

Bulldozer "Terrorism:" It depends on who's on top and who's underneath

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In a span of less than three weeks, two Palestinians used bulldozers in rampages against cars and people in Jerusalem. In the first incident, Hussam Duwiyat killed two men and a woman, and injured many, after he rammed a bulldozer into a packed commuter bus on Jaffe Street on July 2. According to reports, Duwiyat was a resident of Arab East Jerusalem and worked at a building site near the scene. His Jewish wife has told the press that he suffers from drug-induced psychosis, but that he has no associations with nationalist or religious organizations.

In the second incident, Ghassan Abu Teir, 23, from the Jerusalem village Umm Touba, went on a rampage in central Jerusalem on July 22 near the King David Hotel, where Sen. Barack Obama was staying during his "election campaign" trip to Israel. Obama's statement before the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) calling for a united Jerusalem has angered Palestinians, especially Jerusalemites. Nevertheless, Abu Teir's family reports that the incident was an accident, that he lost control of the brakes and was shot only because of the previous bulldozer attack.

Palestinians remember the Israeli truck driver who killed four Palestinian workers in the Gaza Strip in December 1987. That accident—which to this day Palestinians are convinced was intentional—sparked the first intifada.

How Symbolic!

No matter how startling, these recent acts pale in comparison to what Israel has done with its bulldozers. With each passing day, more of Arab East Jerusalem vanishes as bulldozers clear the land for more Israeli settlements. Since the November 2007 Annapolis conference, which was supposed to revive the peace process, Israel has only accelerated its settlement building, especially in Jerusalem; this despite more than a hundred meetings between Israeli and Palestinian officials holding "peace negotiations."

Bulldozers also represent the hundreds of Palestinian villages levelled and thousands of homes demolished in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem in Israel's relentless violation of international law. In 2004 alone Israel flattened 2,243 houses in Gaza and the West Bank, leaving some 14,000 Palestinians homeless. Bulldozing Palestinian homes under the pretext that the owners lacked building permits is common practice in Jerusalem.

Bulldozers also have created massive destruction in the path of Israel's Separation Wall snaking across occupied Palestine. Their Israeli operators have used them to uproot hundreds of thousands of olive, citrus and other fruit trees, representing the livelihood of Palestinian farmers; destroy hundreds of wells and agricultural storehouses; and tear up roads and block thousands of others with concrete and earthen mounds.

A Cowboy on a Bulldozer

In a shocking account published in the May 31, 2001 edition of Yediot Aharonot, Moshe Nissim, who had been suspended from his job as a senior inspector in the Jerusalem municipality on suspicion of having accepted bribes from contractors and other business owners, recounted his role in the attack on the Jenin refugee camp. Drunk and shirtless, he drove a massive D-9 army bulldozer on an officially sanctioned rampage.

"I didn't even know how to operate the D-9," Nissim recalled. "Within two hours, they [Israeli soldiers] taught me to drive forward, and clear a flat surface. I tied the "Beitar" football team flag to the back of the bulldozer and told them: "Move away, let me work." They knew I had no fear, that I don't give a damn…

"For 75 hours, with no break, I just erased and erased, I kept drinking whisky to fight off fatigue. Over the loudspeaker, they were told to leave their houses before I destroyed them. But I did not give a chance to anyone. I did not wait. I did not touch the house and wait for them to come out. I would simply give the house a massive blow so that it would collapse as quickly as possible in order to get to other houses. To do a lot.

"I found joy with every house that came down, because I knew they didn't mind dying, but they cared for their homes. If you knocked down a house, you buried 40 or 50 people for generations. If I am sorry for anything, it is for not tearing the whole camp down."

Crushed underneath a Bulldozer

A year later, in March 2003, 23-year-old American peace activist Rachel Corrie was crushed to death by an American-

made Caterpillar bulldozer as she tried to prevent the Israeli army from destroying the Gaza Strip home of Palestinian pharmacist Samir Nasrallah. International activists who accompanied her claim that the Israeli soldier driving the bulldozer deliberately ran over Corrie twice, advancing and reversing, as she stood unarmed in front of the home.

A Political Bulldozer

“Bulldozer” is also the nickname Israel’s belligerent former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who left 20,000 deaths in his 1982 march to and siege of Beirut. An Israeli commission of inquiry found then-Defense Minister Sharon indirectly responsible for the massacre at Beirut’s Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

A decade earlier, as head of the IDF Southern Command, Sharon ordered the bulldozing of hundreds of Palestinian homes in order to carve a wide, straight path for Israeli troops and their heavy armored vehicles to move easily through Gaza’s Beach refugee camp. After throwing everyone’s belongings into the street, Sharon’s troops brought in their bulldozers and began flattening the street, beating and killing anyone who dared protest. That street is now known as Wreckage Street.

In August 1971 alone, soldiers under Sharon’s command destroyed some 2,000 homes in the Gaza Strip, uprooting 16,000 people for the second time in their lives.

Profound injustice

In both Jerusalem incidents of Palestinian’s bulldozers, operators were immediately stopped with several bullets to their heads by a bypassing officer and a civilian.

Nissim was considered the most devoted and brave; certainly the most destructive operator. After the publication of his testimony—and in spite of it—the unit to which the man belongs received from the army commander an official citation for outstanding service. Not surprising from a system and an army that selects a drunken man on this mission of destruction!

In June of 2003, a military investigation by the Israel Defense Forces Judge Advocate’s Office concluded that the woman’s death was accidental. “The driver at no point saw or heard Corrie.”

An Israeli commission of inquiry investigated the massacre at Sabra and Shatilla and in February 1983 publicly released its findings: Ariel Sharon was responsible for the massacre. On 14 February 1983, he was relieved of his duties as defence minister, to come back to the political scene as prime minister several years later to be the saviour of Israel.

Daily crimes perpetrated by bulldozers go unheeded and unprotested; one can think of many, Israelis that regularly drive over homes and schools and necks of Palestinians and go unpunished. It only becomes terrorism when the perpetrator is a Palestinian or the victim is a Jew!

While Shin Bet, the Israel Security Agency, has yet to officially rule that the attacks were politically motivated, Israeli authorities are keen to crack down on East Jerusalem residents: Jerusalem witnesses the intensive presence of police and armed citizens, and officials expedite procedures that would authorize punitive measures, such as razing the perpetrator’s family home, expelling the families of Palestinians involved in attacks against Israelis and revoking the Israeli identity cards of their immediate relatives.

A Palestinian goes on a rampage on Israelis, is shot dead, labeled a terrorist and his entire family is punished while an Israeli soldier who shot a blindfolded, handcuffed, unarmed Palestinian at point-blank range goes free! Is there any wonder why people kill each other in this region?

The two bulldozer incidents follow an attack in West Jerusalem in which a Jerusalemite gunman killed eight students in a religious school in March. It seems that no acts of deterrence and punitive tools are effective in stopping someone who decides to give up his life in protest to the occupation. Profound injustice allows us to foresee more attacks.

Hussam and Ghassan may have followers; and there are no security measures or means to counter the Palestinian reaction to Israel’s exploitation of power, except by making peace and recognizing the national and human rights of the Palestinians to pave the way for a different future that reflects inclusion, tolerance and accommodation in which all the citizens of this land use their capacities, opportunities and resources, including their bulldozers, to build a better world.