Operation ‘Summer Rain’ – A Critical Analysis of Israeli ‘State Terrorism’

An assessment based on Guardian Article ‘Palestinian children pay price of Israel's Summer Rain offensive’ of 7/9/2006 (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/sep/07/israel)

Summary of Article (500 words max)

Operation ‘Summer Rain’ was an Israeli artillery and air strike in the Gaza strip, with primary mission objectives (according to the IDF) of rescuing a captured Israeli Defence Force (IDF) soldier by the name of Galid Shalit. Palestinians and international monitoring teams however purport that this was a cover story for the crippling of communications between insurgent forces in Gaza; a mission achieved by the destruction of a power plant and three bridges so as to hinder communications in the Southern sector of the region. Quoted secondary objectives for the mission also include scouting out Palestinian ‘smuggling tunnels’; a key lifeline for the ‘resistance dissident’ forces within Gaza during the on-going blockade.

The Guardian Newspaper, based in London UK, is a popular broadsheet newspaper with strong coverage of international events. It is regularly accused of bias in its coverage of the Israel-Palestine Conflict, siding very strongly with the Palestinians in most cases. The article in question featured in the 7th of September 2006 edition of the paper paints (arguably) a highly derogatory image of the Israeli Operation Summer Rain, and Israeli State ‘terrorism’ as an entity.

The tone of the article is firmly in favour of the Palestinian people, to the extent that some organisations have directly accused the Guardian of inaccuracy in its details, specifically in its quotation of Palestinian casualty numbers as issued by the ‘Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR). In the article it is stated for example that 197 of the dead ‘were civilians’, however this cannot be confirmed and the use of the word ‘civilians’ implies indiscriminate killing by the IDF (the PCHR in fact used the words ‘resistance
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fighters’). Furthermore the focus on ‘child casualties’, providing a 1st person specific story of one of the young causes an immediate (and somewhat irrational) bias towards the Palestinians without even reading the article – other images would evoke less emotional reaction.

The description of events is also marred by a lack of coverage of both sides; the IDF losses are not reported at any point, and when an ‘Israeli military spokesman’ is quoted, it has become clear (having assessed the original transcript) that his quotation has been used so as to portray that civilian deaths are ‘acceptable’; “It can happen that innocent people are hit…but the responsibility does not lie with the Israeli Army”. Little focus in the article is given to the issue of the launching of ‘Qassam’ rockets from civilian areas as has widely been condemned and is ‘illegal’. Furthermore little coverage is given at any point to the destruction of Israeli targets by these Qassam rockets which has been extensive. The coverage of the event itself is also very limited, focussing solely on this specific event against ‘children’ without giving due coverage to the elongated “Low Intensity Conflict (LIC)*” [Inbar:2006:p823] and the continued destruction caused on both sides.

This essay therefore concludes that the report is inadequate due to its inaccurate quotations of casualty figures and lack of context of the nature of the incident.
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Critical Analysis of Operation Summer Rain

The Israel-Palestine conflict is a topic which sparks some of the most highly emotive debate witnessed in recent history, with an enormous death toll including many civilians and some of the most inhumane and cruel actions being committed by both the Palestinian militants and the Israeli Defence Force (forthwith referred to as the IDF). The protracted nature of the battle has resulted in coverage waning over the years, however key battles and incidents gain the coverage of the world media, and Operation Summer Rain was one of these incidents.

