

An Ethical Critique of the United States-Israel Alliance Reviving the Prophetic Tasks of Remembrance and Critique of Power

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He who controls the past, controls the future; and he who controls the present, controls the past. –George Orwell

War is the coward's escape from the problems of peace. –Robert MacAfee Brown

You cannot like the word, but what is happening is an occupation—to hold 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation. I believe that is a terrible thing for Israel and for the Palestinians... It can't continue endlessly. –Prime Minister of Israel Ariel Sharon

Political language...is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. –George Orwell

In no field has the pursuit of truth been more difficult than that of military history. –Military historian Sir B. H. Liddell Hart

Whenever they burn books they will also, in the end, burn human beings. –German philosopher Heinrich Heine

History sneaks up on the powerful. –Professor of Jewish Studies Marc Ellis

In 1887, in a speech at the Sorbonne, Ernest Renan observed that “forgetting” is “a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.”^[1] In creating a national unifying narrative, certain difficult memories of unseemly events have to be erased. As Renan said, this will even include the wholesale slaughter of certain ethnic and religious groups within the claimed national borders.^[2] This violence must be whitewashed off the screen of public consciousness. There are many tricks on the way to planned oblivion. Nations specialize in those tricks regarding state-sponsored violence, that is, war, with the inevitable mayhem

that war entails. The ugliness of state-inflicted slaughter does not fit comfortably into any national narrative and so every nation spins its own self-serving Aeneid. Neither the government nor the people can face with candor the horrors wreaked by their wars. So we forget with a vengeance ... and with a purpose.

Forgetting becomes policy, a systematic, enforced effort to suppress the memory of inconvenient past events or to spin them into mythic euphemisms. All nations do this but here I am looking at two nations, the United States and Israel, both of whom see themselves as distinguished by a kind of moral exceptionalism and impunity. There are many other unique linkages between the United States and Israel which I will stress in the following.

Suppressed memories have evil offspring. As true memory is erased, fictive memory takes its place. Even genocide can be forgotten. The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as “the commitment of certain acts with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such.” That certainly describes the American deadly assault on Native Americans and on African Americans. When Americans forget the double genocide that marked their birth as a nation, the fictive memory of “self-made men” takes its place. The Indian hunter and the slaver are replaced by the fictional Horatio Alger, who made it on his own with his wit and grit. Senator Chauncey M. Depew, speaking at Vanderbilt University shortly after the abolition of slavery, put it this way: “We have become a nation of self-made men ... the same open avenues, the same opportunities which [Commodore Vanderbilt] had before him are equally before every other man.” Notice: no classism, no racism, no sexism, no slavery, no genocide. All of those supporting foundations of white American comfort—especially white American male comfort—had become forbidden memories.^[3]

In a similar feat of amnesia, modern Israel and many Jews worldwide forget that 700,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes to make room for Israel. Myth has replaced fact. A fictive memory of “a people without a land” coming to a “land without a people” provided the consoling mythology. As American Jewish scholar Marc Ellis says, unlike that popular myth, Israel did not have an immaculate conception.^[4]

Propaganda is a form of manipulative fiction. It requires selective amnesia. Prophetic remembrance is nonviolent. Prophetic remembrance is the only way to fight the violence of

suppressed memories and self-serving myths. Inconvenient truths, once remembered, have prophetic power but they have to be shouted from the rooftops to end the malignant silence.

Israel and the United States: A Special Relationship

Israel and the United States have a unique relationship, one so close that Israel has been called the 51st state, a privileged state that pays no U.S. taxes and receives ten million dollars a day in aid, more than any other country, except perhaps Iraq. The prime alleged reason for this intimate bonding is a shared commitment to democracy, with Israel being, allegedly, a bastion of democracy in a hostile Middle East. As ever in statecraft, the alleged is rarely the real. (If Israel insists that it is “a Jewish state,” it would thus be defining itself as an ethnocracy, not as a democracy.) A realistic appraisal of the U.S./Israel alliance would face with prophetic courage the following seven unflattering, generally unmentioned, but unmistakable similarities between Israel and the United States. Not recognizing these fatal similarities increases security risks for both the United States and for Israel since it ignores flaws and biases in the alliance. Severe criticism is a service to both nations. The acknowledgment of guilt is the beginning of wisdom and the first step to peace.

1. Both nations were founded on ethnic cleansing—the Indians for the US, the Palestinians for Israel. As an early American critic, Sylvester Judd, put it in 1842, “The people of this country would not be taxed without representation. They did not tax the Indians without representation, but exterminated them and planted themselves in their territories.”^[5] In one example, to pay for the Revolutionary War, early America expropriated twenty-five million acres of Indian land to be sold to Europeans and Americans to pay for the war.^[6] Like Israel’s “settlements,” this was land forcibly stolen from the indigenous peoples.

The foundations of the United States, however, rest on a second genocide. Early American economic success depended upon its African slave base and the effective caste system that produced the American apartheid still evident in the ghettos and barrios of American cities.

