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# **WORLD PUBLIC OPINION**

**AND THE CURRENT  
AGGRESSION IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Michael

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## FOREWORD

*The Sunday Times of November 23, 1969 contains two interesting articles — the first is written by David Leitch a Sunday Times reporter who has been visiting Israel regularly since 1963 and who is an ardent sympathiser of that country.*

*The second is the paper's editorial on events in the Middle East and Vietnam.*

*Though we may not entirely agree with some of Mr. Leitch's descriptions — in the interest of objectivity — we still publish the whole article verbatim and — without comment.*

**U.A.R. State Information Service**

*"I believe that the duty of a Jew now, not only as a human being but as a Jew is to rise as a witness and be a witness against the things being committed in the name of Israel, not only because they are wrong but because they threaten the honour of the Jewish people."*

On October 28, The Times published an article by its foreign editor, E.C. Hodgkin, which was headlined : "Grim reports of repression from Israel-occupied lands." It described how Arabs in the territories which Israel conquered in 1967 were "being persecuted into a new diaspora by the armies and people of Israel." The article caused an international furore. Many instances of repression reported in it have been strenuously denied by the Israeli authorities.

The editorial operations of The Sunday Times are quite independent of those of The Times. And it so happens that more than a week before The Times's article appeared, the Sunday Times had been entirely separately approached by an Israeli citizen with a disturbing account of conditions in one of the Israel-administered territories — the Gaza Strip. It comes from a long and detailed statement which he gave us and to which he swore on oath.

The reporter who was chosen to check our informant's statement was DAVID LEITCH. He has been visiting Israel at intervals since 1963, and has a deep sympathy and affection for the country and its people. Now here is his report.

**"The Sunday Times" November 23, 1969**

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# Eye-witness in Gaza

GAZA this week, the set price for grenade throwers not machines—is Israeli pounds, or 12s. 6d. his cut-price wage they earn more days than not, the troops pick them up, unspent wages still in their short fronts, grenade boys usually from their compatriots than he. They have established long claim to being the inefficient—as well as the best—fired guns of modern

en so, their maladroitness have achieved some, perhaps even their aim. In this they have been abetted by Major-General Dayan. His policy of "selective punishment" or let all it reprisal, for that is, he means, has driven the committed among the Arabs into the arms of the per cent, all-or-nothing. Between them they turned this place, which at was an unlovely strip of hillside East, into a city as living and as terrified as after the Tet offensive. In the indifferent Israeli way, were shooting at heads in the windows in the town of Omar El Mukhtar, when there was a bang, as of fifty unformed school hurried past the town hall so many terrorised black. Private houses were oyed to encourage this and the biggest high up was closed to make an camp. Effectively, this town of more than 60,000 under siege e terrorists, by means of 12s. 6d. hired boys, have only achieved their aim—regulate the population and occupiers. There are con- only Israeli officers there adduce all Gaza's ills to them. They talk of "last ner" with a certain sin. They say next summer, the Dayan plan has elimi- the terrorists, could be

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appeared, the Sunday Times had been entirely separately approached by an Israeli citizen with a disturbing account of conditions in one of the Israel-administered territories—the Gaza Strip. The spirit in which he came to us is suggested by the sentence quoted above. It comes from a long and detailed statement which he gave us and to which he swore on oath.

The reporter who was chosen to check our informant's statement was DAVID LEITCH. He has been visiting Israel at intervals since 1963, and has a deep sympathy and affection for the country and its people. Now here is his report.



Curfew time on the Gaza Strip and Arabs are rounded up for searching

→ easiest to confirm. Several neutral health workers in the area said that they had often seen this happen. Indeed, as long as they were assured their names would not be cited they said they had come to find it quite normal.

Moshe Dayan, Israel's famous Defence Minister, said himself last spring in a recorded inter-

view that he had ordered his troops to search at random, even when there had been no acts of terrorism. When there were terrorist incidents in the area he claims the reaction of his unit was "much tougher".

