'Fear of being slandered as "anti-Semites" means we are abetting terrible deeds in the Middle East'
by Robert Fisk

What if we had supported the apartheid regime of South Africa against the majority black population? What if we had lauded the South African white leadership as "hard-line warriors" rather than racists? What if we had explained the shooting of 56 black protesters at Sharpeville as an understandable "security crackdown" by the South African police. And described black children shot by the police as an act of "child sacrifice" by their parents? What if we had called upon the "terrorist" ANC leadership to "control their own people".

Almost every day that is exactly the way we are playing the Israeli-Palestinian war. No matter how many youths are shot dead by the Israelis, no matter how many murders – by either side – and no matter how bloody the reputation of the Israeli Prime Minister, we are reporting this terrible conflict as if we supported the South African whites against the blacks. No, Israel is not South Africa (though it happily supported the apartheid regime) and no, the Palestinians are not the blacks of the shanty towns. But there's not much difference between Gaza and the black slums of Johannesburg; and there's not much difference between the tactics of the Israeli army in the occupied territories and that of the South African police. The apartheid regime had death squads, just as Israel has today. Yet even they did not use helicopter gunships and missiles.

Rarely since the Second World War has a people been so vilified as the Palestinians. And rarely has a people been so frequently excused and placated as the Israelis. Israeli embassies are now buttonholing editors around the world, saying that it's not fair to call Israel's Prime Minister "hard-line". And the reporters are falling into line.

Sharon, we are told, may turn into a pragmatist, another De Gaulle; in truth he's more like the French putschist generals in Algeria. They also used torture and massacred their Arab opponents. It needed an Israeli writer – Nehemia Strasler, in Ha'aretz – to point out that Sharon's career spells anything but peace. He voted against the peace treaty with Egypt in 1979. He voted against a withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 1985. He opposed Israel's participation in the Madrid peace conference in 1991. He opposed the Knesset plenum vote on the Oslo agreement in 1993. He abstained on a vote for peace with Jordan in 1994. He voted against the Hebron agreement in 1997. He condemned the manner of Israel's retreat from Lebanon in 2000. He is now building Jewish settlements on occupied Arab land – in total violation of international law - at a faster rate than his predecessor.

Yet we are to believe that it is the corrupt, Parkinson's-haunted Yasser Arafat who is to blame for the war. He will not "control" his people. He is chastised by George Bush while his people

are bestialised by the Israeli leadership. Rafael Eytan, the former Israeli chief of staff, used to talk of the Palestinians as "cockroaches in a glass jar". Menachem Begin called them "two-legged beasts". Rabbi Ovdia Yousef, the spiritual head of the Shas party, called them "serpents". In August last year, Ehud Barak called them "crocodiles". Last month, the Israeli tourism minister, Rehavem Zeevi, called Arafat a "scorpion". Even the South African regime never called the blacks by such vile names.

And woe betide the diplomat or journalist who points this out. Earlier this year, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, in Paris, accused the Swedish president of the European Union of "encouraging anti-Jewish violence". To condemn Israel for "eliminating terrorists", the centre wrote in a letter to the Swedish prime minister, "recalls the allied argument during the Second World War, according to which bombing the railways leading to Auschwitz would encourage anti-Semitism among the Germans". Sweden was making "a unilateral attack against the state of the survivors of the Holocaust". And the Swedish president's crime? She had dared to say that "the practice of eliminations constitutes an obstacle to peace and could provoke new violence". She did not even refer to death squads.

In February Newsweek propagated a virtual fraud on its cover by showing – under the headline "Terror Goes Global – Exclusive: Bin Laden's International Network" – a frightening photograph of a man (head and shoulders), his face covered in an Arab scarf, holding a rifle in his right hand. The reader would imagine this to be a member of Osama bin Laden's network of "global terror". But I traced the Finnish photographer who took this picture. He snapped it at a funeral on the West Bank. The man was an armed member of the Palestinian Tanzim militia -- and had nothing to do with Bin Laden. The Tanzim are violent enough. But the cover generically smeared the entire Palestinian people by associating them with the man supposedly responsible for bombing US embassies in Africa.

As that brave American writer Charley Reese said in his regular US column, the Israelis "have created their own unconquerable enemy". They have made the Palestinians so crushed, so desperate, so humiliated that they have nothing to lose. We, too, have done this. Our gutlessness, our refusal to tell the truth, our fear of being slandered as "anti-Semites" – the most loathsome of libels against any journalist – means that we are aiding and abetting terrible deeds in the Middle East. Maybe we should look up those cuttings of the apartheid era and remember when men were not without honour.

[Source..](#) .