Operation Summer rain was an IDF operation which was a culmination of the on-going conventional war in the Gaza strip in 2006, and was the first major ground offensive by Israel in the wake of Israel’s ‘Unilateral Disengagement Plan’ of August and September 2005. In essence the lines of disagreement are drawn along a ‘state’ actor in the form of Israel combating a dissident or ‘non state actor’ in the form of the Palestinian combatants. In this situation the violent act was in the form of an IDF attack on the Gaza strip with the aim of the release of a captured soldier; the operation in fact appears to have had a far greater mandate due to the pre arranged nature of the attacks on key communications, power generation and transport links as previously outlined (many have pointed to the fact that it was unnecessary to destroy the bridges for example and in fact the operation was simply a ‘cover story’ for the reoccupation of areas of the Gaza Strip). In the case of Israel, Gus Martin’s model of rational terrorism can be applied (however it is highly controversial) through his suggestion that “Rational terrorists… [use a] cultural determinant of terrorism is the perception of ‘outsiders’ and anticipation of their threat to ethnic groups survival”[Martin: 2006:p77]; The Israelis see their right to the land the fight over as absolute either due to ‘legal’ state boundaries or for many through a ‘divine’ right instilled upon their people by God.

It is however important to acknowledge that there is a counter argument; the Israeli government and its supporters are ardent it their belief that Israel is a sovereign state defending itself against a non-state actor engaging in terrorist
acts against it, and thus its actions are purely defensive in nature. A typical and on-going example of this is seen in the Guardian article, which addresses the use of the homemade ‘Qassam’ rocket launchers by Palestinian insurgent forces which have resulted in appalling scenes of death and destruction in Israel for many years. The Palestinians have a similar claim to land rights, often seated in a religious and ancient claim to the area, again often using the ‘divine right’ argument. This provides a very real and dangerous complication – both parties in this battle have an absolute belief in their right to the same ‘tangible piece of land’, however they are arguing over ownership based upon ‘intangible rights’ of ownership. Gus Martin summarises this concept eloquently as moral convictions of terrorists on both sides; “Moral conviction refers to terrorists' unambiguous certainty of the righteousness of their cause; to them, there are no gray (sic) areas”[Martin: 2006:p78].

The defining of an act as terrorist is “…driven by one’s perspective and worldview” [Martin: 2006:p50], and is affected by a multitude of factors. Only a very small percentage of dissident actors will take the title of ‘terrorist’ as an accolade in recent years, indeed “…only the very bold and the very precise are any longer willing to declare their actions…are instances of terrorism” [Lustick, I in Crenshaw: 2007: p.515].

The lack of consensus on definitions is “an accepted reality in the study of political violence”[Martin: 2006:p45]. It is however possible to identify common factors amongst most definitions of terrorism which Martin identifies as ‘The use of illegal force, Subnational Actors, Unconventional Methods, Political Motives, Attacks against ‘soft’ civilian and acts aimed at purposefully affecting an audience’ [Martin: 2006:p47]. When using this definition it is therefore almost impossible to identify Israel, a ‘national actor’, a terrorist group; “…if illegality is used as a criterion [for acts] considered terrorism, analysis would…be slanted against opponents of states…and would help camouflage state terrorism”[Lustick, I in Crenshaw: 2007: p.515]. However there is much debate as to the application of a new definition, identified as ‘state’ terrorism. Lustick writes, “If the…noncombatant status of the specific targets of threats or violence are used…as criteria [to define]…terrorism, this will…cast states in the main terrorist role… because they operate on a larger scale…employ
armies…and kill many more ‘innocents’ than…non-state terrorists”[Lustick, I in Crenshaw: 2007: p.515]. Martin makes a similar claim that terrorism is affected by issues of “extremism or ‘mainstreamism’ “ [Martin: 2006: p51], which in this context suggests that Israel’s policies can in fact be labelled as terrorism, but due to the mainstream nature of this action, are in fact an example of national terrorism based on ideological standpoint (this argument in fact provides some moral backing to the Palestinian insurgency, and the proportionality of their relatively minor response to a far more powerful aggressor). Plaw writes, “In the ongoing war on terror both the American and Israeli governments have resorted to a policy of ‘targeting terrorists’…both governments authorize their military or intelligence services to kill specific ‘terrorists’ who they believe mortally threaten citizens and cannot otherwise be neutralized…the Israelis have killed at least 348, including 120 unintended targets” [Plaw: 2007:p1].

