

# Off The cuff

DON MILLIGAN'S

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## Since Way Back When



THE LIBERATION OF CAEN July 1944



TOKYO March 1945



MOSUL June 2017



GAZA December 2023

**SINCE WAY BACK WHEN** civilians have always been slaughtered in war. I cannot think of a war where this has not been the case. During the battle for Normandy in the summer of 1944, at least 20,000 French civilians were killed in the fighting – 3,000 in the ancient city of Caen alone. On July 27<sup>th</sup> 1943 the Royal Airforce dropped leaflets advising people in Hamburg to leave the city – that same night 45,000 men, women, and children died in the flames. In Warsaw 180,000 were slaughtered between August and October 1944 – some were fighters in the Polish Home Army, but most were unarmed men, women, and children. In Tokyo, during March 1945, 90,000 civilians were burned to death.

Wars have always resulted in the reduction of human beings to detritus on the roadside. The killing of civilians is often widespread and deliberate, and those corpses that are counted in the column under

the chilling heading: “collateral damage”. All manner of crimes committed, as lawlessness takes hold, amongst soldiers and armed men, rapes and murders by the gross. Then, there are those, numberless, who perish from hunger and disease, the elderly and the children at the front of the queue for the Grim Reaper.

Wars are like this, this is what they are, mass killing in pursuit of political, social, cultural, and economic, objectives. It is why they are best avoided. The killing of civilians may be direct and deliberate – to destroy a particular ethnic group, to undermine the morale of the enemy, or death comes during the course of the fighting in which hundreds of thousands, sometimes, millions, simply fall under the wheels of the opposing juggernauts.

This is what is happening in Gaza right now. Unarmed Palestinian civilians, men, women, and children, are being killed, injured, and rendered homeless, by the Israel Defence Force as Hamas and other Islamist groups battle against Israeli forces. Civilian casualties are catastrophic, and I have no doubt, multiple crimes are being committed by Israeli soldiers, particularly against young Palestinian men.

The grotesque calculus of this war is – can Israel extirpate the Islamist fighters as quickly as possible, killing as few civilians as possible? The death toll is immense, particularly of children. Watching the camera on a three-year-old girl pan down to reveal her missing legs; a little boy howling uncontrollably on the roadside for his Mum and Dad buried forever under the rubble of their home. Who does not weep?

However, Hamas started this latest war with its pogrom on October 7<sup>th</sup> – they knew what the consequences would be. Of course, it is said in many quarters the historic oppression of the Palestinians is bound to call forth such barbarism – the oppressed can be forgiven their outrages, whereas the oppressor must be damned, decapitated, raped, and rocketed to hell, whilst the oppressed enjoy “unconditional support”.

Consequently, this is the outlook of much of the

left. All responsibility apparently lies with those who insist that Israel is a legitimate state and has the right to defend itself by all means at its disposal. It is even said that those of us who support Israel, celebrate the killing of children. Any lie, any calumny, is apparently permitted in this anti-Zionist struggle to destroy the Jewish state.

The tumultuous calls for a ceasefire assume that Hamas is an ordinary military formation answerable to a responsible state and its public. Nothing could be further from the truth. Hamas is a Islamist dictatorship in Gaza without freedom of speech or ordinary civil liberties. Its leaders have said publicly that they would repeat their pogrom “*over and over again*”. They are an explicitly anti-Jewish tyranny, committed to the violent destruction of the Hebrew nation, and what they call the “Zionist entity”. In such circumstances a sustained ceasefire would be used by Hamas to regroup, and resupply their fighters.

For more than one hundred years, Arabs and Jews have fought for possession of the same stretch of territory. In 1948 the Jews accepted the partition of Mandate Palestine, the Arabs did not. They have never accepted the partition of the land, their defeat in the war of 1948, or the legitimacy of the Jewish state. Palestinians have called for Israel’s destruction directly, or indirectly, by insisting on the right of the descendants of those Arabs expelled in 1948 to ‘return’ to Israel, so they might automatically overwhelm the Jewish population and bring an end to the Zionist state. They have been intransigent, insisting on maintaining their ‘refugee’ status, and have rejected integration as citizens in neighbouring Arab countries – demanding that all and sundry recognise their status as refugees in perpetuity.

Unlike the mass ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe, Anatolia, and India, involving the resettlement of tens of millions of displaced people between 1921 and 1948, the Palestinians have steadfastly refused reconciliation. They insist upon their right to the land of Palestine from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean

– some insist that Jews in future may live in a Palestinian state under the hegemony of a Muslim majority. This is the kind of future which Palestinian opinion, both Islamist and nationalist, envisage. It is not one that can result in peace, because it rests upon the destruction of the Jewish state.

As a consequence, Israeli public opinion has drifted inexorably to the right, multiplying Jewish settlements on the West Bank, supporting the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, implicit in the seizure of Palestinian farms and villages, under the protection of the Israel Defence Force. There are those who envisage clearing the Arab population out of the West Bank in its entirety, so that Israel would be free From the River to the Sea.

In such circumstances, the fundamental condition for meaningful negotiation between Palestinians and Jews, is acceptance of the legitimacy of the Jewish state within its 1967 borders – together with consideration of the final status of Jerusalem. The rejection of the ‘right of return’, and an explicit acceptance by the Palestinian side that the result of the war of 1948 cannot be overturned or annulled. This could form the basis for dismantling the occupation – the abolition of West Bank Zones A, B, and C – and the repatriation of Jewish settlers to Israel proper, in order to facilitate Palestinian sovereignty.

Only this, the Palestinian acceptance that their neighbouring Hebrew country, Israel, is legitimate, and here to stay, can end the fighting and create the conditions for a lasting peace.



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