

America Magazine's Omissions and Misrepresentations in the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict

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October 26, 2009

Executive Summary

A careful review of the coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in *America Magazine* over the past fourteen months (September 2008- October 2009) reveals repeated omissions and misrepresentations which invariably result in Israel's actions being portrayed in a particularly negative light while the relative culpability of Palestinian militants and their political leadership is seriously downplayed.

This is in contravention of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications' instruction that:

Communication must always be truthful, since truth is essential to individual liberty and to authentic community among persons . . .
(*Ethics in Communications*, IV 2000)

and the Council's caution to the media against:

. . . fostering hostility and conflict, demonizing others and creating a mentality of "us" against "them" . . . (*Ethics in Communications*, III(13))

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Introduction

The Obligation to Truth in Journalism

Reporting the truth is the foremost obligation of any journalist. Indeed, the first tenet of the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists² is to “seek truth and report it.” Whatever perspective a journalist writes from, his or her writing must reflect the truth.

What are the principles underlying the obligation to truth in journalism?

Because the media is the public’s source of information regarding local, national and international events it is indispensable and enormously powerful in a democratic society. Democracy depends on citizens having reliable, accurate facts put in a meaningful context. The public tends to believe what it reads and hears in the news and other forms of print and broadcast journalism and tends not to employ an overly critical eye or ear. Therefore, those who control the means of mass communication possess tremendous power to form and sway public opinion. Journalism thus becomes a nearly sacred trust in which people accept that the information they receive is true.

The Catholic Press and the Obligation to Truthfulness

Unlike the news departments of secular media the Catholic press does not limit itself to objective reporting. Catholic publications openly engage in both advocacy and apologetics out of a fundamental commitment to serving God, the Church, society and humanity. Thus, the Catholic press deals heavily in opinion and interpretation.

The obligation to veracity, however, remains a fundamental principle guiding Catholic as well as secular journalists in spite of -- or perhaps especially in light of -- their advocacy efforts. When writing in the context of zealous advocacy journalists might be most tempted to overlook facts supportive of another view or to overstate those which support their own. The Catholic journalist therefore

² The Society of Professional Journalists, established in 1909, is one of the oldest organizations representing professional journalists in the United States. Its Code of Ethics is voluntarily embraced by thousands of journalists, and is widely used in newsrooms and classrooms as a guide for ethical behavior.

must be particularly scrupulous in his or her adherence to the ethical principle of reporting the whole truth.

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications has affirmed that the obligation to truthfulness extends to Catholic journalists, stating that:

Ethical principles and norms relevant in other fields also apply to social communication. . . . Communication must always be truthful, since truth is essential to individual liberty and to authentic community among persons . . . (*Ethics in Communications*, IV 2000)

The Obligation to Use Catholic Journalism in the Service of Good

Despite the immense power of mass communication its means remain ethically and morally neutral. They are merely tools which the journalist can use for either good or evil purposes. On the one hand, the media has enormous power for good, to educate, enlighten and inspire. But it can be used for bad purposes. As the Pontifical Council for Social Communications warned:

The media also can be used to block community and injure the integral good of persons: by alienating people or marginalizing and isolating them; . . . fostering hostility and conflict, demonizing others and creating a mentality of “us” against “them” . . . (*Ethics in Communications*, III(13))

Moreover, the Council admonished:

while social communication rightly looks to the needs and interests of particular groups, it should not do so in a way that sets one group against another. . . (*Ethics in Communications*, IV(22))

The Council also reaffirmed the journalist’s obligation to veracity and to avoid forms of dishonesty that would foster conflict amongst people:

The presumption should always be in favor of freedom of expression Still, considered from an ethical perspective, this presumption is not an absolute, indefeasible norm. There are obvious instances—for example, libel and slander, messages that seek to foster hatred and conflict among individuals and groups, . . . —where no right to communicate exists. Plainly, too, free

expression should always observe principles like truth, fairness, and respect for privacy. (*Ethics in Communications*, IV(23))

With these dual and intertwining obligations to truth and advocacy for the common good, a Catholic journal should never provide a platform for positions that “**foster[] hostility and conflict, demoniz[e] others and creat[e] a mentality of ‘us’ against ‘them.’**” Moreover, editors must take special care that the positions they advocate and the opinions they adopt are grounded in the truth.

The Catholic Church and the State of Israel

While the attitudes towards the Israeli/Palestinian conflict within some of the mainstream Protestant churches have demonstrated a clear bias against Israel in recent years, the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church has remained a highly principled and neutral voice.

In addressing the issue of an appropriate Catholic perspective on the Jewish state, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews concluded that Catholics should: no longer consider Jews as punished and divinely separated from the land of Israel; consider the continued existence of the Jewish people (the people of Israel) as God’s will; and respect and seek to understand the Jewish attachment to the land of Israel. The existence of a modern State of Israel however, should be interpreted not in theological terms, but in reference to common international legal principles. (*See Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*, VI(1) 1985).

The Holy See and the State of Israel established formal diplomatic relations on December 30, 1993, when they signed the “Fundamental Agreement” and in so doing the Vatican clearly recognized the right of the State of Israel to exist. The Holy See also recognizes the right of the Palestinian people to a state of their own. It thus holds a neutral position on the conflict that champions the well-being of all people in the region.

This highly principled neutrality, however, is sadly missing from the pages of *America Magazine*.

America Magazine

America Magazine is a Catholic weekly published by the Jesuits and currently edited by Fr. Drew Christiansen, S.J. With a circulation of about 45,000

including many Catholic bishops, priests, religious, theologians, academics and writers, *America* is highly influential.

America is obligated by profession and by faith to embrace the standards of Catholic journalism we have noted above. For the most part *America* meets these sacred obligations. However, when it comes to its coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, or indeed the state of Israel as such, we find that *America* repeatedly falls short of these standards.

Significant Omissions and Misrepresentations Which Cast Israel in a Consistently Negative Light Appear Repeatedly in the Pages of *America* Magazine

The twin concepts of omission and misrepresentation each describe particular types of fundamental untruths. An omission, whether it is employed deliberately, negligently or inadvertently, becomes deceptive because it involves the failure to state material facts, knowledge of which is necessary to make other statements not misleading.³ Misrepresentation, whether it is employed deliberately, negligently or inadvertently, is equally deceptive because it involves stating as fact a thing or things which are not really true.

A careful review of the coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in *America* Magazine over the past fourteen months (September 2008- October 2009) reveals repeated omissions and misrepresentations that result specifically in Israel's actions being portrayed in a particularly negative light, while the relative culpability of Palestinian militants and their political leadership is seriously downplayed.

Omissions

Articles the editors of *America* have chosen for publication tend to omit significant facts that are highly relevant to the subject and by whose omission Israel repeatedly appears to be the guilty party and the Palestinians appear to be primarily innocent bystanders struggling to free themselves from Israeli aggression and oppression.

³ The word "material" here means that the subject matter of the statement (or concealment) would be important to a full understanding of the topic as distinguished from an insignificant, trivial or unimportant detail.

America's Omissions Covering Israeli Actions in Gaza

In his article "Gaza's Children," (Sept. 22, 2008) Fr. Donald Moore, S.J. laments the Israeli "siege" of Gaza and the humanitarian crisis it helped to create. He blames the "siege" for violence stating that it created "fertile ground for extremists . . ." and places it in the context of a "cycle of violence." But Fr. Moore fails to inform his readers of the original reason for the Israeli blockade of Gaza.

In November 2001 (during the Second Intifada), Hamas -- an organization dedicated by chartered purpose to the eradication of Israel -- began a campaign of firing Qassam rockets at civilian targets in Israel from Gaza. In September 2005, under then Prime Minister Sharon, Israel nonetheless disengaged from Gaza, removing all of its settlers, settlements and any military presence. It is believed that PM Sharon calculated that the promise of Palestinian autonomy in Gaza would mean the end of the rocket attacks because Palestinians would seize the opportunity to begin the process of state building. His calculation proved wrong however. Israel's disengagement was followed not by any attempt at legitimate state building but by the immediate digging of infiltration tunnels from Egypt, an increase in the number of Qassam rockets (ultimately up to 100 per day), and an increase in the range of some missiles. But even with the rockets being fired, Israel did not create the blockade until July 2007 -- after Hamas' election victory⁴ and its violent seizure of power⁵ had given free rein to the development in Gaza of Hamas infrastructure and terrorist bases.