In order to continue this debate, the issue of sovereignty must be addressed; is Israel a sovereign state defending itself against a non-state actor/aggressor or a state terrorist? “…[T]he ICJ (International Court of Justice) stated that Israel could not claim that it was acting in self-defense (sic.) against terrorist attack because Article 51 of the UN Charter does not afford a right of self-defense (sic.) unless a state is defending against aggression by another state”. [Cronin- Furman: 2006: p.435]. Some point to leading political figures within the Israeli government as having prior terrorism links “with Zionism in the late forties…including the killing of Jews as well as Britons and many Arabs…”[Chomsky: 1984:p.164-165]. However is it fair to use this argument against Israel, and did the UNSC fail to take heed of its previous rulings on Article 51 interpretation in the wake of the September 2011 attacks during which “ Security Council resolutions 1368 and 1373 invoke[d] the right of self-defence in calling on the international community to combat terrorism. In neither of these resolutions did the Security Council limit their application to terrorist attacks by state actors only, nor was an assumption to that effect implicit in these resolutions.” [Furman: 2006: p435-6] This argument is also countered by addressing the size and scope of operations of Hamas as the ruling group in the Gaza strip, whose operations take on ‘government-like’
forms, including funding for schools and general support thus suggesting to some that they in fact cannot make use of the Article 51 rulings as an argument due to Hamas in fact making the Gaza Strip a ‘quasi’ state actor.

Using the factors outlined by Gus Martin, it is possible to understand much of the military action of Israel and the IDF as state terrorism. His assessment of ‘state sponsored’ terrorism [Martin: 2006: p116] provides a fitting paradigm for Israeli state violence as case of international and domestic patronage of terrorism by the IDF, coupled with a ‘den[ial]...that what occurred should be labelled as ‘terrorism’’[Martin:2006: p118]. The use of assassinations and warfare are both clear examples as discussed previously, however one of the most interesting examples is the use of torture as a tool of State Terror. Bellamy mentions the ‘No.300 bus affair’ [Bellamy: 2006: p133] in which a bus seized by Palestinian terrorists was ‘recaptured by IDF forces’ in an incident which at the time was said to kill all of those on-board. However later investigation discovered that all terrorists had in fact been removed and tortured to death as a part of the ‘war against terror’ – surely this is an act of state terrorism. Yet again however the argument has two sides; The Landau Commission made two assumptions, “First, it accepted the argument that Israel confronted a continuing emergency caused by Palestinian terrorism”, and second, “...the commission concluded that the acquisition of information was vital to the defence of Israel and noted that such information was difficult to obtain”. [Ballamy: 2006: p.134].

Was the IDF successful in its mission objectives during Operation Summer Rain? “If the essence of terrorism is...to manipulate the behaviour [sic.] of others by scaring them...”, then is every action of State ‘deterrence’ a success? [Lustick, I in Crenshaw: 2007: p.515]. As a result of the operation, terrorist attacks on Israel did decline dramatically; mainly due to the capturing of key Qassam rocket launch sites in the Gaza Strip. However on a wider scale, has Israeli ‘state terrorism’ (if assumed to use Lustick’s definition), and the growing trend of solipsistic terrorism in recent years had an active effect on the ‘hearts and minds’ of Palestinian dissident terrorism thus resulting in a change of requirements by these individuals away from a national state for
Palestinians – this essay concludes that this is not the case for the following reason - the perpetrator has on one level gained some temporary success, and thus achieved its intended outcome, however in the grander scheme of the protracted Israel-Palestine conflict, it has only increased tensions.

