit describes the two-fold purpose of his reconnaissance work: "We need to be able to see from the sky where the enemy is, but also to make sure that civilians are away from harm's way. We have saved countless civilian lives this way."

In spite of these precautions to avoid civilian casualties, the IDF has killed thousands of Palestinians as it has targeted terrorist leaders, bombed armament stockpiles and [rocket launchers in residential neighborhoods](#), and [Hamas facilities situated underneath apartments and schools](#). Now that a cease-fire has brought hope for the possibility of an end to the war, Israel stands accused of the most heinous crime known to mankind—genocide, a charge that South Africa and Ireland are pursuing at the United Nations' International Court of Justice.

This effort to equate Israel's war conduct with Nazi Germany's genocide is galling, particularly as we mark the 80th anniversary of the Soviet Red Army's liberation of Auschwitz on January 27, which the United Nations declared to be International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Among the liberated

prisoners was my mother Rena, then 11 years old. Her younger brother had been murdered in a nearby gas chamber, her father shot on a death march, and her grandparents and dozens of cousins systematically slaughtered at the Treblinka death camp. For me, genocide is a crime so personal that it haunts my soul.

As defined by the [U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#), this crime of crimes is the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” *Intent* is all important when discussing genocide. The Nazis clearly had intent to destroy the Jews, murdering 6 million Jewish victims during the Holocaust, nearly 2/3rds of European Jewry. The Ottoman Turks intended to destroy the Armenian Christians during the genocide of 1915-16, resulting in a death toll [estimated at between 660,000 and 1.2 million](#) Armenians. Hutu militias intended to destroy the Tutsi minority, as well as moderate Hutus, during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, murdering an [estimated 800,000 victims](#).

Israel’s intent—whether it succeeds or not—has been to destroy Hamas, after its terrorists killed [1,200 people](#) in Israel—[raping](#), and [mutilating](#) some of their victims—and took another [250 hostage](#). Israel’s war is against a terrorist organization committed to the destruction of the Jewish state, rather than against the Palestinian people.

How very sad then that Hamas’s greatest victory during the war has been its depraved manipulation of public opinion to convince so many—both gentiles and Jews—that Israel is engaged in genocide! This is a direct result of the U.S.-designated terrorist organization using Palestinian civilians as dispensable human shields whose casualties have earned sympathy and support around the world, in spite of the IDF’s precautions to avoid such tragedies. The more Palestinian civilians who become victims of Hamas’ war, the better for the terror group’s global public relations effort.

The crime that befell Jews 80 years ago is the crime Jews are now accused of committing. Given this vile and spurious accusation, Holocaust Remembrance Day must become more than merely another sad commemoration of man’s inhumanity against man. It is now also a moment to firmly reject the misappropriation of the term “genocide,” a day to loudly declare that there never will be an equivalency between murderers who intentionally try to exterminate another people and those who are forced to defend their right to live safely and securely in their own land.

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