Is it Fr. Moore's view that Hamas can openly call for the destruction of the State of Israel and use its control of Gaza as a platform for incessant rocket attacks on Israeli civilians and in response Israel should meekly open its borders to trade; allow Palestinians to freely cross from Gaza into Israel and the West Bank; allow Palestinians unobstructed access to the sea, facilitating the smuggling of rockets and other ammunition to be used against the Jewish state; and generally allow Hamas to thrive while continuing belligerently to threaten Israel's existence?

Fr. Moore also fails to inform his readers that Israel's blockade of Gaza is not and never was complete.⁶ Fr. Moore neglects as well to mention that Egypt controls

⁴ January 2006.

⁵ June 2007.

⁶ Even during the Dec. 2008- Jan. 2009 war, Israel continued to allow the movement of food, fuel, medicine and other supplies through the border.

the Rafah border with Gaza and chooses to keep it closed. If there is a humanitarian crisis due to sealed borders, where is Fr. Moore's outrage at Egypt over the role it plays? His selective reporting of facts creates the impression that Israel, for no legitimate reason, is solely responsible for creating a massive humanitarian crisis in Gaza for which it is paying with the increased militancy of Hamas.

Nine months after featuring Fr. Moore's article on Gaza, *America* published a two-page article about relationships and good-will building in the Middle East ("Peace Begins Here," June 22-29, 2009) written by Aaron Chassy. Chassy's article begins with a brief reflection on the 2009 Gaza war. He notes that the war "left more than 1,400 Palestinians dead in Gaza, at least half of them civilians. Thirteen Israelis also lost their lives."⁷

That's it -- end of Chassy's reflection on the Gaza war. No mention of the fact that the war had been provoked by eight years of non-stop Qassam rockets being wantonly launched into civilian areas in Southern Israel by Palestinian terrorists openly dedicated to the destruction of the State of Israel. No mention of the suffering of the Israeli population during those eight years. No mention of the three detection blimps that would circulate the sky in Sderot 24 hours a day, seven days a week to detect incoming rockets. No mention of the fact that when the sirens went off Israelis had fifteen to thirty seconds to get into a bomb shelter. No mention of the children that couldn't sleep, or that everyone was afraid to leave their homes, that Israelis had died, that Israeli children had their legs blown off. How many years were people supposed to live like this before taking action to put a stop to it? Mr. Chassy does not ask this question in his article.

Mr. Chassy's article does not mention that it was Hamas that chose not to extend the existing cease-fire on December 18 2008, resuming Qassam attacks on the civilian population in Southern Israel up to 100 times per day. No mention of the fact that once the war began Hamas, with the Israeli army sitting as a ready

⁷ There is a legitimate dispute regarding the number of civilian casualties which Mr. Chassy does not raise. Palestinian rights groups say 1,417 Palestinians, including 926 civilians, were killed in the Gaza war. Israel has said 709 Palestinian combatants, 295 civilians and 162 people whose status it was unable to clarify were killed. One reason for this vast discrepancy is that there are serious problems determining who is and who is not a civilian in Gaza. For example, Gazan police were apparently among those targeted by Israeli forces. Palestinian rights groups classify the Gaza police force as "civilian," while a study conducted by the Orient Research Group found that more than ninety percent were members of Hamas' military wing and active combatants.

target right outside Gaza and in close range, chose to continue to target civilian areas in towns behind the army.

Israel's war in Gaza surely resulted in extremely high civilian casualties. This was tragic and both the tactics decided and the conduct of military actions are fitting subjects of investigation. But it is deceptive to mention only those casualties -- and the relative lack of casualties on the Israeli side -- without discussing the larger context of the war. At every stage -- deployment, preparation, and design -- Qassam launchers were in such close proximity to residential populations that it was impossible for Israel, despite its relatively sophisticated and precise weapons, to wage this war without inflicting severe collateral damage upon schools, mosques, hospitals and homes within which Hamas was embedded. Moreover, Hamas made extensive use of civilians as human shields.⁸

It was thus unavoidable that the war in Gaza would take a horrifically high toll on the Palestinian population in Gaza. Yet, the aim of Israel was not to kill civilians but to end the Qassam attacks on its civilians in the south. Qassam rockets, which are built not to cause damage to structures, but to kill and maim human beings, are not "smart" weapons. They are not guided missiles. Once launched there is no control over where they will land. To help protect its citizens, Israel instituted defensive measures -- bomb shelters every few blocks in Sderot and a twenty-four hour detection system to warn people when the rockets were coming. Thus, while the nearly eight-year campaign of lobbing Qassams into Sderot terrorized the entire civilian population, it did not result in the massive casualty figure that Israel's Operation Cast Lead did. The morality of an army, however, is not vitiated by its effectiveness, nor do terrorists that target civilians score any moral points for having crude weapons and bad aim.

None of this however, was mentioned in Chassy's article: Only the disparity between the numbers of dead Palestinians and Israelis.

In both Fr. Moore's and Mr. Chassy's articles, the omissions tended strongly to cast Israel as the ruthless aggressor in Gaza that launched a war for no legitimate reason and with the sole intention of punishing and killing Palestinian civilians. These are two articles in which *America* did not meet its ethical obligation to use truthful journalism in a manner that does not "demoniz[e]" others or "look to the needs and interests of particular groups . . . in a way that sets one group against another."

⁸ See *America's Uncritical Acceptance of the Goldstone Report*, below.

America's Uncritical Acceptance of the Goldstone Report

In April of 2009 the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed a fact finding mission, led by South African Justice Richard Goldstone, to investigate the fighting in December 2008 and January 2009 between Hamas and Israel. That mission issued its Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict on September 15, 2009 (the "Report").⁹ The Report is rife with indicia of prejudice and lack of due process.

The bias of the U.N. Human Rights Council against Israel has been expressly acknowledged by successive U.S. administrations, and implicitly by the U.N. secretary-general. The resolution mandating the fact-finding mission itself accused Israel of "the targeting of civilians . . ." and one of the investigators judged Israel guilty of "prima facie war crimes," -- all prior to any actual investigation.¹⁰

There was a lack of transparency throughout the inquiry. Hand-picked "witnesses" were invited without explanation to testify before the mission. Casualty figures in the report are taken from the Gaza-based Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), a politically motivated organization, and count senior Hamas military figures such as Nizar Rayan¹¹ and Said Siam¹² as

⁹ The members of the Fact Finding Mission were: (i) Justice Richard Goldstone, Head of Mission; former judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa; former Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda; (ii) Professor Christine Chinkin, Professor of International Law at the London School of Economics and Political Science; (iii) Ms. Hina Jilani, Advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan; and (iv) Colonel Desmond Travers, former Officer in Ireland's Defense Forces.

¹⁰ Panel member Christine Chinkin had signed a Jan. 11 2009 letter to the Sunday Times of London accusing Israel of war crimes even before the Israeli military operation had concluded and certainly before she had had an opportunity to fully investigate the facts. Moreover, her letter already attested to her belief that Israel had no right to self-defense in this case under international law, thereby rendering any Israeli military response to the eight years of rocket attacks from Gaza a war crime.

¹¹ According to Rayan's obituary he was "considered one of Hamas's top five decision-makers" and was "famous for fighting alongside his men He strongly advocated suicide bombing inside Israel. He even sent his 22 year old son on a suicide mission in 2001 to the El Sinai Israeli settlement in Gaza,

“civilians.” The Report is based almost entirely on unverifiable Palestinian claims and publications from highly politicized pro-Palestinian organizations which were accepted at face value and quoted directly. The interviews the Goldstone investigators conducted in Gaza were overseen by Hamas officials -- is it reasonable to believe that civilians in Gaza would speak freely in their presence?¹³

Goldstone regularly credits statements by the “Gaza authorities” as legitimate evidence, while at the same time treating Israeli statements as inherently unreliable, discounting even photographic and satellite image data provided by the Israeli Defense Forces. Israel’s assertions that it warned civilians and planned military operations to minimize civilian casualties were summarily dismissed by Goldstone.¹⁴

where he and two Israelis died and 15 others were injured . . . He played a key role in directing Hamas forces during their battle with Fatah in Gaza . . . [and] his last few years saw him playing a key role in liaising between the political leadership of Hamas and its armed wing.” (guardian.co.uk, 3 January 2009)

¹² Siam was a senior Hamas leader who as interior minister in Gaza “created the executive forces, a cohort of gunmen, ostensibly meant to act as auxiliary police . . . [who were] . . . drawn mainly from Hamas militias . . . [He] helped mastermind the defeat of pro-Fatah units in June 2007 after a four-day uprising that killed at least 116 . . . An early member of Hamas . . . he led a unit that killed Palestinians suspected of informing for Israel.” (guardian.co.uk, 17 January 2009)

¹³ A number of Israeli human rights organizations are calling for a thorough investigation of the charges in the Goldstone report. Where are the Palestinian human rights organizations calling for charges against Hamas? While far from being a perfect country, in Israel human rights activists organize and freely and openly criticize the state, while in the Palestinian Territories and many of the surrounding Arab nations, human rights activists are severely restricted, imprisoned or even murdered by their governments.