It is also necessary to assess the response to this act, both from the insurgent forces within the Gaza strip as well as the international response both by media and political sources. As ever there are polarised viewpoints depending on ideological standpoint; “Israel, more than any other democratic society in the world, faces a constant threat of terrorist attack. While only a minority of Palestinians engage in terrorism, many more lend political support to the men conducting the violence” [Lehrer: 2001:p30]. Many international media sources, ‘The New York Times’ and ‘The Guardian’ most specifically, condemned the event as a gross overuse of IDF military power against a far smaller state. Some however did see the event differently, and whilst none went as far to agree with the attacks, the nature of their articles made more of a point of asserting the damage by Qassam rockets and smuggling tunnels into Gaza and the economic effects these have on Israel. The response from Gaza based terrorist cells was as ever, repeat attacks by remote weapons with little aiming ability striking a wide array of local targets within Israel.

Conclusions

As a result of a critical analysis of the Israeli response in Operation Summer Rain, this essay has determined that whilst Israel does have acceptable and plausible grievances with the Palestinians, and has a claim to territorial rights in the Gaza region, its actions in Operation Summer Rain are in fact examples of state terrorism. There are several reasons for conclusion being reached, principally amongst which is the difficulty in justifying the responses to attacks by Palestinian insurgents and the actions of the IDF which were above and beyond the requirements of rescuing a captured soldier. The second reason for this conclusion is the nature of unnecessary territorial control by the IDF as outlined by the taking of key sites in the Gaza Strip during Summer Rain.
Ghazi – Walid Falah argues, “Israel’s military strategy since the outbreak of the second Intifada, in September 2000, has been one not merely of ‘security’ or ‘counter-terror’ but part of a longer-term strategy of spatial demolition and strangulation.” [Falah: 2005: 1341] The Israeli strategy consists of “two aims: unilateral separation from the Palestinian population, and its concomitant territorial dismemberment.” [ibid.] Falah and Solomon both confirm this essay’s view that Israel adopts state terrorist methods to achieve its territorial imperative, but gains international support from the USA and others through using the banner message of the ‘War on Terror’. However in reality, “separation will ensure Israeli control of and sovereignty over the best land and water resources, and control of all borders and border areas” [Falah: 2005: p1346]. Through these acts, which Falah calls plans of ‘unilateral separation and strangulation’, has “…shattered the spatial basis of a two-state solution” [Falah: 2005: 1341-2].

“The Israeli government has a strategic agenda for securing spatial advantage on the ground to further its position in negotiating with a Palestinian partner” [Falah: 2005: 1342] and the pretext of dealing with a threat of terrorism from Gaza has ‘provided Israel with a huge lever’ [Falah: 2005: p1342]. Whilst this approach gains some traction on an international legal sphere, the use of this ‘war against terrorism’ and the subsequent backing of some key Western nations (the USA mainly) has allowed for ‘state terrorism’ by Israel to take place. “In this sense the Intifada has been a windfall opportunity for… Israel’s nationalist Realpolitik… the effective control of ever more land for potential settlement, not for purposes of security but for purposes of state ideology and territorial expansion” [Falah: 2005: 1342-3]. Through this “ideology-driven unilateralism” [Falah: 2005: p1343], Israel effectively removes the possibility of Palestinian retaliation or participation in the debate, which is “…vital for building any fabric of territorial contiguity and effective sovereignty” [Flint & Falah: 2005],
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From a legal standpoint, the issue is however difficult to fathom; some argue that the violence used by Israel is legal under the rules of war whilst some disagree. “Modern warfare and the war on terror against mainly non-State actors have obliged States to resort to innovative measures which… create a legal oxymoron where the same measures constitute international law violations should they be perceived under jus in bello (actions during war) and legitimate means of self-defence should they be seen under the lens of self-defence and jus ad bellum (reasons to go to war)” [Solomon: 2010: p 501] Whilst appearing complicated, once unpacked this makes sense, and the Palestinian rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip become paramount to the allegation of state terrorism. If measures are seen as ‘jus ad bellum’, each individual attack on Israel can individually be judged as an attack on its sovereignty and thus as a reason to go to war. Therefore “…in conjunction with the rocket attacks stemming from the Strip, as non-forcible self-defense [sic.] measures… the use of force by the Palestinians in Gaza against Israel [can be seen to be a reasonable reason for self defence by Israel and thus each response can be seen as appropriate]”[Solomon: 2010: p.502].

