

The Coronavirus Shelter-in-Place and the Israeli Curfew

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The *New York Times* has for a long time had a “Jewish problem.” In the 1930s and during the Second World War, the Times paid scant attention to the Nazi murders of Jews. Laurel Leff’s study of how the *Times* failed so dismally to properly cover the Holocaust, *Buried By the Times*, notes that between 1939 and 1945, the New York Times published more than 23,000 front-page stories. Of those, 11,500 were about World War II. Twenty-six were about the Holocaust. The Times buried the bulk of its coverage of the Nazi murders in stories of a few paragraphs deep in the paper between advertisements. Leff describes a story published in the paper on July 29, 1942, about the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto. The story bore the headline “Warsaw Fears Extermination,” was published on Page

7, and was not even a stand-alone story, instead consisting of a handful of paragraphs nestled next to an ad for Emerson spinet pianos. When the last of the Jews of Warsaw were deported on May 14, 1943, the story appeared at the bottom of Page 6 of the Times the following day.

This failure to adequately describe the greatest crime in history, and to help alert the American people, and their government, as to what was happening, no doubt contributed to many deaths. How many people might have been saved had readers of the Times been properly informed so that, grasping the enormity of what was going on, they would have pressured the White House to let in Jewish refugees who were being turned away? The antisemites in the State Department, led by the infamous Breckenridge Long, who described Hitler's *Mein Kampf* as "eloquent in opposition to Jewry and Jews as exponents of Communism and chaos," were determined to keep Jewish refugees out of the U.S. Had the Times, as the newspaper of record, provided better coverage of what the Nazis were doing, others in Washington might have created countervailing pressure and forced the government to act, despite the cruel opposition of Long. Furthermore, had the Times more fully reported on the Holocaust, and given those reports more prominence in the paper, American public opinion might have demanded that the railroad lines to Auschwitz-Birkenau be bombed, possibly saving hundreds of thousands of lives. Without that coverage, it was easier for Deputy Secretary of War John J. McCloy, another one of those unspeakable officials, a pillar of the American Establishment, who was supremely indifferent to what was happening to Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe, to [oppose the bombing](#), claiming it would have been too dangerous – even though American bombers had repeatedly been bombing German factories at Buna, only five miles from Birkenau – and then asserting, preposterously, that such bombing would only make the Nazis "speed up" their killing, when they were already going as fast as they murderously could.

The Times was (and is) owned by a Jewish family, the Sulzbergers, who were determined to make sure the paper would not be seen as engaging in special pleading for Jews; instead, they minimized Jewish suffering both in Nazi Germany from 1933 on, and in Nazi-occupied Europe, during the Second World War.

Fast forward to the last decade, when the Times has been scandalously unfair in its coverage of Israel and of the attempts by the Jewish state to defend itself from the violent Jihad waged against it by Muslim Arabs. There is scant history in that Times coverage: almost never, in the thousands of articles on the Arab-Israeli conflict, has the Mandate for Palestine been mentioned, much less quoted. Nor has the text and significance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 been given its due. Instead, there has been plenty of admiring coverage of J Street, of IfNotNow, and of other leftwing Jewish groups opposed to the Israeli government. And the “plight of the Palestinians” will always find sympathetic coverage, in the news reports, on the opinion page, and in the editorials, at the Times.

The latest example of tawdry treatment of Israel is the opinion piece by the anti-Israel activist Raja Shehadeh that recently appeared in the Times. It was ostensibly about how to live through the coronavirus scare. Shehadeh, you see, had some experience with being confined to his house. In March 2002, Palestinians on the West Bank had been told by the IDF to stay home, just like Americans are now doing to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Shehadeh refers to a month – March 2002 – “when my neighbors and I had our movement severely restricted by an Israeli military siege.” But why? He doesn’t say. And it was not really a “military siege.” Manhunts for terrorists were going on. It made no sense to have others out on the street, where innocents might be hurt.

[His piece](#) is magisterially eviscerated [here](#) by Gilead Ini of CAMERA.

The piece, by anti-Israel activist Raja Shehadeh, uses the coronavirus scare as a pretext to attack the Jewish state. The hook is that American cities are ordering people to stay at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The pitch is that cruel Israelis ordered Palestinians to remain indoors for no reason at all. Shehadeh strains to squeeze anti-Israel talking points into his ostensible lesson about the coronavirus. Or is it the other way around? "Unlike the Israeli guns that posed an equal threat to anyone moving outside of their homes without permission, the virus discriminates by age." He writes of Israel's "strangulating roadblocks."

Shehadeh claims that the coronavirus is more deadly for the elderly – "Unlike the Israeli guns that posed an equal threat" to Palestinians of all ages. Really? Did the Israelis, during what Shehadeh misleadingly calls a "military siege," but was merely a confinement to living quarters, simply shoot anyone they found outside during the curfew, whether they were babies or the elderly? Of course not. In fact the IDF kept people indoors for their own safety, as the soldiers combed the West Bank for terrorist murderers on the run, during a period of intense terrorist activity.