In an ethnic cleansing parallel to the American experience, in 1948 some 700,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes in what the Israelis call the War of Independence and the Palestinians call Al Nakba, “the Catastrophe.” Al Nakba led to “the cleansing (i.e., killing and expulsion) of at least 86 percent of the indigenous Palestinian population that

lived in the area that would become Israel and the erasure of at least 531 of their villages and towns, with the explicit goal of creating an exclusively Jewish state in the same area.”^[7] As with the Indians in America there was, thus, a racist base for this cleansing. The extirpation of one ethnic group to replace it violently with another ethnic group is ethnic cleansing and a crime against humanity. It cannot be dismissed as simply a war where one side won and the other lost and “to the victors belong the spoils,” since the explicit goal was the removal of one ethnic group and the planting of another in its place, a crime that continues in the ongoing appropriation of Palestinian land and homes, euphemized as “settlement.”

2. Both Israel and the United States claim religious warranty for their existence and expansionism. Both imagine a God who was into real estate distribution, a God who handed out parcels of land with a perpetual deed. Israel is seen as “the promised land” chosen by God for the Jewish nation. Early America saw itself as “the new Zion,” the new chosen people with a “manifest destiny” to expand. Pity those who had lived on those lands for centuries. Religiously enforced nationalism breeds fanatical claims and arrogance. As the poet Alexander Pope put it: “the worst of madmen is saint gone mad” and nationalism, as Arnold Toynbee insisted, is always religiously tinged as national perceived needs are sacralized.

Not all Israeli Jews are blinded by these myths of modern Israel’s innocent birth. Israeli historians like Simba Flapan, Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé, Marc Ellis, Michael Lerner, and others have written honest studies of the expulsion of the Palestinians.^[8] Most recently Dr. Shlomo Sand, a son of Holocaust survivors, and professor at the University of Tel Aviv argues that the Jews who settled modern Israel may not descend from the Palestinian Jews of the Roman era, but that the Palestinian Semites locked into Gaza and the West Bank might have a better claim to being the actual descendants of Palestine’s original Jews, even though they later converted to Islam.^[9] Sand also disputes the “myth” of the exile of Jews in 70 CE and the corollary myth of the “right to return.”

3. Both the United States and Israel claim their special security needs justify violence, unchecked militarism, torture, violations of human rights and international law, and imperial expansion. The United States violates the UN Charter’s proscription of preemptive wars by engaging in vigilante wars. It employs occupation, torture and rendition as security needs. Israel stands in violation of the 1948 UN Resolution 194, which says

Palestinian refugees violently removed from their homes should be allowed to return. It is also in violation of the 1967 UN Resolution 242, which cites “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” after Israel tripled its size in the six day war. This resolution was reinforced by Resolution 338 in 1971.^[10]

Both the United States and Israel claim unique victimhood. Both make strategic use of recent tragedies to claim the immaculate conception of their expansionist policies, the Holocaust for Israel and 9/11 for the United States. Both rely on an open-ended, unspecified pandemic “terrorism” to explain their militancy. The cry of victimhood and insecurity rings hollow when the United States is the strongest military power in the world and Israel possesses the fourth strongest military and is ranked as the sixth strongest nuclear power, although Israel refuses to admit the open secret of its nuclear weaponry, and the United States compliantly blesses that concealment.

4. Both the United States and Israel are sacrificing their original idealism at the altar of empire. Early Israel birthed ideals of justice and peace that inspired Christianity and Islam and found their way into the constitutions of many modern states and international law. That great moral history has gone sour. The United States is no longer a city built on a hill to edify the world, and modern Israel is no longer a representative of prophetic Judaism, which was to be a light to all nations. The great Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel feared at the founding of Israel that the state of Israel could end up in exile from Judaism as state needs trumped the rich Tsedaqah tradition of Judaism.

5. Both the United States and Israel define their national identity in morally normative terms. Illustrative of this, the erstwhile House Un-American Activities Committee was predicated on “American” as a moral norm, so that to be un-American would be evil, making you liable to criminal prosecution. In a similar way, criticism of Israeli policy is regularly branded as anti-Semitic. Jews who criticize Israeli policies are dubbed “self-hating Jews.” Interestingly, there seems to be more freedom to criticize Israeli policies in Israel than in the United States, but in both countries criticism is resisted in the name of patriotism and security.

6. Both the United States and Israel preach nuclear disarmament while armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons, the United States being the prime possessor of these weapons of mass destruction and Israel coming in at sixth place. Both are like the village sot

preaching sobriety. Both ignore the fact that their possession of nuclear weapons makes this lethal power the coin of the realm and stimulates other nations, such as Iran, to seek the same.

7. Both the United States and Israel use strategic amnesia as policy to cover over inconvenient imperialist, expansionist, and genocidal truths. It acts as cover for all six of the just listed unflattering similarities.

The United States of Amnesia^[11]

I now turn to examples of this strategically enforced forgetfulness. The United States forgets its long romance and early marriage to state-sponsored violence (i.e. to war). The long tenured American pretense is that we have only gone to war reluctantly. We forget how we repeatedly provoked conflicts when we wanted war. Howard Zinn stripped away the fog and distorted memory of America's wars.^[12]

In each case we thought our cause just, but in each case war was the wrong solution. In 1898 Spain was oppressing Cuba so we went to war and then we took over the job of oppressing Cuba. We also picked up the Philippines, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Guam in the process.