¹⁴ Throughout Operation Cast Lead, Israel’s military tried to warn civilians in advance of attacks. They dropped leaflets, used text messaging and cell phones and an innovative method known as “knocking on roofs” with nonexplosive noisemakers which gave residents of houses ten minute warnings before an attack. See Testimony of Col. Richard Kemp, former commander of the British forces in Afghanistan, at the U.N. Human Rights Council, 12th Special Session, Geneva, October 16, 2009 (“Mr. President, based on my knowledge and experience, I can say this: During Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli Defence Forces

Perhaps the most damning flaw in Goldstone, however, is its failure to cite conclusive evidence of Hamas' use of civilians and civilian infrastructure for military purposes despite extensive and readily available evidence to support such use.¹⁵ Thus, the Report makes no mention of incidents of Palestinian rockets launched from schools or the use of mosques to store explosives despite solid video evidence. Goldstone also claims to have found no evidence that Palestinian armed groups forced civilians to remain within the vicinity of Israeli attacks. But in an article in the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*,¹⁶ for example, Gaza residents explicitly stated that Hamas fighters shot at Israeli forces from their homes after forcibly preventing them from leaving. Contrary to numerous contemporaneous reports in media outlets like the *New York Times*, the Report denies that Hamas fighters wore civilian clothing, hid in hospital facilities and used ambulances for military purposes. The Report also failed to mention that

did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare The truth is that the IDF took extraordinary measures to give Gaza civilians notice of targeted areas, dropping over 2 million leaflets, and making over 100,000 phone calls. Many missions that could have taken out Hamas military capability were aborted to prevent civilian casualties. During the conflict, the IDF allowed huge amounts of humanitarian aid into Gaza. To deliver aid virtually into your enemy's hands is, to the military tactician, normally quite unthinkable. But the IDF took on those risks"); Haaretz, January 4, 2009 ("The IDF has code named such operations "roof knocking," in which the army informs the residents of a suspected building that they have 10 minutes to leave the premises. In some cases, residents of suspected houses have been able to prevent bombing by climbing up to the roof to show that they will not leave, prompting IDF commanders to call off the strike.")

¹⁵ In responding to an inquiry asking why his mission had ignored requests to invite witnesses such as Colonel Richard Kemp, the former commander of British forces in Afghanistan and an adviser to the UK cabinet, Justice Goldstone admitted that they had deliberately selected incidents that would evade the issue of confronting armed combatants in civilian areas: "[t]here was no reliance on Col. Kemp mainly because in our Report we did not deal with the issues he raised regarding the problems of conducting military operations in civilian areas and second-guessing decisions made by soldiers and their commanding officers 'in the fog of war'. We avoided having to do so in the incidents we decided to investigate." Goldstone stated.

¹⁶ *Corriere della Sera* is among the oldest and most reputable Italian newspapers.

the Palestinian forces in Gaza recruited children to conduct combat-support operations. A January 9, 2009 report in an Arab/Israeli newspaper published an interview with a child from Gaza who is reported to have said: "We the children, in small groups and in civilian clothes, are fulfilling missions of support for the [Hamas] Resistance fighters, by transmitting messages about the movements of the enemy forces, or by bringing them ammunition and food. We ourselves are not aware of the movements of the Resistance fighters. We see them in one place, they suddenly disappear, and then reappear somewhere else. They are like ghosts, it is very hard to find them or hurt them."¹⁷

Despite the myriad significant problems with Goldstone, in "Siege Mentality" (October 5, 2009), *America's* editors refer to the Report with a wholly uncritical acceptance and a complete failure to adequately address -- or even mention -- the serious flaws which may well render it unworthy of serious consideration. These omissions undermine *America's* editors' use of the Goldstone report to support their accusations of "collective punishment" leveled at Israel.

In "When Silence is Betrayal (October 12, 2009) Fr. Donald J. Moore, S.J. also references Goldstone uncritically as he accuses Israel of the worst sort of war crimes with a ferocity rarely seen even in the pages of *America*. Far more should be expected from a serious and influential Catholic magazine. Whether or not the editors agreed with accusations that Richard Goldstone's report and investigation were guided by an agenda to isolate Israel, *America* had an obligation to report its deep flaws and the severe criticisms that have been leveled against it. The failure to do so is an omission that violates the obligation to truthfulness in a manner that specifically serves to "foster[] hostility and . . . demoniz[e]" the state of Israel.

Fr. Moore characterizes Israel as a brutal and a rogue state, yet, the entire premise of "When Silence is Betrayal" is false as it completely fails to set forth the facts and the larger context of the war. Fr. Moore describes in some detail the suffering in Gaza and the destruction that was wrought by the last war, but he does not reveal the truth about how it came about. First he confuses history with the argument that Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza after the 1967 war was about "'territorial expansionism.'" Here Fr. Moore neglects to inform his readers that Israel fought that war in self-defense and tried to negotiate land for peace almost immediately afterwards. It was the Arab nations that solidly rejected negotiations at the time.

¹⁷ *Kul-Al-Arab* (Israeli Arabic language weekly), January 9, 2009.

Fr. Moore then compounds the omissions by suggesting that in recent years Hamas resorted to terror against Israeli civilians only because it had no alternative and that it is merely the “spin of [Israeli] public relations experts” that Israel’s goal in the war was to stop the rockets.

Why does Fr. Moore fail to mention that after Israel disengaged, the response on the part of Palestinians in Gaza was to immediately start digging infiltration tunnels? Why does he fail to state that the rockets which Hamas started pelting Israeli civilians with in 2001 did not stop or even decrease when Israel ended the occupation of Gaza in 2005?

Before beginning Operation Cast Lead, Israeli leaders issued the sternest of warnings to Hamas to stop the rocket attacks on Israel. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni openly warned that Israel “cannot tolerate” Palestinian militants targeting Israeli citizens and that they would act to halt “unbearable” rocket attacks by Gaza militants.¹⁸ “Hamas needs to understand that our aspiration to live in peace doesn't mean that Israel is going to take this kind of situation any longer. Enough is enough,” Livni said. (Then) Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made it clear that he would not hesitate to strike Hamas and another militant group, Islamic Jihad, in the Gaza Strip. Mr Olmert called on residents of Gaza to stop militants “firing on innocent civilians” in an interview with the Arab television station Al-Arabiya. “I say to you in a last-minute call, stop it,” Mr Olmert said. “Don't let Hamas, which is acting against the values of Islam, put you in danger. Stop them. Stop your enemies and ours.” Mr Olmert added: “I will not hesitate to use Israel's might to strike Hamas and [Islamic] Jihad. How? I will not go into details now.”¹⁹

Hamas had a last chance and clear alternative to the war -- extending the ceasefire that it walked away from in December 2008 and stopping the endless rocket fire. But Fr. Moore fails to state any of this, allowing the readers of *America* to believe that rocket fire was merely one of Hamas’ few or only alternatives to Israeli brute force.

Criticizing Israeli Policies but Omitting the Rationale Behind the Policies

In “Peace Begins Here,” author Aaron Chassy refers as if by surprise to the lack of anger two Palestinian Christians he encounters harbor towards Israeli and American Jews “as a result of the U.S.-backed Israeli policies that have caused undue suffering for many Palestinians.” (*America*, June 22-29, 2009).

¹⁸ www.news.bbc.co.uk

¹⁹ www.alarabiya.net (25 December 2008)

While some Israeli policies, in our view, have caused Palestinian suffering, the willingness to cite only Israeli policies and Palestinian suffering without also discussing the reason behind the policies, namely Palestinian terrorism and ongoing threat of terrorism is intellectually dishonest on the part of both Chassy and his publisher, *America*. Israel's security barrier and the extensive system of closures, checkpoints and roadblocks on the West Bank, for example, have caused severe hardship and inconvenience for many Palestinians, innocent and less innocent. But the security barrier, roadblocks and checkpoints cannot be discussed -- nor can the suffering they have caused -- out of the larger context of the terror that led to them. Hundreds of innocent Israelis were killed in the Second Intifada and thousands more maimed -- many for life. Where is the integrity in publishing an article that complains of restrictive Israeli policies but fails to mention the context from whence those policies arose?

