

{MARCH 18 2006}

# A DISGUSTING EXERCISE

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**T**he central theme of this article is disgust. Therefore I apologize in advance for the frequent use of this and similar words.

In the thesaurus I find quite a number of synonyms: loathing, revulsion, dislike, nausea, distaste, aversion, antipathy, abomination, repulsion, abhorrence, repugnance, odium, detestation, and some more. They are all present in my feelings about the action that took place in Jericho on Tuesday.

It was abhorrent, first of all, because it was an election propaganda gimmick. For a politician to send the army in to collect votes is an abhorrent act. In this action, three people were killed. Many more lives, Palestinian and Israeli, were put at risk.

The horrible cynicism of the decision was plain for all to see. Even the voters noticed it: in a public opinion poll two days later, 47% said that the decision was influenced by electoral considerations, only 49% thought otherwise.

This is not the first time for Ehud Olmert to walk over dead bodies on his way to power. As mayor of Jerusalem, he pushed for the opening of a tunnel in the area of the Muslim shrines, causing (as expected) dozens of casualties. Binyamin Netanyahu, his accomplice at the time, is made of similar material.

Netanyahu, at least, was once a combat soldier, who risked his own life in action. Much more distasteful is a politician who sends others to risk their lives but takes great care not to risk his own. This inglorious band also numbers George Bush and Dick Cheney, two serial war-mongers.

Olmert had a problem. His party was slowly sinking in the polls. As time passed, some of the Kadima fans started to notice that Olmert, after all, is no Sharon. Sharon's glory derives mainly from his being a victorious general, who walked around during the Yom Kippur war with a large bandage around his head (to this very day it is not quite clear what purpose it served). Olmert was in urgent need of a military action that would provide him with the laurels of a tough military commander, and would also help him shake off the nickname attached to him by the Likud: Smolmert. (Smol, in Hebrew, means left.)

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The trick paid off. In the same poll, 20.7% of the voters said that the Jericho action persuaded them to vote for Kadima, or, at least, reinforced their decision to do so.

In general, one should beware of a civilian politician who succeeds a leader crowned with military laurels. It is enough to mention the classic case of Anthony Eden, the heir of Winston Churchill, who initiated the Suez war of October 1956.

What does that war remind us about? The collusion.

The British wanted to topple Gamal Abd-al-Nasser, because he had the temerity to expropriate the property of the British shareholders of the Suez Canal Company. The French wanted to bring him down because of his support for the Algerian war of liberation. They conspired with David Ben-Gurion, who wanted to destroy the newly re-equipped Egyptian army. The main middleman of the collusion was Shimon Peres, now No. 2 on the Kadima list.

It worked like this: Israeli paratroopers, commanded by Ariel Sharon (founder of Kadima), were dropped near the Suez canal. Britain and France issued a fake ultimatum, calling upon Egypt and Israel to withdraw their forces from the canal - a preposterous demand, since the canal is deep in Egyptian territory. As agreed beforehand, Israel refused, and then the British and French forces invaded the canal area, leaving the Israeli army to take control of the entire Sinai peninsula. The collusion was so primitive and obvious that it was uncovered at once. End of Eden.

The Jericho affair is incredibly similar: the British and the Americans pretended to fear for the safety of their monitors, which were stationed in Jericho according to an agreement which we shall touch upon later. They told Mahmoud Abbas that they might withdraw them. At a time secretly agreed upon with the Israeli Prime Minister, the British and American monitors went out and the Israeli army went in. Preparations for the action had been going on for weeks.

One thing should be said in favor of George Bush and Tony Blair (and his miserable Foreign Minister, Jack Straw): they have returned the oldest profession in the world to the oldest city in the world. The scarlet thread of Rahav the Harlot (Joshua, 2) leads to this act of prostitution.