North Korea was invading South Korea. There was a dictatorship in North Korea and a dictatorship in South Korea, so we went to war. The result? Two to three million people dead and a dictatorship in North Korea, a dictatorship in South Korea, and an unending presence of American soldiers in South Korea. The Revolutionary War that gave us independence from England is hallowed in song and festival, but it is not clear that violence was the only or most efficacious way to solve conflict. Already, in the year before shots were fired at Lexington and Concord, farmers had thrown the British out in Western Massachusetts without firing a shot. The American Indians do not celebrate the Revolutionary War. In the Proclamation of 1763, England drew a line and said colonials could not go westward into Indian territory. After the war that line was erased and genocide and the American "settlement" process began.

The Civil War ended slavery but other nations ended slavery without slaughter. Six hundred thousand people died in the Civil War, equivalent to five million today, and amputated

limbs filled the bloody fields severed from bodies without benefit of anesthesia. Did the Second World War end fascism? Did it end militarism, imperialism? It did end fifty million lives and inaugurated nuclear weaponry. The idea that only war could stop Hitler ignores the peace-making failure that ended World War I and contributed in some ways to the development of Nazism.

But What about Hitler and Rwanda?

One of deepest convictions that grips our imagination with steely claws is the belief that the bullet is the final arbiter. When the ultimate push comes to the ultimate shove, sound the trumpet, bring on the Marines. Did not even Gandhi say that if there were only two choices in the face of evil, cowardice or violence, he would prefer violence? Militarists always return to the charge that nonviolence would not have stopped Hitler. Rwanda, they note, was where we should have gone to war to stop genocide, but we failed to do so.

However, and this is key, there is a third option. It is called peacemaking. The poets of early Israel imagined it. Isaiah 32:17 put it in nuce: it is justice, not war, that brings peace. Peacemaking is intelligent politics, an exercise in pre-emptive nonviolent power that defuses tensions before they erupt into mayhem. The Rwanda story is illustrative. A multidisciplinary group of experts put it this way: “Had there been international determination to make the Arusha peace accord work—had there been an amnesty provision in the agreement; a demobilization plan; a genuine attempt to deal with the refugee problem; radio broadcasts to challenge the views of extremists; humanitarian coordination; provision of adequate policing; resources such as riot gear, maps, up-to-date information, early warning systems linked to institutions that could initiate preventative nonviolent action; and a culture of accountability and strong international institutions—the genocide would have been prevented. The failure in Rwanda was a failure of politics, the result of a lack of faith in and commitment to the slow and unglamorous work of nonviolent political action. ... Military options only seem morally compelling because of a host of lost opportunities.”^[13] The reparations imposed on Germany after World War I helped to make a Hitler possible. With more certainty it can be stated that wars become likely because nations have no effective Department of Peace working to spot and defuse tensions. American vigilante wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan are waged because we forget the historic breakthrough made in the United Nations charter. Richard Falk writes: “World War II ended

with the historic understanding that recourse to war between states could no longer be treated as a matter of national discretion, but must be regulated to the extent possible through rules administered by international institutions. The basic legal framework was embodied in the United Nations charter, a multilateral treaty largely crafted by American diplomats and legal advisers. Its essential feature was to entrust the Security Council with administering a prohibition of recourse to international force (article 2, section 4) by states, except in circumstances of self-defense, which itself was restricted to responses to a prior “armed attack” (article 51), and only then until the Security Council had the chance to review the claim.^[14]

Collective, multi-nation action, coordinated by the UN, could also address internal problems of nations when crimes against humanity are ongoing, as in Darfur and Zimbabwe at this writing. Articles 43 and 45 of the UN charter provide for this, though there has been little political will to intervene. This use of the United Nations, when in place and organized, would also act as a deterrent and would buttress resolutions of the Security Council just as the presence of a well organized police force deters crime within a nation.^[15]

We forget. And this conniving forgetfulness allows us to think war inevitable.

Reluctant Warriors?

We are fond of thinking that we go to war as noble, reluctant chivalrous Galahad’s responding to moral need. We forget our inveterate habit of faking crises to find an excuse for the war. Nafeez Ahmed writes that American wars “have been justified on the basis of either [our] provocations or fabrications of attacks on U.S. symbols of power. The systematic use of this strategy ... indicates that it is, indeed, intrinsic to the structure of U.S. decision-making.”^[16]

Historian John C. Miller traces this use of provocation to justify war back to Sam Adams. In his Stanford University Press book, *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda*, Miller shows that Boston revolutionaries under the leadership of Sam Adams provoked the British into “the Boston Massacre,” the shooting of five Americans. Adams plastered the town with posted notices—supposedly from the British!—that the British troops were about to attack the people. This precipitated chaos that led to the shooting incident. Adams then said the massacre was “proof that there was no alternative to war.”^[17] That became a mantra of

American policy used by every president in all of America's wars.

The American public was averse to going to war at the beginning of World War II. Robert Stinnett, a naval officer in that war, earned ten battle stars and a Presidential Unit Citation. After seventeen years of archival research, gathering over 200,000 documents and interviews, he concluded that the United States deliberately provoked the attack on Pearl Harbor to rally Americans to war. That thesis may be too broad to sustain and scholars have challenged it. What is a fact is that there was an "Action Proposal" from Lieutenant Commander Arthur McCollum, dated October 7, 1940, urging eight actions to provoke Japan to attack. All eight were, in fact, executed, and Japan did attack. Roosevelt, like Sam Adams, had his excuse for war. He gave his "day of infamy" speech. Stinnett's book is entitled *Day of Deceit*.^[18]

It is now widely conceded that the Tonkin Bay attack by North Vietnam on August 4, 1964 (used by Johnson to get Congress to pass the Tonkin Bay Resolution), never happened just as Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction. Again, we will lie and deceive to make war happen. "Conventional" American wisdom tries not to remember this.