To be sure, not all problematic Israeli policies are a direct response to terror. The settlements, which can and should be forcefully challenged, were not motivated primarily by security interests. But the facts on the ground are complex in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. A simple approach which cites alleged Israeli wrongdoing without discussion of the larger context constitutes an omission that serves not to inform and enlighten but to "marginaliz[e] and isolat[e]" one side.

Omissions Which Highlight Israeli Actions While Ignoring Actions of Israel's Arab Neighbors

America also failed to provide complete information in an editorial on the Convention on Cluster Munitions which required signatories to cease using cluster bombs ("Ban the Bomblets," Dec. 1, 2008).²⁰

In spite of the fact that the very nations and militias that surround and have historically threatened Israel (Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Yemen) also failed to sign the treaty, *America's* editors chose to list only four non-signatory countries. First they list the U.S., and then provocatively add "As might be expected, other nonsignatories include Israel, Russia and China." The article failed to explain why it "might be expected" that Israel failed to sign

²⁰ Cluster bombs have been used in warfare since World War II. At least 14 countries and a small number of non-state militias -- Hezbollah, for example -- have used cluster bombs in at least 30 nations and territories, while at least 76 nations have stockpiles, according to Human Rights Watch. (See www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/07/17/cluster-munition-information-chart).

the treaty. One good reason Israel did have for not signing -- left unmentioned by the editors -- is that it is surrounded by hostile countries and non-state terrorist militias that for some sixty years have repeatedly attacked and/or threatened to attack Israel and that have retained the option of using cluster bombs. But by both failing to state this fact and the coy use of the phrase “[a]s might be expected . . .” when citing Israel as a non-signatory, *America* manages to create the clear implication that the reason Israel did not sign the treaty is that the Jewish state is a rogue state, a serial violator of international law and human rights and can always be expected to act accordingly.

America's singling out of Israel as the only country in the Middle East that failed to sign this treaty is inexcusable. We do not endorse the use of cluster bombs -- and we endorse the use of maximal efforts to avoid the tragedy of civilian casualties in war. But why does *America* omit the fact that Israel's hostile neighbors were also non-signatories to this treaty?

Moreover, in the opening paragraph of the editorial, *America* singles out Israel for its use of those weapons during the 2006 Israel/Hezbollah war, while failing to also mention that Hezbollah rained cluster bombs down on Northern Israel during that war.²¹ This is an egregious and blatant omission. If we are talking about cluster bombs in the context of war, mentioning only one side that used them is almost certain to “demoniz[e]” Israel.

Omissions in Reporting on the Dwindling Christian Population in Palestine

Although the reasons behind the exodus of Christians from the West Bank are varied and complex, *America's* coverage does not do justice to any of those reasons apart from the pressure of the Israeli occupation which it chooses to magnify. In “Bethlehem's Wall,” (Sept. 1, 2008) Austen Ivereigh cites only the Israeli security barrier, claiming that “the wall is responsible for the destruction of the town's Christian population.” Mr. Ivereigh appears to scoff at the notion that the Christian exodus might be caused even in part by significant tensions between Palestinian Christians and Muslims.

Those with an in-depth understanding of the situation on the West Bank know that there are many reasons for the Christian exodus. Yes, the security barrier and the pressure of life under Israeli occupation are among them. But the

²¹ Human Rights Watch cited testimony indicating that the Lebanese militia fired more than 100 rockets containing cluster bombs into northern Israel during the 34 day war in August 2006. (hrw.org/en/news/2006/10/18/lebanonisrael-hezbollah-hit-israel-cluster-munitions-during-conflict)

ineffective and corrupt Fatah government that squandered \$6.5 billion dollars in international aid the Palestinian Authority received after the Oslo accords is another very significant factor. There is also the problem of tensions between the growing radical Muslim population and the minority Christian population on the West Bank, where the rule of law does not hold much sway. Life on the West Bank is tough -- especially for Christians -- and it likely will not get any better if the only change made is an end to the Israeli occupation.²²

It is also an inexcusable omission to ignore the reason behind Israel's restrictive policies that do contribute to Christian flight. In his review of Archbishop Michel Sabbah's²³ book *Faithful Witness*, ("A Daring Vision" May 18, 2009) Ed Gaffney writes "Because of the belligerent Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Christians in Jerusalem are regularly impeded from going to Bethlehem for Christmas. Nor may Bethlehemites go to Jerusalem for Holy Week and Easter or Pentecost." But the book review fails to discuss how Israel's very real concern over terrorism and need to ensure its own citizens' safety led to the current situation where Palestinians cannot freely cross into Israel and Israelis (Christian or otherwise) cannot freely cross into the West Bank. The strict measures of the security barrier, checkpoints and roadblocks appeared only after the rash of suicide bombings that started in 2000, when Israelis could not take a bus, eat in a café or send their children to school without fear of being blown up.

The book review also fails to mention the fact that from 1948-1967, when the West Bank and East Jerusalem were annexed and under Jordanian rule, Israeli

²² On September 4, 2005, Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Custodian of the Holy Land, reportedly said to Lorenzo Cremonesi, the Jerusalem correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*: "What do you mean by difficulties between Israel and the Vatican? We Christians in the Holy Land have other problems. Almost every day - I repeat, almost every day - our communities are harassed by the Islamic extremists in these regions. And if it's not the members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad, there are clashes with the 'rubber wall' of the Palestinian Authority, which does little or nothing to punish those responsible. On occasion, we have even discovered among our attackers the police agents of Mahmoud Abbas or the militants of Fatah, his political party, who are supposed to be defending us." Fr. Pizzaballa also reportedly told the *Corriere* that he had "a list of 93 cases of injustice of various kinds committed against Christians in the region of Bethlehem between 2000 and 2004." www.chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/38551?eng=y).

²³ Archbishop Sabbah was the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem from 1987 to 2008.

Christians were subjected to various restrictions during seasonal pilgrimages to the holy sites in East Jerusalem and only limited numbers were grudgingly permitted to briefly visit the Old City and Bethlehem at Christmas and Easter.

America again omits the larger context and fails to mention any problems for Christians other than those caused by Israeli policies. The book review is thus likely to “foster hatred and conflict” between Israelis and all readers of *America* who are rightly concerned about the plight of Palestinian Christians. While appearing to “look[] to the needs and interests of [the Palestinian Christians],” *America* goes about this in a way that “sets one group [Israelis] against another.”

Palestinian Christians are not helped and generally there is nothing to be gained from pretending that it is only Israeli actions that lead Christians to leave the holy land -- nothing, that is, but a fueling of anti-Israel animus.

Omissions in Discussion of Education in Israel

America deemed the failure of Jewish Israeli schools to do what it considers an adequate job of teaching about Christianity worthy of a full page feature earlier this year.

The feature did make some good points. Comparative religion should be taught in schools and Israel should be no exception to this. It would lead to an increase in interreligious tolerance and understanding. But some of the points in “In Israeli Jewish Schools, No Teaching About Christianity” (Signs of the Times, May 4, 2009) were far fetched and grasping. The article reported how one Israeli Rabbi laments the fact that “Jewish kids in Israel who finish high school will be totally ignorant about Vatican II I have never heard about someone in Israel taking [it] upon himself to educate Jews about post-Vatican II Christians.” How well educated are kids in the U.S. about Vatican II for that matter? Or Catholic High School students?

Moreover, there is a rather obvious and glaring omission here. While the topic of countries with Christian minorities and how they handle teaching about Christianity would certainly make a worthy topic upon which to report why does *America* single out Israel? Do the editors of *America* think, for example, that the Arab Muslim nations which surround Israel do a fine job of teaching about Catholicism? How does India fare on this point? Pakistan? Iran?

Apparently it is only Israel’s failure to teach Christianity in Jewish Israeli schools that merits scrutiny in the pages of *America*. By singling out Israel -- as if it were the only non-Christian majority country where Christianity is not well taught in the schools -- the negative inference about Israel is made clear.

Allowing Defamatory Accusations to Stand

In “Arab Christians Assess Election Results” (Signs of the Times, March 2, 2009), *America’s* omissions again cast Israel in an overly negative light. Noting that the party of Avigdor Lieberman had won 15 seats in the Knesset on a nationalist platform, *America* quoted retired Arab/Israeli journalist Atallah Mansour saying “We now have a fascist party in the Knesset and none of the large parties have spoken out against them ...”