In the tougher cases, the same curfew was imposed, but only indoors. The troops then

times until their legs were broken.

How accurate are these accounts? And do the events they describe result from official policy? The first question is desperately hard to answer. Many Arabs around Gaza have told me similar stories in the last weeks, but even President Nasser could not call them good witnesses. They were vague on details. They were carried away by their own rhetoric (even filtered through an interpreter) and evidently biased.

On the other hand, an Arab professional man—he is under such pressure that I cannot even

wars. He is a highly educated man, and indeed one of distinction in his profession. He knows people in Israel, himself, who have told me similar stories. Finally, this man, who, it should be said, is unlike the majority of the student sources in Tel Aviv in his anti-Communism, has so far as to swear a detailed statement which is in the possession of the Sunday Times. The evidence is by no means conclusive. It does, at the least, establish a prima facie case for some kind of independent inquiry. And it is not only evidence.

The next set of arguments, which deal with the under detention in Israel, into much the same category. They have been obtained both from Arab and Israeli sources, and, via access to defence statements and court transcripts, I have selected four examples which are, in various ways, typical.

It would be possible, in time, to add about 40 more of the following are in themselves sufficient to warrant an inquiry. These examples all involve amounts to torture.

For historical reasons, I do not require emphasis to a subject which is highly sensitive in Israel. It is hard to believe that a government is on all kinds of humane is prepared to make methods an instrument of power. Are the allegations true or not? Again, it seems that only independent groups could be trusted, again, the evidence is able to enough in itself to

## The evidence of Lutfiel El Hquari

THE FIRST statement is from a woman and, it should be said, a damned tough one. It is called Lutfiel El Hquari is 25, and she was arrested August this year in Ramat

The charges against her numerous being a member of an unlawful organisation

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## EYE - WITNESS IN GAZA

In Gaza this week, the market price for grenade throwers — men not machines — is five Israeli pounds, or 12s. 6d. At this cut-price wage they function more days than not. Also more days than not, the Israeli troops pick them up, their unspent wages still stuffed in their shirt fronts. The grenade boys usually harm more of their compatriots than Israelis. They have established a strong claim to being the most inefficient — as well as the cheapest — hired guns of modern times.

Even so, their maladroitness manœuvres have achieved something, perhaps even their masters' aim. In this they have been abetted by Major-General Moshe Dayan. His policy of "collective punishment," or let us call it reprisal, for that is what he means, has driven the uncommitted among the Arabs in Israel — and they did once exist — into the arms of the 100 per cent, all-or-nothing haters. Between them they have turned this place, which at best was an unlovely armpit of the Middle East, into a city as menacing and as terrified as Saigon after the Tet offensive.



Here, indifferent Israeli conscripts were shooting at heads moving in the windows in the street of Omar El Mukhtar. Here, when there was a bang, groups of tiny uniformed schoolgirls scurried past the town hall like so many terrorised black rabbits. Private houses were destroyed to encourage the others, and the biggest high school was closed to make an army camp. Effectively, this Arab town of more than 60,000 was under siege.

The terrorists, by means of their 12s. 6d. hired boys, have evidently achieved their aim — to alienate the population and their occupiers. There are consequently Israeli officers there who adduce all Gaza's ills to terrorism. They talk of "last summer" with a certain lyricism. They say next summer, once the Dayan plan has eliminated the terrorists, could be as happy.

But was last summer so good? One observer, and he was there before terrorism was making young soldiers trigger-happy, found conditions unacceptable even then. It is reasonable to ask whether what is happening now is a product of what was done then.

He is an observer worth listening to because, apart from anything else, he is an Israeli, by education and by temperament even a Zionist. This is what he found.

The first thing was hunger. During his period of reserve duty on the Gaza Strip, which he described

later as "the most horrific three weeks of my life" he was approached by Arab children who were happy to work all day, he says, for leftovers from soldiers' plates, or even waste food which the Israeli army dumps in plastic bags.

During his service he visited two hospitals where parents, usually mothers, were, according to the staff, in the habit of stealing food from the meals served up to their sick children.