There is no irrefutable proof that the U.S. government provoked the 9/11 attacks. What is a matter of record is that members of that government planned a Project for the New American Century, a "blueprint for maintaining global US pre-eminence, precluding the rise of a great power rival, and shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests."^[19] This blueprint said the process would be accelerated if there were a Pearl Harbor type event. What is also an uncontested fact is that the attacks were permitted "to occur entirely unhindered for over one and a half hours in the most restricted airspace in the world."^[20] Rigid protocols are in place for the immediate interception of any plane that is off course. When golf professional Payne Stewart's plane missed a scheduled turn, heading north instead of south to Texas, fighter planes were in the air quickly from Florida, Oklahoma, and North Dakota. We cannot, of course, dismiss the possibility of sheer incompetence playing a role on 9/11. We do know that on 9/11 no fighter planes were dispatched until after the plane hit the Pentagon.^[21] That is a fact testified to by the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Even during our undefinable "war on terror," our amnesia is actively present. (Gore Vidal says a war on terrorism makes no more sense than a war on dandruff.) Terrorism is defined

as attacking innocent people to send a message to their government. Hitler did it in Rotterdam and Coventry and we and our allies joined in from Hamburg to Tokyo. As Michael Walzer said, terrorism “became a feature of conventional war” in World War II.^[22] The two greatest acts of terrorism in history, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were done under the flag of the United States of America, the nation that is now sanctimoniously denouncing terror. Amnesia is an effective analgesic and an essential ingredient of hypocrisy as policy.

When it comes to war, the US has multiple layers of forgetfulness. We forget that wars are fought by the lower classes. The upper classes, like five-deferment Dick Cheney, have “other priorities.” At the time of the Revolutionary War, “the rich, it turned out, could avoid the draft by paying for substitutes; the poor had to serve.”^[23] The same is true at the time of the Civil War. As Howard Zinn writes, the wealthy Mr. Morgan had escaped military service in the Civil War by paying \$300.00 to a substitute. So did John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Philip Armour, Jay Gould, and James Mellon. Mellon’s father had written to him that “a man may be a patriot without risking his own life or sacrificing his health. There are plenty of lives less valuable.”^[24] We forget that We the People do not go to war; We the Poor do the fighting and We the Rich often end up richer.

Marilyn Young, in her essay “Remembering to Forget,” looks at an appalling American atrocity from the Korean War, called by historians “the forgotten war,”^[25] and shows how it immediately became a forbidden memory. The massacre at No Gun Ri in Korea, however, did happen. Korean refugees, who were driven from their homes by American bombs that had leveled their cities and towns were herded onto a railroad track, where U.S. planes then began strafing them. “Running for their lives, dragging their children, abandoning the dead and dying, people took shelter in a culvert beneath the tracks. American soldiers then opened direct fire on the people in the culvert. One Korean survivor, Chung Koo Hun, told a Washington Post reporter that American soldiers then walked among the wounded, ‘checking every wounded person and shooting them if they moved.’”^[26]

When this story leaked out into public view years later, Democratic Senator James Webb, once Secretary of the Navy, wrote an angry rebuttal in the Wall Street Journal. Webb regretted that the incident had been dredged up again and he blamed rapacious lawyers for “trying to squeeze millions out of a long-ago tragedy of the sort that seems always to

accompany battle fought where other people live.” As Young comments, we might well wonder why Americans like to fight their battles “where other people live.”^[27]

Like a cuckolded lover who cannot face the fact of betrayal, or like an addict who is not ripe for recovery, we deny, we insist on forgetting, and we will keep on paying in blood and money for our addiction to state sponsored violence. To transpose the words of the Gospel, show me your budget and I will tell you where your heart is. The Center for Defense Information notes that the 2008 official budget for military spending was drastically understated and that the real figure was over 900 billion dollars when all war expenses were included.^[28] Rounded off, that means this nation, which cannot decide whether basic health care is a human right, which is falling behind other nations in child health, education, infrastructure and science, is nonetheless spending on kill-power:

77 billion dollars a month

19 billion dollars a week

Over 2 ½ billion dollars a day

Over 100 million dollars an hour

Almost 2 million dollars a minute

And over 31 thousand dollars a second

With just a portion of that wasted money, all education could be free, health care, including reproductive health care, could be universal, world hunger, illiteracy, and thirst could be ended, slums transformed, and full employment guaranteed as we move from capital intensive military spending to labor intensive social and green infrastructure spending.

Israel’s Enforced Amnesia

As already noted, Israel is our imperial soul mate when it comes to tactically imposed forgetfulness and preference for militarily enforced policies. In citing these crimes I make no claim that Israel has a monopoly on criminality in the Middle East. Arab nations have never been consistent friends of the uprooted Palestinians and the inability of Hamas and Fatah to form a unified alliance in the face of occupation is disastrous. The violence of Palestinians, aside from being useless in the face of Israeli might, shows a serious lack of awareness among the Palestinians of the uses of nonviolent power. Still the distinction between the occupier and the occupied is morally telling and the ability of the occupier to

enforce immediate and long term forgetfulness must concern us.