Lieutenant General Dan Halutz can be proud of this victory. In the past, he became famous for saying that all he feels is a slight bump on his wing when he drops a bomb on a civilian neighborhood, even if women and children are also killed. After that he sleeps well, he said. Now he has won real glory: with the help of dozens of tanks, gunships and heavy bulldozers he has succeeded in capturing six unarmed prisoners in the tranquil, non-violent little town that lives off tourism.

In the course of the action, Halutz' soldiers created a disgusting picture that has sullied the image of the Israeli army in the eyes of the hundreds of millions who saw it

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on their screens. They ordered the Palestinian policemen and prisoners to take their clothes off, and then let them be photographed, again and again – and again and again – in their underpants. There was no need for that. The pretext, that they might have hidden explosive belts on their body, was ridiculous under these circumstances. And even if it had been necessary, it could surely have been done far from the cameras. No doubt: the intention was to humiliate, to debase, to satisfy sadistic tendencies.

A person can, perhaps, get over beatings, or even torture. But he cannot ever forget humiliation, especially when it was done in full view of his family, friends, colleagues and all people around the world. How many new terrorists were born at that moment?

On that day I happened to visit friends in a Palestinian village in the West Bank. We – my hosts and I – were riveted to the TV screen (mainly Aljazeera). When these pictures appeared, I could not look them in the eye for shame.

The Israeli media had a ball. Not just a ball, they went gaga for sheer joy. They contributed their special part to the loathsome event and stood to attention behind the government. Like a flock of parrots, unanimously repeating the mendacious official version.

It was a festival of brain-washing. The “Murderers of Ze’evi” have been captured! It was our national duty! We could not rest until they fell into our hands, dead or alive!

These three words – “Murderers of Ze’evi” – turned into a mantra. They were repeated endlessly on radio and television, and appeared in the printed newspapers (all of them!) and the speeches of the politicians (all of them!). That’s how it is: Israelis are “murdered”, Palestinians are “eliminated”.

Why, for Gods sake? Rehavam Zee’vi, a cabinet minister at the time, preached day and night about “transfer” – the euphemism for driving the Palestinians out of Palestine. Compared to him, Jean-Marie le Pen in France and Joerg Haider in Austria are bleeding-heart liberals. His targeted killing is no different from the targeted killing of Sheik Ahmed Yassin and scores of other Palestinian leaders, including Abu-Ali Mustafa, the chief of the Popular Front, who was allowed by Israel to return from Syria to the Palestinian territories after Oslo.

This is part of the endless chain of violence: The Israeli army killed Abu-Ali Mustafa. He was succeeded by Ahmed Sa’adat, who, according to the Israeli security service, ordered the killing of Rehavam Ze’evi in revenge, and whose capture was the aim of the Jericho action. And so it goes on.

Let’s be clear: I oppose all murders. Theirs and ours. The murder of Abu-Ali Mustafa and the murder of Rehavam Ze’evi. But whoever spills the blood of a Palestinian leader cannot complain about the shedding of the blood of an Israeli one.

There is still another side to the affair, which is no less disgusting: the attitude

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towards the keeping of agreements.

Sa'adat and his colleagues were held in Jericho in accordance with an agreement signed by Israel. On the strength of it, they left the Mukata'a in Ramallah, during the siege on Yasser Arafat, and entered the Palestinian jail in Jericho. The US and the UK guaranteed their safety and undertook to monitor their imprisonment.

What has happened now in Jericho is a blatant breach of the agreement. The miserable pretexts invented in Jerusalem, London and Washington are an insult to the intelligence of a 10-year old.

Israeli governments often regard the breach of an agreement as a patriotic act if it serves our purpose. Agreements are binding only on the other side. This is not only a primitive morality, it is also damaging to our national interests. Who will sign an agreement with us, knowing that it obligates only him? How can Israel convincingly demand that the Hamas leaders "accept all the agreements" signed by the Palestinian Authority?

Many Israelis believe that the Jericho action was a brilliant exercise. I found it simply loathsome.