This was one of his milder allegations, and one of the easiest to confirm. Several neutral health workers in the area said that they had often seen this happen. Indeed, as long as they were assured their names would not be cited they said they had come to find it quite normal.

Moshe Dayan, Israel's famous Defence Minister, said himself last spring in a recorded interview that hunger conditions in some parts of the Gaza Strip were unacceptable, and bad for Israeli prestige in the world. But there is no source, apart from this unofficial one, for the method which occupying forces are reported to have used last summer against the occupied.

He saw, and heard from fellow soldiers, how the authorities treated Gaza Arabs, months before Israeli officials began to talk about "environmental, or neighbourhood punishment."

The first approach involved arbitrary curfews of the kind recently used as a reprisal against terrorism, in the village of Beit Sahor, near Bethlehem, among other places. The inhabitants are forbidden to leave their homes for almost the whole 24 hours; they can go out to get food and water for perhaps two hours a day. As Arab homes in Gaza are usually tiny, have no sanitation or running water, and are sometimes shared with livestock, this is a severe punishment.

This witness says that such curfews were imposed against small villages at random, even when there had been no acts of terrorism. When there were terrorist incidents in the area he claims the reaction of his unit was "much tougher."

In the tougher cases, the same curfew rules applied, but only the women were kept indoors. The men were driven into the desert in trucks and sometimes beaten up on the way. When they arrived at an isolated spot they were divided according to age into two groups. They were then forced to squat on their haunches in the sun under guard for several hours — he says for as long as eight hours at a time.

There were also harsher measures, which the witness says were common knowledge among soldiers serving on the Strip this summer, but which he never witnessed himself. He says that during a coffee party in his tent (the Israeli army is dry) half a dozen soldiers told him the best way to combat terrorism

was to bind suspects tightly with electric wire on arms and legs, and leave them in the sun.

These were not young soldiers telling tall stories, he says, but mature reservists chatting unemotionally, without even much interest (which was the single thing that made the deepest impression on him). He also says they reported beating Arab men on the shins with the butts of automatic weapons, sometimes until their legs were broken.

How accurate are these accounts ? And do the events they describe result from official policy ? The first question is desperately hard to answer. Many Arabs around Gaza have told me similar stories in the last weeks, but even President Nasser could not call them good witnesses. They were vague on details. They were carried away by their own rhetoric (even filtered through an interpreter) and evidently biased.

On the other hand, an Arab professional man — he is under such pressure that I cannot even say which profession — gave a similar account. And this was, also largely confirmed in the course of a series of extremely guarded conversations with international workers in the area, most of whom are concerned, above all, to avoid offending the occupying authorities.

Moreover they are frankly terrified that any statement of theirs will be used to prevent them from continuing all kinds of essential services.

All of these witnesses, some of whom have spoken at first hand, and others only through hearsay, must be treated with some reserve. But the Israeli soldier, I believe, is in a different category.

He is not only a Jew; he is a devoted one. He has served in the Israeli army during two wars. He is a highly educated man, and indeed one of some distinction in his profession. He knows people, Israelis like himself, who have told me very similar stories. Finally, this witness, who, it should be said, is unlike the majority of dissident sources in Tel Aviv in that he is anti-Communist, has gone so far as to swear a detailed statement which is in the possession of The Sunday Times.

The evidence is by no means conclusive. It does, at the very least, establish a *prima facie* case for some kind of independent inquiry. And it is not the only evidence.

The next set of statements, which deal with Arabs under detention in Israel, fall into much the same category. They have been obtained from both Arab and Israeli lawyers and, via access to defendants' statements and court transcripts, I have selected four examples which are, in various ways, typical.

It would be possible, given time, to add about 40 more. But the following are in themselves sufficient to warrant an inquiry. These examples all involve what amounts to torture.