Furthermore (and with reference to the Guardian article), media coverage of the on going fighting around the Gaza strip is both lacking in provision of context to the reader and inherently biased in its coverage. Despite the fact that this essay agrees with the allegations hinted at by the Guardian article and many others like it that Israel is adopting acts of state terrorism, not providing the correct level of contextual analysis for the reader coupled with an imbalance in the sources used for coverage of events and the use of ‘eyewitness’ and highly personalised accounts of the IDF in the Guardian article leads an individual new to the topic to immediately form an uninformed yet biased opinion without suitable knowledge of the protracted battle for land rights over the past 50 years or more. Perhaps then this protracted battle is a culmination of a ‘Tolstoyian’ cycle of evil without a conclusion; a truly harrowing conclusion to a bloody and violent war.
Bibliography


CHRISTOYANNOPoulos, A.J.M.E., _Leo Tolstoy on the state: A detailed picture of Tolstoy's denunciation of state violence and deception._


Appendix

Palestinian children pay price of Israel's Summer Rain offensive

Rights group says 197 civilians have been killed in military operation, including 48 minors

- Rory McCarthy in Gaza City
- The Guardian, Thursday 7 September 2006

Palestinian Hosam Sersawi, 6, lies in a critical condition in intensive care at the Shifa hospital in Gaza City after being wounded Israeli sniper fire. Photograph: Khalil Hamra/AP

On a humid afternoon, an hour or two after lunch, Nadi al-Attar, 12, set off on a donkey-drawn cart with his grandmother Khariya and two of his young cousins to pick figs from a small orchard near their home in northern Gaza.

Ahmed, 17, one of the cousins, remembers the moment when the shell struck, but pauses as he tells his story to nervously rub the muscles at the top of his thighs. The shell that hit their cart that afternoon sliced off his left leg just above the knee and his right leg halfway up his calf. He still has an aching pain in his bandaged stumps.

They had stopped the cart and two of the boys jumped off. "They went to collect something, some metal bars, and then they came back to the cart," he said. The boys hoped to sell the strips of metal for scrap. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) later determined that the metal came from a launcher for a Qassam, one of the crude rockets launched by Palestinian militants from Gaza into Israel. Qassams had been fired from the area that morning, though the militants had since left.

"Then the shell struck. I saw my mother [Khariya] dead and Nadi killed. I saw them dead on the ground," Ahmed said. "I looked down and then I saw my legs were cut away."
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Human rights field workers believe an artillery shell, fired from an Israeli military position not far away at the border with the Gaza Strip, hit the cart. Several were fired that day, July 24 - one day in a long and damaging Israeli military operation.

"I think it happened because of the metal we were collecting," Ahmed said. "But we were just going to the farm." He was taken to hospital with another cousin, Shadi, who was wounded in the stomach by shrapnel. Nadi and Khariya, 58, were killed instantly.

"We had lunch together," said Nadi's father, Habib, 36. "Then he went with his grandmother and never came back."

The deaths are not an isolated case. For the past two months, while the world's attention in the Middle East has been focused on the conflict in Lebanon, the Israeli military has led a wave of intense operations along the length of the Gaza Strip. It began after the capture of an Israeli soldier, Corporal Gilad Shalit, by Palestinian militants on June 25. The Israeli military said its operations were intended to free Cpl Shalit and to halt Qassam rocket fire. Early on the Israelis bombed Gaza's only power plant and they have kept Gaza's crossing points to Israel and Egypt closed for most of the time.

Since the start of the operation, codenamed Summer Rain, at least 240 Palestinians have been killed. One in five were children. According to the PCHR, which has investigated each case, 197 of the dead were civilians and the vast majority were killed in Gaza. Among them were 12 women and 48 children.