Ab uno disce omnes, single incidents, can be illustrative of patterns. There is, of course, a difference between the immediate coverup of an atrocity and the forgetfulness that settles in as national attention is diverted to other matters. However, the coverup bears witness to the power of remembrance and to the strategic need to not allow events to take root in the memory of the nation. Three incidents illustrate how effectively and ruthlessly forgetfulness can be enforced.

USS Liberty

On June 8, 1967, during Israel's six day war with its neighbors, Israeli naval and air forces, with full knowledge of what they were doing, attacked and almost sank an American ship, the USS Liberty. In a relentless one hour attack, they murdered thirty-four American seamen and wounded 171.^[29] Consider these well forgotten facts, facts that the survivors of the USS Liberty, whom I have interviewed, are begging their nation to remember. Israeli reconnaissance planes flew over the USS liberty every half hour on a cloudless day starting at dawn. American sailors sun-bathing on deck waved at the Israeli pilots as they flew over. Nine hours before the attack the Israeli pilots had identified the ship with its colors aloft as American, and from its prominent hull markings they were even able to identify and report the name of the ship, the USS Liberty. Israel also knew the ship was unarmed, alone, and slow.

The unarmed surveillance ship was sailing in international waters off the coast of Egypt. The sailors on board the Liberty were cheering reports of Israeli victories in the ongoing war. Suddenly in a total surprise, in the early afternoon, in a carefully coordinated naval and air force attack, Israeli planes and torpedo boats pummeled the ship with 821 shells including napalm and torpedoed and almost sank the ship. Their clear purpose was to sink the ship and leave no survivors, witnessed by the fact that the Israeli torpedo boats shot and sank the life rafts put out by the crew of the Liberty. As recently reported by former CIA officer Ray McGovern, the following exchanges took place between a horrified Israeli pilot and Israeli headquarters:

Israeli pilot to ground control: "This is an American Ship. Do you still want us to attack?"

Ground control: “Yes, follow orders.”

Pilot: “But sir, it’s an American ship—I can see the flag.”

Ground control: “Never mind. Hit it”^[30]

The Israeli’s shot down the American flag. But first, to prevent an SOS going out they jammed and then disabled the communications antennae on the deck. The sailors hoisted a larger American flag. That flag was also riddled with bullets. After an hour of intense attack, seaman Terry Halbardier eventually rigged up a makeshift antenna and signaled the U.S. Fleet. When that Mayday signal for help went out, the Israelis heard it and the relentless one hour attack stopped instantly. Approaching Israeli helicopters filled with armed soldiers coming in to finish off the American crew suddenly retreated when the Mayday alarm went out.

The Israelis immediately claimed it was an innocent mistake, which is a lie of epic proportion. At first President Johnson protested and said it was not a mistake but an Israeli deliberate attack on the US surveillance ship so that we would not pick up their signals during their very successful six day war, a war that tripled the size of Israel. However, Johnson, taken up with his own failing war in Vietnam and under pressure from his Jewish constituency in the United States, yielded to the “innocent mistake” lie and buried the incident in a rushed eight day “inquiry” that was haphazardly completed before all the dead were buried. Members of the surviving crew of the Liberty were “threatened with court-martial and prison if they so much as mentioned to their wives what had actually happened. They were enjoined as well from discussing it with one another.”^[31] The suggestion was even made at the Pentagon that we, the Americans, should sink the Liberty “in order that newspaper men would not be able to photograph her and thus inflame public opinion against the Israelis.”^[32] There was more concern for Israel than there was about our own sailors murdered by the Israelis.

Admiral John McCain, father of Senator John McCain, was a major figure in the coverup. He barred investigators from going to Israel to seek interviews or to view the logs, diaries, or radio communications of the attackers.^[33] *The Washington Post* called his investigation “a shabby coverup.”

The truth of the deliberate attack, the first such surprise attack on an American ship since Pearl Harbor, was clear at the time. Secretary of State Dean Rusk fumed over the attack and

said it was not an accident. Clark Clifford said it was “inconceivable” that it was an accident given the excellence of Israeli intelligence. Robert McNamara issued a release from the Department of Defense that the Israeli claim of an “accident” was “implausible.” Arthur Goldberg, the American ambassador to the United Nations confided in Mr. Harman (the Israeli ambassador) that the United States had intercepted the communications of Israeli pilots identifying the ship as American.^[34]

A cursory Israeli “investigation” found no fault or even negligence and no one was ever punished. The lack of punishment was further proof that the Israeli forces were following orders. Israel offered no records for inspection of the attack and made no pilots or seamen available for an inquiry. Israel paid a token reparation. Immediate calls for a congressional investigation were quashed and the coverup continues to this day. It is the only such incident of an attack on an American ship that has never been investigated by Congress. Calls to finally investigate it while some of the survivors of the USS Liberty and some of the Israeli attackers are still alive go unheeded. Members of the US Congress fend off any inquiries on the subject. It is an officially forbidden memory in the United States and in Israel.

The attack on the Liberty should not be allowed to be buried, if only for the sake of the murdered dead and wounded of the Liberty crew. But the attack on the Liberty was also a symbolic policy-maker. It had disastrous consequences. George Ball, a former undersecretary of state, said that the Liberty coverup set the tone for U.S./Israeli relations in the following years. He wrote: “If America’s leaders did not have the courage to punish Israel for the blatant murder of American citizens, it seems clear that their American friends would let them get away with almost anything.”^[35] And so we have. And so we still do. Once you burn memories, you end up burning people.