For historical reasons which do not require emphasis this is a subject which is highly sensitive in Israel. It is hard to believe that a government based on all kinds of humane ideals is prepared to make these methods an instrument of policy. Are the allegations true or not ? Again, it seems that only an independent group could decide. But, again, the evidence available is enough in itself to cause great concern.

### **The evidence of Lutfieh El Houari**

The first statement comes from a woman and, it should be said, a damned tough one. She is called Lutfieh El Houari, she is 25, and she was arrested in August this year in Ramallah.

The charges against her were numerous : being a member of an unlawful organisation and attempted murder were the most serious.

According to her prosecutors, and their case has not been contradicted with any conviction, on June 5, 1969 — the second anniversary of the outbreak of the Six-Day War — she and four girl-friends despatched a bottle of poisoned whisky to some Palestinian Arabs whom they regarded as collaborators.

She confessed to most of the charges against her, but on November 4 before a military court in Ramallah, her lawyer claimed that her statements had been extracted through torture and fear. This is what she says happened :

She was taken to Beit Shemesh and interrogated for 15 days. During this period she was kept in solitary confinement, with both wrists and feet handcuffed. She says her interrogators, threatened her with the same punishment that she had received a year earlier while under administrative arrest.

Then, she says, she was put in the same cell as a group of Jewish prostitutes mostly from the Yemen. They attacked her and were encouraged to do so by the guards. She claims that during her solitary confinement she was prevented from using the lavatory, which was particularly painful for her as she was convalescing from an operation for appendicitis at the time of her arrest.

She also claims that police or soldiers (she is not sure which) threatened that her house would be blown up unless she confessed. Eventually she did, but the house was blown up anyway. Miss Houari has given many more details of her alleged ill-treatment to her lawyer, who has made an official protest, so far without response.

### **The evidence of Ichak Ali El Marari**

Ichak Ali el Marari was arrested on March 7, 1969, in Jerusalem. After two months of interrogation, during which he claimed he had no access either to his wife or his lawyer, he was charged with being a member of an illegal organisation. Interestingly,

though he is still in prison, the charges against him were dropped on June 6, 1969.

He says, and I have seen his statement, that he had been so maltreated during the interrogation period, that the marks would have been visible in court.

His story, which is similar to that of many others, tells of being beaten on the hands with a strap, and of being denied water and medical treatment until he had made a full confession.

In his statement, which his lawyer sent on September 15 this year — so far without reaction — to Israel's Attorney-General, the Minister of Defence, and the Minister responsible for police, he names a police chief inspector (he is called Marcus) who directed the interrogation.

On the same date his lawyer, again to no effect, requested an independent medical examination and access to the prisoner's medical files. These are probably easily available because, after his interrogation, Mr Marari was treated in the prison hospital at Ramleh.

He says his most serious injury was a head wound, and he also complains of defects in vision as a result of his treatment during interrogation, and recurring headaches.

His case is particularly interesting because,



unlike most detainees who allege torture, there seems to be no convincing evidence, or indeed evidence of any kind, that he was involved in terrorist activities.

He admits a connection with a nationalist front organisation, but says he was only concerned with aiding the families of people who had been arrested. He may, of course, be lying, but unless there are statements suggesting the contrary, to which I have not had access, there appears to be no hard evidence against him. This does not mean under the system of administrative imprisonment which is now widely used that there is anything to prevent his remaining in prison for an indefinite period.

### **The evidence of Abdullah Yusuf Oduan**

Similarities can be found in the story of Mr Abdullah Yusuf Oduan. The allegations of torture methods are much the same, though he names three different interrogators.

Mr Oduan is, I understand, a Communist Party member, though this is not an offence in Israel, which has two Communist parties with parliamentary representation. By a nice international irony, he has already served a long period in a Jordanian prison for being a Communist.

He says the Israelis acquired his Jordanian files when they occupied the West Bank, and picked him up as a result. He also says that Israeli interrogators

assured him they would do a much better — which in this context means more brutal — job than their counterparts in the Hashemite kingdom. Through his lawyer, on September 11 of this year, he submitted various allegations of ill-treatment to the relevant authorities. By the middle of November, there had been no response.