The article contains another quote by an Arab/Israeli named Wadie Abunasser who says “I don’t see any difference between Hamas and Lieberman.”

It was a serious omission for *America* to let stand both of these statements without correcting them or putting them into any mitigating context. While there are very legitimate concerns about (now) Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman,²⁴ there is no rational basis upon which one could compare him to Hamas, nor is there a sound basis upon which to call his party fascist. Mr. Lieberman has espoused very right-wing views, but he is not a terrorist, does not support the targeting of civilians in warfare, does not call for the destruction of any Arab nation, and in fact has supported the creation of a Palestinian state. By not making any of these points, *America* simply let stand the claim that Lieberman is indeed just like Hamas.

Moreover, at the time this issue of *America* was published, mainstream parties and politicians had indeed spoken out in droves against Mr. Lieberman. In addition to Labor Party condemnation (Education Minister Yuli Tamir called Lieberman’s positions “immoral”), senior members of Likud and Kadima had condemned him. When (then) MK Lieberman discussed his proposal to make Arab towns in Israel part of the Palestinian Authority, (then) Prime Minister Olmert immediately distanced himself, saying Israeli Arabs were integral to Israeli society. Former Likud leader Ariel Sharon had also condemned Lieberman’s policies saying “We regard [the Israeli Arabs] as part of the State of

²⁴ FM Lieberman is a Soviet-born Israeli politician and Member of the Knesset as well as the current Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel. He is the founder and leader of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, whose electoral base consists largely of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. A highly polarizing figure within Israeli politics, Lieberman had previously called to redraw the border between Israel and the West Bank so that Israel would include large Jewish settlement blocs and the Palestinian state would include large Arab-Israeli population centers.

Israel." On 4 June 2004, (then) Prime Minister Sharon dismissed Lieberman from the cabinet. Following the 2009 elections, Nachman Shai, one of Kadima's senior members, stated "we disagree with [Lieberman] on Israeli Arabs."

The Yisrael Beitenu Party has extreme views which are openly opposed by most Israelis. But it is not truthful to call it fascist.²⁵ Also, surely the editors of *America* know that mainstream Israeli politicians have over time repeatedly condemned Lieberman's extreme policies. So the question remains -- why didn't *America's* editors make these things clear in the article?

Mr. Lieberman's proposal for drawing the border between Israel and a future Palestinian state and his belief that Israel's citizens should sign a loyalty oath or lose their right to vote are offensive and unacceptable to the majority of Israelis. But *America* fails to place them in the context of the increasingly hostile attitude towards the Jewish state that has been articulated by some Arab/Israelis and many Arab members of the Knesset since the Second Intifada in 2000 and Israel's war with Lebanon in 2006.

For example, after the 2006 war Azmi Bishara, an Arab member of the Knesset and the chairman of the Israeli Arab Balad party proclaimed his support for Hezbollah. Hezbollah's resistance "lifted the spirit of the Arab people," Bishara stated.²⁶ Between December 2006 and May 2007, Israeli Arab organizations published four manifestos in which they portrayed Zionism as a "colonial-settler project in Palestine" and demanded that Israel shed its identity as a Jewish state. This sort of extremism came to a climax during Israel's Operation Cast Lead in early 2009 when "Death to the Jews" chants were heard in some Arab/Israeli villages. Such events are obviously shocking and frightening to Jewish Israelis.

America, however, omits this information which is highly relevant if not crucial to understanding attitudes like Avigdor Lieberman's. It chooses instead to allow its readers to think that proposals aimed at decreasing Israel's Arab population, which are indeed abhorrent, arose out of nowhere beyond an alleged racist impulse in Israeli hearts and minds.

²⁵ Fascism is a totalitarian philosophy of government that glorifies the state and nation and assigns to the state control over every aspect of national life. Fascism rejects ideas such as freedom and individual rights, and opposes free elections, legislatures, and other elements of democracy.

²⁶ *Jerusalem Post*, September 15, 2006.

Relations between Jewish Israelis and Israel's Arab citizens have been marked over the years with varying, but always some, level of strain. The lines were drawn before 1948 when both populations were fighting for control over the same land which they both saw as their birthright. It is probably the case that most Arab/Israelis that stayed in Israel after the 48/49 war did so more for lack of viable options than out of a desire to live in the Jewish state. But while they still endure a second-class social status in Israel, a 2008 study conducted by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government found that a full 77 percent of Israeli Arabs would rather live in Israel than in any other country in the world.

The study also found that 73 percent of Jewish Israelis want Israel to be a society in which Arabs and Jews have mutual respect and equal opportunities and that 68 percent of Jewish citizens support teaching conversational Arabic in Jewish schools to help bring Arab and Jewish citizens together. The data also showed that more than two-thirds of Israeli Jews (69 per cent) said they believed that contributing to co-existence between Jewish and Arab Israelis was a personal responsibility.²⁷

But rather than report these very positive and hope-filled findings, *America* seems to prefer fanning the flames of hostility between Israeli Arabs and Jews. Any responsible Christian media outlet should be in the business of fostering peace between Jewish and Arab Israelis. *America*, however, through omission of facts and selective reporting of attitudes,

"foster[s] hostility and conflict, . . . and creat[es] a mentality of 'us' against 'them'" while it "sets one group against another. . ." in violation of ethical obligations cited by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. (*Ethics in Communications* III(13), IV(22))

²⁷ "Coexistence in Israel: A National Study" was conducted in Hebrew and Arabic with the assistance of University of Haifa researchers, and was funded by the Alan B. Slifka Foundation. Lead researcher Associate Professor Todd L. Pittinsky noted that "[e]very day, innovative experiments in coexistence are going on. People on the ground in Israel are running community centers that enable cultural exchanges; in bilingual schools like the Hand in Hand network of schools -- young Jewish and Arab children become culturally conversant with each other. These deserve as much attention as rockets and roadblocks." "This report supports what we have long suspected. Unity among Israel's Jewish and Arab communities is not only attainable, but there is great public support for it," philanthropist Slifka added.

Misrepresentations

Articles about the Jewish state in *America* also contain misrepresentations which invariably highlight and exaggerate Israeli wrongdoing while at the same time downplaying Palestinian violence.

Misrepresenting the Fundamental Aspects of the Conflict

Israeli actions, the threats Israel faces and the face of Palestinian terrorism all seem to be routinely misrepresented in the pages of *America Magazine*.

In "When Silence is Betrayal" (October 12, 2009), Fr. Donald J. Moore, S.J. complains that Israel has "demonized [Hamas] so effectively that economic sanctions are imposed . . ." And in an absurd circumvention of reality, Fr. Moore reproaches Israel for its "public relations programs [that] have successfully conveyed the notion that Palestinians, especially Hamas, are terrorists who reject coexistence with Israel, whose nationalism is a form of anti-Semitism and whose Islamic faith is incompatible with democracy."

Fr. Moore appears to be trying to neutralize the image of a terror group by using the rhetorical technique of intertwining Hamas with ordinary Palestinians. He is quite right when he says that "most Palestinians are people with normal aspirations, no better and no worse than other national groups, who want to live in freedom and dignity in a land they can call their own."

But he is dead wrong when he tries to misrepresent Hamas as just another innocent face of this "normal" Palestinian nationalism.

Hamas is indeed a terrorist organization which has openly and repeatedly expressed not a desire for a two-state solution, but a total rejection of the right of Israel to exist at all. Hamas has launched wars against Israel while deeply embedded within the civilian population of Gaza. Its callous use of Palestinian civilians and civilian infrastructure for military purposes is well documented. In the Palestinian Authority daily, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* (Jan. 27, 2009), for example, members of a Gaza family reported that they were helpless to stop Hamas from using them as human shields during Operation Cast Lead:

The Abd Rabbo family kept quiet while Hamas fighters turned their farm in the Gaza strip into a fortress. Right now they are waiting for the aid promised by the [Hamas] movement after Israel bombed the farm and turned it into ruins . . . The hill on which the Abd Rabbo family lives overlooks the Israeli town of Sderot which turned it into an ideal military position for the

Palestinian fighters, from which they have launched hundreds of rockets into southern Israel during the last few years. Several of the Abd Rabbo family members described how the fighters dug tunnels under their houses, stored arms in the fields and launched rockets from the yard of their farm during the nights.²⁸

There is solid video and other evidence demonstrating that Hamas fired its rockets from homes and schools and used mosques to store explosives. Gaza residents are on record explicitly stating that Hamas fighters shot at Israeli forces from their houses after forcibly preventing them from leaving.

