

The Gold and the Stone

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THERE IS something tragicomic about the persona of Richard Goldstone.

First there was a veritable storm of fury when the original Goldstone report was issued.

What a fiend! A Jew who claims to be a Zionist and an Israel-lover, who publishes the most abominable slanders about against our valiant soldiers, aiding and abetting the worst anti-Semites around the world! The very prototype of a self-hating Jew! Still worse, a “mosser” – a Jew who turns another Jew over to the evil Goyim, the most detested figure in Jewish folklore.

And now the turnabout. Goldstone, the Jew who has recanted. Goldstone who has publicly confessed that he was wrong all along. That the Israeli army committed no crimes in the 2009-2010 “Cast Lead” Gaza operation, On the contrary, while the Israeli army has conducted honest and meticulous investigations into all the allegations, Hamas has not investigated any of the horrendous crimes it has committed.

Goldstone, the Man of Stone, has become Goldstone, the Man of Gold. A man of conscience! A man to be admired!

It was, of course, Binyamin Netanyahu who had the final word. Goldstone’s recantation, he summarized, has confirmed once again that the IDF is the Most Moral Army in the World.

MY HEART bleeds for Judge Goldstone. From the beginning he was placed in an impossible situation.

The UN commission which appointed him to head the inquiry into the allegations of war crimes committed during the operation was acting on a seemingly logical but actually foolish calculation. Appointing to the job a good Jew, and an avowed Zionist to boot, would disarm, it was thought, any allegation of anti-Israeli bias.

Goldstone and his colleagues undoubtedly did an honest and conscientious job. They sifted the evidence laid before them and arrived at reasonable conclusions on that basis. However, almost all the evidence came from Palestinian and UN sources. The commission could not interrogate the officers and soldiers of the Israeli forces because our government, in a typical and almost routine act of folly, refused to cooperate.

Why? The basic assumption is that all the world is out to get us, not because of anything we do, but because we are Jews. We know we are right, and we know that they are out to prove us wrong. So why cooperate with these bloody anti-Semites and Jewish self-haters?

Today, almost all influential Israelis concede that this was a stupid attitude. But there is no guarantee that our leaders will behave any differently next time, especially since the army is dead set against allowing any soldiers to appear before a non-Israeli forum, or, for that matter, before an Israeli non-military forum either.

BACK TO poor Goldstone. After the publication of his commission’s report, his life became hell.

The full fury of the Jewish ghetto against traitors from its midst was turned on him. Jews objected to his attending his grandson’s Bar Mitzvah. His friends turned away from him, He was ostracized by all the people he valued.

So he searched his soul and found that he had been wrong all along. His findings were one-sided. He would have found differently if he had heard the Israeli side of the story. The Israeli army has conducted honest investigations into the allegations, while the barbarous Hamas has not conducted any investigations at all into their obvious war crimes.

So when was Goldstone wrong? The first or the second time?

The answer is, alas, that he was wrong both times.

THE VERY term “war crimes” is problematic. War itself is a crime, never to be justified unless it is the only way to prevent a bigger crime – as with the war against Adolf Hitler, and now – on an incomparably smaller scale – against Muammar Qaddafi.

The idea of war crimes arose after the horrendous atrocities of the 30-year war, which devastated central Europe. The idea was that it is impossible to prevent brutal actions if they are needed to win a war, but that such actions are illegitimate if they are not needed for this purpose. The principle is not moral, but practical. Killing prisoners and civilians is a war crime, because it serves no effective military purpose, since both sides can do it. So is the wanton destruction of property.

In Israel this principle was embodied in the landmark judgment by Binyamin Halevy after the 1956 Kafr Qasim massacre of innocent farmers, men, women and children. The Judge ruled that a “black flag” flies over “manifestly” illegal orders – orders which even a simple person can see are illegal, without talking to a lawyer. Since then, obeying such orders has been a crime under Israeli law.

THE REAL question about Cast Lead is not whether individual soldiers did commit such crimes. They sure did – any army is composed of all types of human beings, decent youngsters with a moral conscience besides sadists, imbeciles and others suffering from moral insanity. In a war you give all of them arms and a license to kill, and the results can be foreseen. That is one reason why “war is hell”.

The problem with Lebanon War II and Cast Lead is that the basic approach – the same in both cases – makes war crimes as good as inevitable. The planners were no monsters – they just did their job. They superimposed two facts one on the other. The result was inevitable.

One consideration was the requirement to avoid casualties on our side. We have a people’s army, composed of conscripts from all walks of life (like the US army in Vietnam but not in Afghanistan.) Our public opinion judges wars according to the number of (our) soldiers killed and wounded. So the directive to the military planners is: do everything possible so the number

of our casualties will be next to nil.

The other fact is the total disregard for the humanity of the other side. Years and years of the occupation have created an army for whom Palestinians, and Arabs in general, are mere objects. Not human enemies, not even human monsters, just objects.

These two mental attitudes lead necessarily to a strategic and tactical doctrine which dictates the application of lethal force to anyone and anything that can possibly menace soldiers advancing in enemy territory – liquidating them in front of the soldiers preferably from afar by artillery and air power.

When the opposition is a resistance movement operating in a densely populated area, the results can almost be calculated mathematically. In Cast Lead, at least 350 Palestinian civilians, among them hundreds of women and children, were killed, together with about 750 enemy fighters. On the Israeli side: altogether 5 (five!) Israeli soldiers were killed by enemy fire (some six more by “friendly fire”).

This result did not contradict the undeclared political aim of the operation. It was to pressure the Gaza Strip population into overthrowing the Hamas government. This result, of course, was not achieved. Rather the opposite.

The logic – and the balance of casualties - of Lebanon War II were about the same, with added huge material destruction of civilian targets.

FOLLOWING THE Goldstone report, our army did indeed conduct quite extensive investigations into individual incidents.

The number is impressive, the results are not. Some 150 or so cases were investigated, two soldiers were convicted (one for theft), one officer was indicted for the killing – by mistake – of an entire extended family.

This seems to satisfy Goldstone, who this week gratefully accepted an invitation from the Israeli Minister of the Interior – perhaps the most rabid racist in the entire government, in which racists abound – to visit Israel. (When the conversation was leaked, Goldstone cancelled the matter and stated that the report would not be withdrawn.)

On the other side, Goldstone is aflame with indignation against Hamas, for launching rockets and mortar shells at civilians in Israel and conducting no investigations at all. Isn't it rather ridiculous: using the same standards for one of the five mightiest armies in the world and a band of irregular and poorly equipped resistance fighters (alias terrorists).?

Terrorism is the weapon of the weak. (“Give me tanks and airplanes, and I promise I won't plant bombs” a Palestinian once said.) Since the entire military strategy of Hamas is terrorizing Israeli communities along the border in order to persuade Israel to put an end to the occupation (and, in the case of Gaza, to the ongoing blockade), Goldstone's indignation seems a bit surprising.

Altogether, Goldstone has now paved the way for another Cast Lead operation which will be far worse.

I expect, however, that he can now pray in any synagogue he chooses.