### **The evidence of Abdel Rahim Gaber**

A fully paid-up 100 percent, terrorist, Abdel Rahim Amin Gaber made similar allegations. He is serving a life sentence for terrorist activities, including planting a bomb at a bus station in Tel Aviv in 1968. Presumably he knew the risk, and was prepared to pay the price.

He claims to have served a longer period of solitary confinement than most of the other prisoners whose files I have seen.

But, if one can believe the statements prisoners make, there is little distinction between the treatment of an avowed terrorist, and a suspect. A lawyer, an Israeli who handles many of these cases, says that experience suggests 80 per cent, of the prisoners are tortured during interrogation if what they say is true.

But is it ? Prisoners, Communist Party members, men who have been picked up off the street after a grenade has gone off, are clearly not the best witnesses of their own experiences. Unfortunately, given the

present system, what they say cannot be verified, or contradicted.

Almost all allegations cover the period immediately after arrest. The suspect has not yet graduated to the comparatively enviable status of prisoner — that is, someone detained inside an official Israel prison with certain rights.

I have heard complaints about prison standards but, compared with those levelled against police and military intelligence during the interrogation period after arrest, they are too trivial to be worth repeating.

The prevailing system makes it particularly hard to check. The legal code which covers Arabs in the occupied areas, and within Israel as it existed before the six-day war, is so superlatively illiberal that those on the receiving end have almost nothing on their side. Anyone can be arrested, restricted to a certain area and kept in prison for an indefinite period without any charge. The authorities can give them access to outsiders, or they cannot. It depends on how they feel.

The system is disgraceful. For the British, who feel moral indignation when brought face-to-face with an approach apparently so alien, the only reaction is outrage. It is, however, worth bearing in mind that the British themselves are responsible for the system.

It is based, very largely, on the 14 chapters and 170 articles of the 1945 Emergency Defence Laws

which the British introduced under their mandate to deal with Jewish terrorism. Stern though the provisions were, they failed. Passionately, though Israeli jurists condemned them at the time as a contradiction of the most fundamental principles of justice, they have, with certain amendments, been carefully preserved.

The best objective witnesses of what is going on inside Israel's detention centres are members of the international committee of the Red Cross. For various reasons, they cannot say what they believe is true, one way or the other. If they confirm bad stories they provide Arab propaganda. If they deny them, the Israelis will exploit their statements.

As Israel refuses to accept the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention apply to the occupied territories, Red Cross delegates have no access to the police stations or detention centres where prisoners are kept after arrest. Neither can they see prisoners in solitary confinement.

If their representatives decide torture charges are justified-their criteria are physical marks on a prisoner-they make a report. These reports are strictly secret. They are not published because they would prejudice the job which Red Cross delegates, within strictly defined limits, are at present permitted to do.

Many observers believe that the Israelis, if they wish to demonstrate the strength of their case, should either give the Red Cross more facilities, or let some other unbiased group look for themselves.



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# THE SUNDAY TIMES

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## Confronting the world's conscience

WE DEVOTE MOST of these two pages today to an examination of the war in Vietnam. On another page we carry the result of a long inquiry into the conduct of Israeli soldiers occupying the Gaza Strip. Neither of these subjects makes palatable reading. Both are concerned with the casualties of war, and the inhumanities to which civilians are exposed by an occupying Power. The situations are different in many respects. What Pinkville and Gaza have in common, however, is that they are real occurrences which cannot be overlooked as irrelevant minutiae in a grand ideological conflict.

The stories are published in a spirit of inquiry rather than partiality. It is necessary to say this because both the Middle East and Vietnam arouse such intense opposing commitments that reporting of either arena tends to be twisted by readers into an expression of bias. Some pro-Israelis and some pro-Americans find it difficult to read any relevant material without seeing evidence of a hostile plot against them. But we are neither anti-Israeli nor anti-American. Still less do we publicise horror for horror's sake. These are significant events which need to be honestly confronted.

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