The attack on the USS Liberty is a forbidden memory and forbidden memories have evil progeny. With ten million dollars of American aid coming their way every day, Israel has turned Gaza into the largest jail in the world, with 1.4 million beleaguered inmates. The December 2008 attack on Gaza killed 1,417 Gazans, destroyed 3,354 homes, Gaza’s only flour mill, 280 schools and kindergartens, U.N. refugee centers, hospitals, sewer systems, water wells, and mosques and it has gone unpunished by the Obama administration. This was not a war since Hamas does not have an army, navy, or air force. Ten million dollars continues to flow daily to Israel from the nation that has become the paymaster for Israel’s

crimes. Only twice did American presidents call a halt to American support for Israeli expansionism. Eisenhower did it in 1956 when Israel had occupied Sinai and the Gaza strip. He threatened to “halt all foreign aid and eliminate private tax-deductible donations to Israel if it did not withdraw” and they withdrew. George H. W. Bush did it in 1989. Jimmy Carter reports: President Bush “threatened to withhold a substantial portion of America’s \$10 million of daily financial aid to Israel unless the settlements were stopped between Jerusalem and Bethlehem ... and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir halted construction.”^[36] Construction resumed when Bush Sr. left office and continues to this day as Prime Minister Netanyahu senses the same reliable old weakness in President Obama. Impotent pleas to withdraw from illegally occupied land without financial sanctions will not work. They never have.

Talk of two states, Palestinian and Israeli, has become a mask. Israel is succeeding in making it impossible. As Eduardo Galeano writes: “Little of Palestine remains. Bit by bit, Israel is erasing it from the map.”^[37] It is becoming a de facto single state on the apartheid model. In 1999, Ehud Barak, former Israeli Prime Minister, told The Jerusalem Post that if there were a single bi-national state there would be no Jewish state unless the Arabs are denied a vote in what he called an “apartheid state.”^[38] Apartheid, I submit, is what has happened. Gaza is a prison in shambles; Israel is tightening its grip on East Jerusalem, limiting the movement and voting of Palestinians. In May 2008, The Economist magazine reported that “in the West Bank, Israeli settlements and military zones take up 40 percent of the land.” The World Bank and the BBC reports that the Jewish settlers control 80 percent of the West Bank water. The 2.5 million Palestinians are divided into “dozens of largely separate enclaves.” The Palestinians inside Israel have “long suffered legal and economic discrimination.”^[39] Note the words: “separate enclaves,” “discrimination,” “vote deprivation”: all of that is the language of apartheid, American-financed apartheid.

The Murder of Rachel Corrie

Another more recent incident is being pushed into the “forbidden memory” hole. On March 16, 2003, a 23-year-old American citizen, Rachel Corrie, as part of a group committed to nonviolence, was peacefully protesting the destruction of Palestinian homes in Gaza. She had previously been trying to prevent Israeli forces from destroying water wells. As in the case of the USS Liberty, this was a cloudless day. Rachel was fully visible, wearing an

orange flack-jacket and speaking into a bullhorn. She saw the Israeli bulldozer which was used to destroy Palestinian homes heading toward the house of the Nasrallah family, occupied by two brothers, their wives, and five children. The American-made Caterpillar bulldozer had two occupants in the cab, and nearby there was an armored personnel carrier observing. Rachel was high enough to look straight into the cab of the bulldozer and into the eyes of its two drivers. The bulldozer did not stop. Her fellow workers screamed and waved their arms, but the bulldozer did not stop. She was run over twice and killed. She died in the arms of Alice, a Jewish member of her group from England.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon promised President Bush a “thorough, credible, and transparent” investigation. As in the case of the USS Liberty, the investigation concluded that it was simply an innocent accident. The U.S. State Department wrote to Rachel’s family that the investigation by Israel was neither thorough, credible, or transparent, and the State Department also testified before the Committee of International Relations of the U.S. House of Representatives to the same effect. But nothing was done about it. Israel once again could murder an American citizen with impunity. George Ball was right, and Congress ignored repeated appeals to investigate.^[40] All who are silent, in the congress and in the citizenry of this nation, are complicit in this coverup of murder. The command of Israel and the United States is that the murder of Rachel Corrie is to be forgotten.

The Attack on the Mavi Marmara

On May 30, 2010, well-armed Israeli special forces boarded the lead ship of a flotilla bringing medical and other urgent needs to a Gaza under siege. The Israelis killed nine people, one of whom was an American citizen. Turkey reacted strongly to the killing of their citizens. The United States showed no comparable indignation at the killing of an American citizen. Israel refused to have an impartial international investigation of the event and the United States concurred. George Ball’s prophecy is again fulfilled. Israel can kill American citizens with impunity.

Solutions

The United States chooses to forget its imperial past and to ignore its imperial present. It chooses to forget its passionate commitment to state-sponsored violence, war, as the final, most trusted arbiter. At this writing President Barack Obama embraces this long tenured

American faith in violence by trying to kill our way to success in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan while spending ourselves to death on more kill-power. Repeated quagmires in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan have thus far not been instructive. There is some faint quickening of what Reinhold Niebuhr called “the feeble mind of a nation” going on the United States. Stupidity unmasked is chastening. It may be beginning in the United States, especially as we watch China in Afghanistan developing mineral mining in cooperation with the Afghans while we wage an undeclared war.