Yesterday an Israeli military spokesman said his forces did not target civilians. "Our actions are targeted only at terrorist organisations, terror activities and infrastructure," he said. "It can happen that innocent people are hit. But the responsibility does not lie with the Israeli army, but rather with the terror groups who are working within civilian populations without any regard to the danger they are causing."

More than two months into the Gaza operation Israel has still not secured the release of Cpl Shalit or stopped Qassam rocket fire.

"We believe that the whole offensive against the Gaza Strip is characterised by being an act of revenge and retaliation in which civilians are paying the price," said Hamdi Shaqqura, a founder member of the PCHR in Gaza City. "They have demonstrated total disregard for the rights of innocent Palestinian civilians. There has been an excessive use of force, a disproportionate use of force in civilian areas, and that explains the high toll of death."

Mr Shaqqura also condemned the Palestinian militants for launching the Qassams and for firing them from civilian areas. "This is illegal and we have called on them to stop," he said.

Many relatives of those killed by the Israelis in Gaza have been equally critical of the rocket attacks. "We get nothing out of it," said Muhammad al-Attar, 23, another of Nadi's cousins. "After they launch rockets we get killed and they destroy our farms."

A few hours after the donkey cart was hit a shell was fired into Beit Hanoun, another district of northern Gaza. It killed Khitam Tayeh, 11, who was on her way to the shops after school with her sister Nuha, 12. Nuha was hit by a piece of shrapnel in her left thigh, but survived. Khitam had a severe head injury and died in hospital.

"I carried her in from the ambulance and took her to the operating room in my arms," said her father, Muhammad 48. "Then she died. They couldn't do anything." He showed several framed photographs of his daughter, with long dark hair and wide brown eyes. Two bright stars had been superimposed in the background.

Mr Tayeh has collected a box of shrapnel from the scene, a couple of dozen sharp, rigid shards of metal, each three or four inches long, and talks of bringing a legal case against the Israeli military. Like many, a year ago he had hoped that life in Gaza would improve when Israeli settlers were withdrawn, in what seemed a ground-breaking move.
"People expected it would get better, but it's been the opposite," he said. "Don't tell me they withdrew. It's like they didn't leave. They are everywhere."

On the eastern side of Gaza, in Shujaiya, Hussam al-Sirsawi, 12, was with his friends standing on the street watching Israeli troops fighting against militants in the distance on August 27. He was badly injured by a piece of shrapnel and died three days later.

"You know how children are when they hear something happen. They want to go and see," said his uncle Nasser al-Sirsawi, 37. "I can't say why the Israelis killed him. These army people are full of hatred. Maybe these kids went to watch some resistance people and they were in the wrong place. To kill a child like this is not natural." On the wall opposite his cloth shop there is graffiti dedicated to his nephew. "Hussam," it says, "we swear to God you won." "Of course," said his uncle, "he's a martyr."

Two days later there was another incident in Shujaiya, when again a group of children were watching the fighting. Either a tank shell or a large chunk of shrapnel flew at them and hit Muhammad al-Ziq, 14, on the head. He died instantly. "I think sometimes they just want the Palestinians to pay," said his uncle, Ziad al-Ziq, 36. "He was with children wanting to see what was happening. There was no excuse for what happened."

All of the dead and most of the injured pass through the Shifa hospital in Gaza City. Staff photograph the bodies of the dead - they call the victims "martyrs" - and document their injuries. Junu'a al-Saqqa called up a picture on his computer screen of Muhammad al-Ziq, an appalling image of the boy lying on his side on a metal morgue table, the side of his head sliced away. In the past two months the hospital's doctors have dealt with 1,280 injured from the military operations, a third of whom were children. The doctors performed 60 amputations.

Dr Saqqa flicks through the photographic record, images of bodies charred beyond recognition, flesh no longer human in form. Many of the figures were young children, at least one in a shredded blue school uniform. "We have passed through the worst situation we have ever come across in our years of work," he said. "But this is our situation. What can we do? We raised our voices to the world, but nobody moves."

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