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January 14, 2009

Minnesota Lawmakers
Including Al Franken

Re: Gaza, et al

Dear Senators and Congresspeople:

Measured in the way our American and western society tends to measure things, Israel has been “winning” in all ways in the Gaza conflict, as it has been for all of its very short history as a country in the modern world, a western creation out of Palestine and, in many ways, the U.S.’s 51st state.

Has serious thought been given to the possibility that ultimately Israel may well be the final victim of its own domination of Palestinians? “Live by the sword, die by the sword” comes to mind. Israel will never win peace through violence. Memory is not easily killed, as you know.

We humans tend to see things from how they appear now. But the “winner” who has the “power” at the moment might miss a great portion of the total story. We are great at denying reality; we, in fact, are daily duped by fictitious realities through words and images (see Tom Petters, and others of his ilk).

Looking at winning from a broader context, Israel is itself confined in a reservation (prison) of its own making: small, isolated, surrounded, possibly doomed to its own ultimate destruction regardless of its immense superiority in fire power or U.S. assistance. Israel is well armed and very dangerous... to its own future. It is killing itself. I think reasonable people know that what I am saying is rational, but cannot, for assorted reasons, admit this possibility. It is politically very dangerous to voice such caution and concern. I don’t know if Israel can reverse the course to make permanent peace possible. It has lost.

I make my point in the enclosed op ed which I submitted last week to the local media. It went unpublished, which was no surprise. Perhaps you and the others to whom I am sending this might now read it and consider its points, which are based on our own less than savory history as “imperialists”.

There are many lessons about the dangers of one-sided points of view. I have been thinking a lot, lately, about Elie Wiesel’s powerful book, “Night”, given to me by one of my fellow pilgrims from Temple Israel on our return from Auschwitz and other places in the spring of 2000.

This week I re-visited two specific characters in Night. Moshe the Beadle tried to warn the Jews of Seghet of their coming fate: “They [the Jews of Seghet?] take me for a madman”, he said to a young Wiesel as storm clouds gathered. And Madame Schachter, who on the third night in the train on the way to her likely death at the camps, “pointed her arm toward the window, screaming: “Look! Look at it! Fire! A terrible fire....” There was, of course, no actual fire. “Madame Schachter had gone out of her mind”. But she was prophesying her fellow inmates future.

Moshe and Madame Schachter turned out to be right. Consider the possibility that today’s supposed “winner”, Israel, may be tomorrows tragic and permanent loser, and that it’s losing will be premised on its own actions against others.

C: others

Peace,



Dick Bernard

To: Dick Bernard

Subject: P&J#1879: Gaza/Israel/America:Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

-----Original Message-----

From: Dick Bernard [mailto:dick_bernard@msn.com]

Sent: Thursday, January 08, 2009 9:25 AM

To: 'opinion@startribune.com'

Subject: Gaza/Israel/America:Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

Op Ed submission: app 675 words Attached map of Palestine is from my Grandmothers 1906 Douay-Reims (Catholic) Bible.

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As we entered the first major building housing the hideous exhibits reminding us of the results of the holocaust at Auschwitz-Birkenau on my birthday in 2000, a stark sign greeted us:

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." George Santayana

It is a famous reminder which stands on its own.

Santayana's quote and another happening in our own Minnesota history during this sesquicentennial year, keep coming to mind as I view the daily reports of the carnage in Gaza, and read the reports from both sides. There is abundant insanity.

In 1862-63, my great-uncle Samuel, not long in Minnesota from his native Quebec, became one of the privates in the Army assembled to fight the Dakota in the Indian Wars. I have his records, and that of his unit in that war. By the time the 38 "Sioux" were hanged at Mankato, he was out of the service; simply by luck his unit was not involved in the infamous Whitestone Hill Massacre in south central North Dakota, where large numbers of peaceful Indians, preparing buffalo after the hunt, were massacred by a unit of the U.S. Army, which suffered proportionally far fewer losses (It is not possible to fix an exact number of casualties on both sides, but it was hundreds vs tens.) It was suspected that there were within the Indian ranks some enemy Indian leaders, and this justified the carnage. The surviving men, women and children made out worse than the dead: their winter food supply was destroyed.

As it always seem to go in the wake of war, in 1909 a major monument was erected to the soldiers who had been killed in the massacre of the Indians. I've been there many times. The monument still stands sentry, overlooking the area. It was only many years later that a simple stone monument was put in place down the slope to remember the larger number of Indians who had died.

To the victors go the monuments and the official history; the losers retain the memory.

Whitestone Hill and the Dakota Conflict were just part of the successful efforts to subjugate and contain the rightful owners of a land. For those of us, like myself, who benefitted from these "wins", we are insulated by almost 150 years from the acts of the then-leaders, whose names identify counties, streets, towns, schools and other institutions in our state and others.

1/9/2009

In those olden days of our country, the palefaces possessed overwhelming numerical and armament superiority over the scattered and disunited tribes of Indians. In relative terms, and with relatively few exceptions (Little Big Horn), we subjugated the Indians and put them in the least desirable places (reservations), and felt no need to honor treaties or reservation boundaries if for some reason some resource of value to us had been overlooked and later coveted.

It might be of some value for Israel and our own country's leaders to take a serious look back at the lessons they should have learned from our victories over the Indians.

The Israeli's might believe themselves to have driven the Palestinians permanently into reservations, but it is not quite so simple if one considers that from another point of view, the Israeli's themselves might be in worse shape than the American Indians were: hemmed into a small arid space, isolated, surrounded. No amount of superiority in firepower gives more than a temporary advantage. Absent killing them all, or expelling them (to where?), the Palestinians will live on in their land, and their memory of what happened to their ancestors will live on with them, and with others.

As Santayana said, and as Auschwitz reminds, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

But an important point is missed in this quote: remembering only selected portions of a whole, or creating a mythical history to excise certain realities, simply does not work in the long term.

An olive branch, a "Marshall Plan" for the 2000s, must replace the bombs and bullets...for the long-term survival of all, most especially the Israelis.

MAP 17

