

'Innocents?'



by Lev Tsitrin

Thinking is not something that can be controlled; the thoughts take their own, strange paths. When in his State of the Union address President Biden spoke of “thousands and thousands of innocents – women and children” among the “[m]ore than 30,000 Palestinians [who] have been killed,” my thoughts for some reason veered off Gaza, and posed to me this question: were the children of Dr. Josef Goebbels “innocent?”

I don't know why this thought entered my mind. The only common denominator was war – in May 1945, as the Red Army approached Berlin, Goebbels and his wife, before committing suicide, poisoned their children, five girls and a boy. The oldest was 12.

Clearly, though beloved by Hitler, and much paraded in Goebbels' propaganda reels as model exemplars of what Aryan offspring should look like, they were non-combatants. Yet the question of whether they were "innocent" still stirs controversy: as per [Wikipedia](#): "In 2005, Rochus Misch ["a bodyguard, courier, and telephone operator for Hitler [and] the last surviving former occupant of the *Führerbunker* when he died in September 2013"] called for a memorial plaque to be installed in honour of the six Goebbels children. ... Misch argued that the children themselves were completely innocent, that to treat them as criminals like their parents and thus deserving of the world's collective posthumous opprobrium was wrong as no one has a choice as to who they are biologically related to and that they were murdered just as other victims during the war were murdered."

It kind of makes sense (though the Wikipedia-supplied photo of them innocently doing a *Sieg Heil* makes one wonder) – except for the last part. It is simply not true that "they were murdered just as other victims during the war were murdered." Yes, they were murdered – but by their own parents; if not for their loving Mommy and Daddy, they would have lived. This is the key difference; it is definitely *not* how other victims of WW2 died. The clinical diagnosis of their deaths would be that the Goebbels children died from an ideology that was so inhumane that it completely superseded and suppressed all normal human instincts and feelings.

Which brings us right to the Gaza war – and Hamas' method of waging it, well-captured by a *Washington Post* editorial cartoon that became famous upon the [paper's decision to suppress it](#) following an outcry from the "progressives" – the method of turning their wives and kids into dead human shields, so Hamas could present to the appropriately tearful West the lament that – to repeat the above-supplied quote from Biden's State of the Union, "thousands and thousands of innocents – women and children" are getting killed by Israel,

and so the war on Hamas must be stopped – allowing Hamas to survive, regroup, and fight the other day. And it is true enough that they were women and children, and that they got killed – yet not by Israel, but by Hamas. Those dead Palestinians are “innocent” only in the same degree to which the Goebbels children can be called “innocent.”

And even less so – because the word “non-combatant” that clearly applied to the Goebbels children, does not apply to the Gazan casualties at all – for a simple reason that a shield is an implement of war. That it is made of humans, does not change this basic fact one bit: it protects the Hamas combatants.

So instead of talking of “thousands and thousands of innocents – women and children,” President Biden could, and should have talked of “thousands and thousands of Hamas’ human shields – their wives and kids,” That would have made perfect factual sense – but would have taken the edge off of the addresses’ rhetoric, ruining it.

The choice of words matter – and speechwriters know it full well. The art of rhetoric – of making a speaker carry the audience with him, is built entirely upon such rhetorical flourishes. Plain unadorned truth – that the dead Gazans were being used as a weapon by Hamas, wouldn’t trigger the much-desired, loud and prolonged applause.

And yet, this fact is a fact– though the media tends to suppress it, as did the *Washington Post*. Politicians (and the media, and the academe) would rather cater to the crowds than educate them that Gaza’s “innocents” are not exactly “innocent.” And their sacrifice is not necessarily involuntarily – many act as human shields for Hamas out of commitment rather than coercion; there are many Palestinian Goebbelses and their acolytes among the “civilians” in Gaza (and for that matter, in the PA-administered West Bank!). But that is a nuance, and a nuance throws a monkey wrench into the

narrative – and therefore, gets suppressed. What a shame!