Newsweek magazine described one instance of Hamas' military use of civilian housing:

Suddenly there was a terrific whoosh, louder even than a bomb explosion. It was another of Hamas' homemade Qassam rockets being launched into Israel - and the mobile launchpad was smack in the middle of the four [apartment] buildings, where every apartment was full. ("Hamas and its Discontents," *Newsweek*, January 20, 2009).

Hamas' fighters wore civilian clothing, hid in hospital facilities and used ambulances for military purposes. According to *Newsweek*, Palestinian gunmen admitted using the al-Quds hospital for firing at Israel:

One of the most notorious incidents during the war was the Jan. 15 shelling of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society buildings in the downtown Tal-al Hawa part of Gaza City, followed by a shell hitting their Al Quds Hospital next door; the subsequent fire forced all 500 patients to be evacuated . . . In the Tal-al Hawa neighborhood nearby, however, Talal Safadi, an official in the leftist Palestinian People's Party, said that resistance fighters were firing from positions all around the hospital. He shrugged that off, having a bigger beef with Hamas. They failed to win the battle. ("Hamas and its Discontents," *Newsweek*, January 20, 2009)

A report from *Corriere della Sera* confirmed that the grounds, ambulances and uniforms of the al-Quds hospital had been hijacked by terrorists:

Magah al Rachmah, aged 25, residing a few dozen meters from the four large buildings of the now seriously damaged health

²⁸ Translation by Palestinian Media Watch.

complex, says about this fact: “The men of Hamas took refuge mainly in the building that houses the administrative offices of Al Quds. They used the ambulances and forced ambulance drivers and nurses to take off their uniforms with the paramedic symbols, so they could blend in better and elude Israeli snipers.”
(*Corriere della Sera*, January 21, 2009)

Yet, it is only the “brutality of Israel’s military” that concerns Fr. Moore. Ignoring the fact that the Israeli government “knocked on roofs,” made cell phone calls, sent text messages and fliers into areas before they were attacked to warn civilians and give them time to leave the area, he scoffs at the notion that Israel tried to minimize civilian casualties. Yet, the media is rife with indications that this was in fact the case. For example, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported an extensive interview in January 2009 with Muhammad Shriteh, a Palestinian ambulance driver who evacuated wounded Gazans from the battle zones. Mr. Shriteh stated that during most of the Gaza Operation he would:

coordinate with the Israelis before we pick up patients . . .so they would not shoot at us.

The more immediate threat was from Hamas, Mr. Shriteh indicated, because they:

would lure the ambulances into the heart of a battle to transport fighters to safety. (“Hamas tried to hijack ambulances during Gaza war” *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 26, 2009)

In addition to embedding itself within the civilian population, thereby virtually ensuring massive civilian deaths during war with Israel, there is credible evidence about Hamas murdering Palestinian civilians during the war. In a 26-page report issued in April, 2009, “Under Cover of War: Hamas Political Violence in Gaza,” Human Rights Watch documented Hamas’ pattern during the war of arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, maimings by shooting, and extrajudicial executions of Palestinians by alleged members of Hamas security forces. “During Israel’s attack on Gaza, Hamas moved violently against its political opponents and those deemed collaborators with Israeli forces,” said Joe Stork, deputy director of Human Rights Watch’s Middle East and North Africa division. “The unlawful arrests, torture, and killings in detention continued even after the fighting stopped, mocking Hamas’ claims to uphold the law.”

But despite Hamas’ record, Fr. Moore appears intent on neutralizing this brutal regime in Gaza. Since its creation in 1987 by the Palestinian wing of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas has been sponsoring suicide bombers and

launching rockets into Israel, killing and wounding thousands of Israelis. When Hamas deploys Qassam rockets over the border at civilian areas it puts into action the stated aim of the Hamas Charter of 1988:

Israel will rise and will remain erect until Islam eliminates it as it had eliminated its predecessors.

Hamas officials have repeatedly stated they will never recognize Israel. On May 4, 2009 the *New York Times* reported, for example, that “[Hamas leader Khaled Meshal,] repeated that he would not recognize Israel, saying to fellow Arab leaders, ‘ There is only one enemy in the region, and that is Israel.’”

And yet, Fr. Moore would have us believe that Hamas is some sort of benign governing power the Israelis have unjustly chosen to vilify with their cunning public relations “spin.” According to Moore, this Israeli “spin” includes “messages handed out to the media . . . that Hamas broke the cease-fire agreements.” Yet, it is well documented that this is precisely the case.

On June 17, 2008, after several months of indirect contacts between Israel and Hamas through Egyptian mediators, Egypt and Hamas announced that a cease-fire had been reached in the Gaza Strip. On December 19, 2008, after using the cease-fire to stockpile arms, Hamas unilaterally terminated the cease-fire and resumed firing Qassam rockets -- up to 100 per day -- at Israeli civilians.²⁹ According to Al Jazeera, on December 19, 2008:

Palestinian group Hamas has declared that the six-month ceasefire between Israel and the Gaza Strip is over. The ceasefire officially ended at daybreak in Gaza on Friday and came after armed Palestinian groups admitted that they had been using the truce to train and better arm themselves.³⁰

²⁹ According to the *New York Times* “Palestinian militants in Gaza fired barrages of rockets at Israel for a second day on [December 18, 2008], escalating tensions before a six-month truce is due to expire on Friday. One rocket landed in the parking lot of a busy shopping center in Sderot, an Israeli town near the Gaza border, wounding two civilians. At least 13 more rockets landed in open areas, according to the Israeli police, and the air force destroyed an armed rocket launcher in northern Gaza.” (*New York Times*, December 18, 2008).

³⁰ english.aljazeera.net December 19, 2008.

In a news conference from Cairo aired on Palestinian Authority TV in December, 2008, PA President Mahmoud Abbas described how he repeatedly made contact with Hamas and implored them not to break the ceasefire. President Abbas lamented that the violence in the Gaza Strip could have been avoided had Hamas not broken the ceasefire.³¹

Yet, Fr. Moore claims that Israeli assertions that it was Hamas that broke the cease-fire are mere "spin." This sort of misrepresentation should be deemed unacceptable in a Catholic journal.

In his review of the book *Faithful Witness* (May 18, 2009) Ed Gaffney states that Archbishop Michel Sabbah "provides reliable testimony about events in the Middle East for the past two decades." Yet, Mr. Gaffney says that the former Patriarch "identifies the root cause of the violence" when he states "'If we want to stop the violence and terrorism, we have to put an end to military occupation.'" A complete review of recent Israeli/Palestinian history informs us that this is simply not the case. The Second Intifada started on September 29, 2000, just weeks after Yasser Arafat -- not the Israelis -- walked out of Camp David, turning down both Israeli and U.S. proposals for a two-state solution. These proposals were not ideal, and no one expected the Palestinians to accept them without further negotiation. But Arafat refused to negotiate. He made no counteroffers, just walked out of the summit. And soon after, the violence and terrorism rose to unprecedented levels never before seen in Israel.

At the end of December 2000, President Clinton made a final proposal in Washington, D.C. known as the "Clinton Parameters." It was offered expressly as a last deal -- with no more negotiations within the Parameters allowed on either side. The Palestinians would get all of Gaza, about 97% of contiguous West Bank territory, East Jerusalem for their capital, three out of four quarters in the Old City, sovereignty over the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa mosques and a 30 billion dollar fund. Prime Minister Barak accepted and obtained the necessary authority from his cabinet. It was Yasser Arafat who said no.³² So there was no peace agreement and instead the Second Intifada raged on. But Mr. Gaffney's review mentions none of this. He merely states that the peace negotiations at Camp David and the Clinton Parameters "failed," as if neither party was more or less to blame. This misrepresents the critical events of that time and misrepresents the relative culpability in the failed negotiations. The fact is, Israel was willing to end the occupation and contrary to Michel Sabbah's "reliable testimony" it did not bring peace and it did not bring security.

³¹ Video and translation available at pmw.org.il

³² See Bill Clinton, *My Life* (Vintage Books 2004) at pp. 936-938.