The Israeli solution is clear. It must stop forgetting March 2002. That is when all twenty-two members of the Arab League offered to recognize Israel’s right to exist and have normal relations with Israel. This offer has since been repeatedly reconfirmed.^[41] In April 2002, the Organization of the Islamic Conference which includes fifty-seven nations concurred with the Arab League offer, and the Iranian delegation expressed its full approval. The condition was Israel’s compliance with the United Nations Resolutions 194, 242, 338 and the return to the pre-1967 borders. Hamas has said it will acknowledge Israel’s right to live in peace within its pre-1967 borders. Israel can have peace or expansion; it is currently choosing expansion.

Israel’s conservative government ignores the “back to the 1967 borders” solution since it would take away their prime excuse for imperial expansion and their claim of unique victimhood and insecurity. Israel even forgets the words of David Ben Gurion shortly after the 1967 war when Israel was drunk with military conquest. At a conference of the Labor Party, Ben-Gurion punctured the euphoria telling the party that Israel was overextended, that it had bitten off more than it could handle and that it should return almost all the conquered territory immediately.^[42]

Forgetfulness could destroy Israel and much of the Middle East. The nuclear genie is out of the bottle and bombing Iran will not put it back in. As Marc Ellis says, “the scenario of Israel going down and bringing the middle East down as its last act is hardly far-fetched.”^[43] Israel’s intransigence may provoke a nuclear holocaust, giving Hitler an evil posthumous victory. Atomic bombs of suitcase size are available, as are small packages of biological weapons. Against such weapons the massive military might of the U.S. and Israel have no adequate defense. The prophet Micah is looking more and more like a realist. Before it is too late, Israel and the United States should remember the words of Micah. You

cannot build “Zion in bloodshed” (Micah 3:10). Zechariah said it also: “Neither by force of arms nor by brute strength” would the people be saved (Zech. 4:6). The United States and Israel, these twinned amnesiacs, forget prophetic wisdom to their own peril and undoing.

1. 1. Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” in *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhaba (New York: Routledge, 1990), 11.
2. 2. On Renan’s view of a nation’s need for strategic forgetfulness, see Alexis Dudden, “The Politics of Apology between Japan and Korea,” in *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights*, edited by Mark Philip Bradley and Patrice Petro (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 73.
3. 3. Quoted in *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology*, by Yehoshua Arieli (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 335. On the United Nations definition of genocide, see *Everyman’s United Nations*, 8th Edition, (New York: United Nations, 1968), 352.
4. 4. Marc H. Ellis, *Judaism Does Not Equal Israel* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 95. Not all remembrance is benign. There can be demonic remembrance that can lock persons and peoples into a defining past and limit growth. Esther Benbassa, in her book *Suffering as Identity: The Jewish Paradigm* (London: Verso, 2010), suggests that is what has happened for many Jews who use the Holocaust.
5. 5. Sylvester Judd, *A Moral Review of the Revolutionary War* (Hallowell, Me.: Glazier, Masters & Smith, Printers, 1842), 38.
6. 6. Sylvester Judd, *A Moral Review of the Revolutionary War* (Hallowell, Me.: Glazier, Masters & Smith, Printers, 1842), 40.
7. 7. Khali Nakba, “Al Nakba of 1948,” *Just Commentary: International Movement for a Just World* 8, no. 6 (June 2008): 1.
8. 8. Marc H. Ellis, *Judaism Does Not Equal Israel* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 91-95.
9. 9. Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London and New York: Verso, 2010). See Robert Parry, “Ancient Israeli Myths Deter Peace,” *Consortium News*, 9 July 2009, <http://www.consortiumnews.com/Print/2009/070809.html>. On the concept of Jews as a biologically distinct “race,” see two books with the same title, *The Myth*

of the Jewish Race, revised edition, by Raphael Patai and Jennifer Patai (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), and *The Myth of the Jewish Race: A Biologist's Point of View*, by Alain F. Corcos (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2005). Both argue against a genetically distinct Jewish race. For a different view, see Simon N. Herman, *Jewish Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective* (Beverly Hills and London: Sage Publications, 1977).

10. 10. See Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 1-10; 217-47; Jimmy Carter, *We Can Have Peace In The Holy Land: A Plan That Will Work* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).
11. 11. This term is Gore Vidal's, *Imperial America: Reflections on the United States of Amnesia* (New York: Nation Books, 2004).
12. 12. Howard Zinn, "A Just Cause Does Not Equal A Just War," *The Progressive* 71, no. 7 (July 2009): 21-23.
13. 13. Stanley Hauerwas, Linda Hogan, and Enda McDonagh, "The Case for Abolition of War in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 31. The Gulf War of 1991 is touted as an exemplary US military triumph but as Alan Geyer notes, the war was brought on not only by Saddam's blundering aggression but also by the "United States' lack of meaningful political memory of its past policies and actions that contributed to the hostilities," in *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*, edited by Glen Stassen (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1998), 83. The problem with "humanitarian military interventionism" is this: arriving late at a long neglected crisis may create more problems than it solves, adding another set of belligerents to an already over-militarized situation, leaving unattended the complex economic, historical, religious-ethnic, and resource problems that lay at the root of the unrest, and having no realistic plans for follow-up. No matter how you describe such interventions the fact remains that a so-called "humanitarian military intervention" is a violent action, and violence, even in the hands of do-gooders, is a lethal weapon. It is a pathetic substitute for the advance work of intelligent diplomacy and peacemaking. In many defenses of military intervention for humanitarian purposes there lurks our illusory confidence in violence as the old reliable standby, always waiting there to solve the problems we have helped to create.
14. 14. Richard Falk, "Why International Law Matters," *The Nation*, March 10, 2003, 276,

9, 20.