The misrepresentation of Israel in the pages of *America* continues with its coverage of the specific problems with Gaza. Any objective and realistic assessment of Israeli action in Gaza must start with an acknowledgment that Hamas is not a resistance movement intent on ending an occupation, but a terrorist and anti-Semitic³³ organization openly dedicated to Israel's destruction. Sadly, the pages of *America* magazine do not acknowledge this reality. Instead, *America* has gone so far as to state that "Resistance - and with it Hamas - will wither only when Israel is ready to make a peace that relinquishes the upper hand over Palestinian life." (*Current Comment*, "After Gaza," Jan. 19-26, 2009). *America* further insists in this *Comment* that in negotiations with Hamas, it is Israel that "holds most of the cards and therefore must make most of the concessions." This is either a hopelessly naive assessment, or perhaps an attempt to unjustly tag Israel as the sole cause of violence in the region -- even vis-a-vis an enemy that for years has been targeting Israeli civilians in rocket and suicide attacks, and calls in its charter for the destruction of the Jewish state and replacing it with an Islamic state on the lands of Palestine.

We have to seriously question a Catholic publication which claims Israel "holds most of the cards" while it is confronted with the impossible situation of the long-term violent struggle to which Hamas has committed itself in defiance of Israel's very right to exist as a nation on any part of the territory in the region. Similarly, in "Gaza's Children" (Sept. 22, 2008) Fr. Donald Moore, S.J. appears to twist facts to justify pointing the moral finger of blame at the Jewish state. The order of events is reversed in what Fr. Moore calls the "cycle of bloodshed," with the deaths of four Gazans in April, 2008 reported first and only a later mention of the fact that Hamas had fired rockets into civilian towns in Israel for "revenge." With an apparent sleight of hand that has no place in Christian journalism, the article implies that Israel was the aggressor in this conflict. Fr. Moore continues this approach, stating that Hamas launches its rockets into Israel "in response" to

³³ Hamas is anti-Semitic to the point of Holocaust denial. In a statement distributed on September 1, 2009, after a meeting among elected leaders of the radical Islamist group and the head of the Hamas-run Education Ministry in Gaza, Jamila al-Shanti, the most senior Hamas woman in the Palestinian Legislative Council, said "Talk about the holocaust and the execution of the Jews contradicts and is against our culture, our principles, our traditions, values, heritage and religion." Hamas spiritual leader Yunis al-Astal said teaching children about the murder of 6 million Jews during World War II would be "marketing a lie." He characterized the possible introduction of the subject into Gaza schools as a "war crime." (*The Washington Post*, September 2, 2009).

Israel's "powerful military" attacks, when in fact a review of the historical record reveals that Israeli military action in the Gaza Strip followed Palestinian attacks.

While people of good will have and will continue to question whether Israel has sometimes employed more forceful military responses than necessary, there is no justification for the distortion of facts which makes it impossible for the reader to assess the relative responsibility of the warring parties for the violence in the region.

Misrepresenting Israel's Security Barrier

In "Bethlehem's Wall" (Sept. 1, 2008) Austen Ivereigh misrepresents another aspect of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict -- Israel's security barrier.³⁴ No matter what one thinks of the barrier, and whether or not one believes it should have been constructed, it is a matter of historical fact that Israel built it to stop the suicide bombing that became epidemic after September 2000. Yet, Mr. Ivereigh writes:

The justification for the wall is security, to protect Jerusalem from suicide bombers. But the path it follows makes clear its real purpose: to consolidate the illegal Israeli settlements, which now flow down from Jerusalem almost to the borders of Bethlehem, on land seized from the town's Christian farmers.

Criticism of Israel's settlement policy is justified. And there can be a legitimate debate about whether the route of the barrier has always taken sufficient account of Palestinian humanitarian concerns.³⁵ But an objective review of the history of

³⁴ Although frequently depicted in the media as a wall, the barrier is for approximately 95% of its length a fence. The fence forms a strip approximately the width of a four-lane highway. At its center is the chain-link fence that supports an intrusion detection system. This technologically advanced system is designed to warn against infiltrations, as are the dirt "tracking" path and other observation tools. Only a small fraction of the barrier (about 5%) is actually a 30 foot high concrete wall, built in specific locations where it was necessary to prevent sniper fire into Israeli neighborhoods, on major highways and roads, or where the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the fence took up too much width and caused unacceptable incursion into Palestinian territory.

³⁵ Palestinians impacted by the barrier have access to Israel's Supreme Court. A series of rulings in which the Court found that the barrier had in some cases isolated families and sealed off villages from farmland to a degree

the security barrier makes plain that “consolidat[ing]” these settlements was not Israel’s motivation behind putting the barrier up.

On September 29, 2000, shortly after Yasser Arafat walked out of peace negotiations at Camp David, the Palestinians embarked on a terror campaign of shooting into Israeli neighborhoods and sending suicide bombers into Israel, targeting crowded civilian areas. Israel was forced to respond with widespread efforts by civilians, police and military personnel to adopt patterns and practices that would protect the population from wanton acts of murderous destruction.

There was very little Israeli military response to the Palestinian terror attacks until March 2002 when there were forty-seven suicide attacks in one month including a massacre at a Passover Seder in Netanya which left 30 dead and over 170 wounded. That is when Israel began serious military incursions, set up an extensive system of roadblocks and checkpoints, and eventually (June 2002) started construction of the security barrier (almost two years after the suicide bombing began). The security barrier virtually eliminated suicide bombing emanating from the West Bank.

Israel’s security barrier and the checkpoint system cause severe hardship and inconvenience for many Palestinians on the West Bank. 120,000 Palestinian workers that used to cross into Israel for their jobs have been cut off from employment. In some cases it may limit access to worship. Palestinians can’t get to Israeli hospitals, the barrier breaks up some families who are split between the West Bank and East Jerusalem, houses were demolished to build the barrier on both sides (Israeli and Palestinian). And while the barrier has 124 gates, so people can, for example, get through to their orchards and farms, Palestinians may have to wait hours for an Israeli soldier to come and let them through.

But hundreds of people were killed in the suicide bombings of the Second Intifada and thousands terribly maimed. Yet, Mr. Ivereigh has no problem brushing off Israel’s need to stop the barbarous attacks on its citizens as mere pretext for building the barrier.³⁶

that security concerns did not warrant, have forced the IDF to change the route and move parts of it closer to the 1967 “Green Line.”

³⁶ Further demonstrating the fact the “consolidat[ion]” of the settlements is not the motivation for the barrier is the fact that most of the 40% of the planned security barrier which Israel has not yet built is that part which would surround the Israeli settlements on the West Bank.

Use of Holocaust Imagery in the Service of Misrepresenting Israel

Misrepresenting facts is one thing, but attempting to misrepresent an entire people is an even more serious matter. This is especially so when the misrepresentation involves the exploitation of the most tragic event in that people's history. Thus, perhaps the most disturbing example of misrepresentation we found in the pages of *America* was the portrayal of Israel as a nation : (i) so psychically scarred by the trauma of the Holocaust that it is indelibly prone to paranoia , racism and victimizing non-Jews; and (ii) with strong parallels to Nazi Germany.

Fr. Donald Moore reviews Avraham Burg's controversial and disturbing book *The Holocaust is Over, We Must Rise From Its Ashes* in a wholly uncritical manner. ("The Whole World is Against Us" June 22-29, 2009). He thus essentially adopts the author's unsavory thesis that as a result of the Holocaust and their subsequent "monopolizing" of that experience, Jews and Israelis have collectively entered into a "state of hysteria" which has resulted in their "isolation from the world," indiscriminate branding of their Arab opponents as Nazis, and taking on the same characteristics of Germans which led to the Holocaust.

Fr. Moore begins his book review noting that Mr. Burg "traces the wavering of the Zionist ideal to the 1960s, beginning with the trial of Adolf Eichmann" Moore then discusses in some detail what he says was Israel's failure to recognize "the Shoah as a crime against all of humanity." Moore laments the fact that Israel neglected to see the Holocaust's "horrors in a more meaningful universal light" preferring instead to make "it a source of its isolation from the world."

It is difficult to comprehend, and impossible for us to justify, the extreme moral arrogance, not to mention lack of sensitivity and civility, that might lead an American Catholic priest to feel free to adjudge that Jews do not view the period in time when six million of their people were deliberately murdered in a sufficiently "meaningful light."

Moreover, this is a misrepresentation of the historical facts and experiences of the Jewish people during World war II.

The Holocaust, in all its immense gravity, stands clearly as a uniquely Jewish experience. The Jews were singularly targeted for extermination by the Nazis and indeed in a matter of several years one-third of the population of world Jewry was extinguished. Of course many non-Jews were killed as well; the Nazis were ruthless and cruel to many. But the Holocaust was not unique because of its horrible cruelty -- it was unique because it was a formal and systematic attempt at the genocide of one people -- the Jews. The Holocaust is a uniquely Jewish tragedy. To not only deny this but to accuse Jews of causing their own "isolation from the world" in recognizing this fact is a distortion of history in a manner that is shockingly self-righteous, sanctimonious and cruel all at the same time.