15. 15. These ideas are developed in *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*, edited by Glen Stassen (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1998), 146-55. This is not just a “pipe dream”: peace actions. In one year, 1994 for example, there were seventeen peacekeeping operations to which seventy-six nations contributed.
16. 16. Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, *The War on Truth: 9/11 Disinformation and the Anatomy of Terrorism* (Northampton, Mass.: Olive Branch Press, 2005), 389.
17. 17. John C. Miller, *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1936), 166-92.
18. 18. Robert B. Stinnett, *Day of Deceit: The Truth about FDR and Pearl Harbor* (New York: The Free Press, 2000). Appendix A gives the full “Action Proposal” of Lieutenant Commander Arthur McCollum, with endorsements by Captain Dudley Knox. Stinnett writes: “Opinion polls in the summer of 1940 indicated that a majority of Americans did not want the country involved in Europe’s wars. Yet FDR’s military and State Department leaders agreed that a victorious Nazi Germany would threaten the national security of the United States. They felt that Americans needed a call to action.”
19. 19. Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, *The War on Truth: 9/11 Disinformation and the Anatomy of Terrorism* (Northampton, MA.: Olive Branch Press, 2005), 343. Project for the New American Century is on line.
20. 20. Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, *The War on Truth: 9/11 Disinformation, and the Anatomy of Terrorism* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2005), 291.
21. 21. Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, *The War on Truth: 9/11 Disinformation and the Anatomy of Terrorism* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2005), 269, 273. Ahmed is quoting Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Air Force General Richard B. Myers and NORAD spokesman Major Mike Snyder.
22. 22. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 198.
23. 23. Howard Zinn, “A Just Cause Does Not Equal a Just War,” *The Progressive* 71, no. 7, July 2009, 75-76.
24. 24. Howard Zinn, “A Just Cause Does Not Equal a Just War,” *The Progressive* 71, no. 7, July 2009, 249.
25. 25. Marilyn B. Young, “Remembering to Forget,” in *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights*, edited by Mark Philip Bradley and Patrice Petro (Piscataway, NJ:

- Rutgers University Press, 2002), 11-21.
26. 26. Douglas Strick, "Airing an Ugly Secret," *Washington Post*, October 27, 1999.
 27. 27. Marilyn B. Young, "Remembering to Forget," in *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights*, edited by Mark Philip Bradley and Patrice Petro (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 14-15. Multiple other acts of wanton slaughter were committed by Americans but again swallowed up in the fogs and fabrications of war.
 28. 28. *The Defense Monitor*, 37, no. 2 (March-April 2008): 1-3.
 29. 29. For the latest study of the attack, written by a son of a survivor of the attack, see James Scott, *The Attack on the Liberty: The Untold Story of Israel's Deadly 1967 Assault on a U.S. Spy Ship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009).
 30. 30. See Ray McGovern, "Navy Vet Honored: Foiled Israeli Attack," *Commondreams*, 2 June 2009, <http://www.commondreams.org>. According to Haviland Smith, a CIA officer stationed in Beirut during the Six Day War, these transcripts were "deep sixed" because the U.S. government did not want to embarrass Israel.
 31. 31. Ray McGovern, "Navy Vet Honored: Foiled Israeli Attack," *Commondreams*, 2 June 2009, <http://www.commondreams.org>.
 32. 32. James Scott, *The Attack on the Liberty: The Untold Story of Israel's Deadly 1967 Assault on a U.S. Spy Ship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 93-94.
 33. 33. James Scott, *The Attack on the Liberty: The Untold Story of Israel's Deadly 1967 Assault on a U.S. Spy Ship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 175-76, 228.
 34. 34. James Scott, *The Attack on the Liberty: The Untold Story of Israel's Deadly 1967 Assault on a U.S. Spy Ship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 197. On statements from Rusk and Clifford see 87, 100, 159, 193.
 35. 35. James Scott, *The Attack on the Liberty: The Untold Story of Israel's Deadly 1967 Assault on a U.S. Spy Ship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 287.
 36. 36. Jimmy Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 45-47.
 37. 37. Eduardo Galeano, "Operation Impunity," *The Progressive* 71, no. 3 (March 2009):12.
 38. 38. Jimmy Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 165.
 39. 39. Jimmy Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), quoted on 147-48.

40. 40. Rachel Corrie, *Let Me Stand Alone: The Journals of Rachel Corrie* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), ix-xx.; Joel Kovel, "Overcoming Impunity," *The Link* 42, no. 1 (January-March 2009): 1-11. After writing this article about the USS Liberty and Rachel Corrie and other Israeli policies, Professor Kovel, a Jew, was fired from Bard College.
41. 41. Jimmy Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), xvi, 61, 141-42.
42. 42. Daniel Lazare, "The One-State Solution," *The Nation* 277, no. 14 (3 Nov. 2003): 24-25.
43. 43. Marc Ellis, *Judaism Does Not Equal Israel* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 100-01.