Fr. Moore is concerned that "Monopolizing the Shoah has led to a state of hysteria, leading Israel to brand its opponents with the Nazi swastika." Ironically, however, in his uncritical echoing of Avraham Burg, it is Moore who hastens to "brand [Israelis] with the Nazi swastika." First, Fr. Moore notes that Burg fears that just like the Germans in the pre-Holocaust years "did not take Hitler and his provocations seriously Israelis are also turning a blind eye to what is happening in their midst." The fact that some Israelis, who while living in a region that has been relentlessly hostile to them and while locked in a seemingly interminable battle with the surrounding Arab nations and the Palestinians, may have attitudes towards Arabs that we might all find objectionable, does not make the Jewish state comparable to Nazi Germany. And to even suggest this, much less state it as a virtual fact, is not only the grossest form of misrepresentation, but perhaps a new low in *America's* Israel-bashing. Is there any country where prejudice against minorities cannot be found in some members of the majority population? Are there any people who as a group would not harbor some negative feelings towards people with whom they had been locked in armed battle for years?

Fr. Moore complains that "From the Palestinian Liberation Organization to Hamas to Iran, every threat to Israel is perceived as a threat to its existence," thus misrepresenting both the nature of the very real threats Israel is indeed surrounded by and its response to them. The wars that were waged by virtually everyone of its neighbors were waged against Israel with the express intention of wiping the Jewish state off the map. Currently both Hamas and Hezbollah are openly sworn to Israel's destruction. Leaders of soon-to-be nuclear Iran have referred to Israel as a "rotting corpse" and have called for its annihilation. These are indeed threats to Israel's existence. Fr. Moore fails to mention the many instances where Israel exhibited restraint -- tolerating years of attacks on Israeli farms and villages from the Golan Heights for example, finally responding with a retaliatory strike on April 7, 1967, and more recently tolerating eight years of non-stop Qassam attacks before initiating the Gaza war. By downplaying the

very real, and yes existential, threats Israel faces, Fr. Moore trivializes the ongoing, critical security threats Israel faces, while simultaneously belittling Israeli attempts to balance security measures with humanitarian concerns.

The editorial decision to publish such an uncritical review of *The Holocaust is Over, We Must Rise From Its Ashes* is sadly reflective of *America's* willingness to use even the Holocaust to cast doubt on the fundamental morality of the Jewish nation. As a matter of civility, no one should use a people's single most tragic historical episode as a weapon against them. *America's* use of the Holocaust as a weapon in its arsenal against Israel, raises questions about a possible deep-seated animosity towards the Jewish state.

America's editors also chose to publish this same sort of invidious comparison between Israelis and Nazis in an article by (Jewish) author Mimi Schwartz. In "One Rescue Revisited" (November 10, 2008) Schwartz tells the story of a Torah which was salvaged by a German policeman after the intentional torching of a synagogue in a small German village in 1938. Then in her concluding paragraph, Ms. Schwartz likens the fires that burned on Kristallnacht³⁷ to the "ongoing fires of hate" in Gaza.

This story, coupled with the call to examine the suffering caused by the fighting between Israel and Hamas, would be justifiable and even morally compelling if published in a Jewish magazine. Being self-critical is commendable and generally indicative of a high moral standard. But we have to question the judgment and motives of a Jesuit magazine emphasizing this off-base comparison. It would be one thing if *America* was otherwise sympathetic or even marginally fair to Israel and had approached the Israeli/Palestinian conflict with sensitivity, moral honesty and an even hand. But *America* has taken an approach to the conflict which invariably and without exception seeks to condemn Israel and cast it in a harsh and negative light. With its record of routinely demonizing the Jewish state, we question *America's* venture into this sort of Holocaust exploitation.³⁸

³⁷ Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass was an anti-Jewish pogrom in Nazi Germany and Austria in November 1938. In a coordinated attack, 91 Jews were murdered and 25,000 to 30,000 were arrested and deported to concentration camps. 110 synagogues were destroyed and thousands of homes and businesses were ransacked.

³⁸ It is noteworthy that *America* uses Jewish voices in both instances of "holocaust exploitation," perhaps in an effort to shield itself from the very

Misrepresentations About Religious Freedom in Israel

Despite the fact that Israel has one of the best records (if not the best) with regard to religious freedom in the Middle East, in a feature about Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the holy land, *America's* editor Fr. Drew Christiansen, S.J. chose to highlight what he referred to as "A host of restrictive policies . . ." which he claimed were making life for "native Christians in the land of Israel dim indeed." ("Of Many Things," May 11, 2009). Fr. Christiansen fails to delineate what these "restrictive policies" are however -- in fact, he does not cite a single one.

Oddly, in this same feature, *America* extols Jordan as "a model for the future presence of Christians in the Middle East." The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a constitutional monarchy. According to the 2008 U.S. Department of State Human Rights Report, the Jordanian "constitution provides for freedom to practice the rites of one's religion, provided that religious practices are consistent with 'public order and morality'; however, the constitution also restricts freedom of religion in stipulating that Islamic law, which forbids the conversion of Muslims to another religion, governs Muslim citizens' personal status. **The government also continued to impose some restrictions on religious freedom in practice.**" (emphasis added).

The Israeli record on religious freedom is, according to the State Department, a more positive one: "The [Israeli] law provides for freedom of worship, and the government generally respected this right in practice. The Basic Law and Declaration of Independence recognize the country as a 'Jewish and democratic state,' while also providing for full social and political equality, regardless of religious affiliation."

The State Department reported that in Jordan, "The state religion is Islam, which effectively restricted others' rights, especially in terms of family law. . . Christian religious leaders stated that the MOI³⁹ also conducts background investigations of church leaders."

sort of criticism we are leveling here. But this use of Jewish voices in no way redeems *America* -- in fact it compounds the extent of the exploitation.

³⁹ Ministry of Interior.

Israel, on the other hand, while recognizing only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil status matters concerning *Jewish* persons, “confers recognition on some religious communities, granting them authority over their members in personal status matters [including] Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), Gregorian-Armenian, Armenian-Catholic, Syrian (Catholic), Chaldean (Uniate), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, Orthodox Jewish (both Ashkenazic and Sephardic rites), Druze, the Evangelical Episcopal Church, and the Baha’i. . . .[Even] Unrecognized communities generally practiced their religion freely and maintained communal institutions but were ineligible to receive government funding for religious services.”

According to the State Department, there are many restrictions which impact the daily lives of Christians in Jordan. Christians can convert to Islam, but Muslims are not allowed convert to Christianity. Christian leaders have reported that the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate regularly calls them in for questioning regarding their congregation’s membership, proselytizing of Muslims, and distribution of Christian literature. Some Christian churchgoers have reported the presence of security police at the church door requesting to see identity cards. Christian students in private and public schools have to learn verses from the Koran and Islamic poetry in Arabic and social studies classes.

Yet, in the pages of *America*, Jordan is heralded as the “model for the future presence of Christians in the Middle East,” while Israel is lambasted for its purported “restrictive policies.” While Jordan may have a better record than other non-democratic Muslim nations in the Middle East, painting an overly rosy picture of religious freedom in Jordan, while at the same time only complaining of Israel’s alleged “restrictive policies” for Christians, does not present the reality in the region. It does, on the other hand, serve the pattern we see in *America*, which is to take every opportunity to make Israel look like an oppressive nation, even if that requires misrepresenting Israeli policies and practice.

Conclusion

While one might wonder what *America’s* motivation is in the repeated use of omissions and misrepresentations that foster hostility and demonize Israel, we prefer to employ a more productive approach and call upon *America* to begin to adopt a fair standard when writing about the Jewish state.

Don’t get us wrong -- we know that Israeli society is far from perfect. Israel can be fairly criticized for a host of reasons -- second class treatment of its Arab

citizens (even though they have equal rights under the law) and at times oppressive treatment of the Palestinians in the territories.

But what we read in the pages of *America* is not fair criticism. Rather, due to pervasive instances of omissions and misrepresentations that invariably cast Israel as a ruthless, racist, unjust oppressor, *America* fails to meet its obligation to truthful reporting and has “foster[ed] hostility and conflict [and] demoniz[ed]” the Jewish state in contradiction to common standards in journalism and the directives of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.