Gilead Ini again:

And for what [were Shehadeh and other Palestinians confined]? Apparently nothing. In what is the piece's most disingenuous and offensive passage, Shehadeh writes:

"In 2002, when my neighbors and I had our movement severely restricted by an Israeli military siege, I tried my best to continue living as normally as I could. It was springtime then, as it is now. I would look out the window and lament my inability to venture out to the lush hills all around covered with wildflowers. But the danger lurking outside my house back then was readily recognizable: armed soldiers enforcing

the stay-at-home orders. Only Palestinians were under threat. While we suffered, normal life continued elsewhere, indifferent to what we were enduring.”

It was not an Israeli military siege, with weapons drawn, forcing everyone to come out with their hands up. That’s a siege. This was different – a confinement to homes, in order to make it more difficult for terrorists to move about, and to make sure that the innocent were not out in the streets when gunfire might be exchanged between the IDF and the terrorists they located. It’s normal police practice in the U.S., too – people are told to remain in their homes when a manhunt is going on in the neighborhood, so as not to impede or complicate the operation. It makes perfect sense.

Ini observes:

It is a flagrant distortion of history – a stark example of terrorism denial – to claim that, in 2002, “only Palestinians were under threat” while “normal life” continued in Israel. That year was the single deadliest in history for Israelis in terms of terrorism deaths, as a campaign of Palestinian suicide bombings targeted Jewish civilians. Life was turned upside-down for Israelis, many of whom wouldn’t dare enter a restaurant or city bus. The curfews imposed on parts of the West Bank, which the Op-Ed focuses on, was the direct result of a Palestinian terror campaign, which the Op-Ed dishonestly ignores, and which claimed over 400 lives in the time period Shehadeh discusses, a suicide bomber murdered 11 Jewish civilians, including a 5-month-old, a one-year-old, a three-year-old, a seven-year-old, and three other children waiting for prayers to end outside a Haredi yeshiva. At a café across town, 11 more were murdered. Five 18-year-old Jews were shot dead in Gush Katif. A 9-month-old infant was among the dead in an attack along the Mediterranean coast. Seven passengers on a bus were killed by a suicide bomber in the north of Israel. Sixteen Israelis were killed while dining in a Haifa

restaurant. And 30 mostly elderly Jews, including Holocaust survivors, were slaughtered while celebrating Passover in a Netanya hotel.

These attacks were in March alone, and represent only a portion of the deadly terror attacks that month. "Normal life"?

It's one thing for the author to use the coronavirus in the service of anti-Israel activism. That's his prerogative – though editors might be expected to balk at such cynical treatment of the crisis. But to inform readers that the curfew was arbitrary, that only Palestinians were under threat, and that normal life continued elsewhere is to show an egregious disregard for the truth.

In his Times piece, Shehadeh was merely being a good Muslim, emulating Muhammad, who in a famous hadith insisted that "war is deceit." Of course he wants his readers to think that there was no reason for the Israelis to confine Palestinians, in parts of the West Bank, to their homes for a month. It was just one more hideous example of their motiveless malignity, the IDF's wanton cruelty. Shehadeh never mentions a single terrorist attack on Israelis during that month. He doesn't even offer something like this: "In March, 2002, at a time of great communal tension, Israeli soldiers decided to confine Palestinians to their homes on the West Bank." That could pique the curiosity of some readers as to why there was that "great tension"; they just might do a little unwelcome digging online .

Shehadeh wants you to believe that the Israelis were callously leading "normal lives" while the Palestinians were locked up. But as Gilead Ini says, how "normal" is your life when you are afraid to enter a restaurant, or a café, or a hotel, are afraid to wait at a bus stop or ride on a bus? How "normal" is your life when you could be murdered, just as other Israeli

Jews have been murdered, while at a café, or a restaurant, or a Passover celebration in a hotel, or while waiting with babies and toddlers outside a yeshiva, or while hiking with friends through a nature park. Terrorism? What terrorism? Shehadeh didn't see any terrorism. He only knew that he was inexplicably forced to remain in his home for a whole month, along with other Palestinians, while Israelis were being allowed to lead their "normal lives," that is, lives of well-justified fear of being shot, or stabbed, or blown up, by fanatical Muslims conducting their Jihad.

Perhaps someone on the *Times* will have the decency to supply a "correction" to Shehadeh's piece. Here's what that lengthy "correction" could say:

"In the opinion piece ("Stay Vigilant, Says A Curfew Veteran") by Raja Shehadeh that appeared in the March 24 issue, mention was made of Palestinians in the West Bank being confined to their homes for a month in the spring of 2002, as part of an Israeli "military siege." There was no military siege, but rather a series of manhunts for terrorists. People were confined to their homes in order not to impede, by their presence on the streets, those ongoing operations by the IDF, and also to ensure that they were not harmed by being caught in a crossfire. Mr. Shehadeh offered no explanation as to what had happened to cause the Israelis to engage in such manhunts. The month when that curfew was imposed was the deadliest month for terrorist attacks in Israel's entire history. Mr. Shehadeh fails to mention this, but readers should know that more than 400 Israelis were killed during that period.

"A very partial list includes these victims:

"A suicide bomber murdered 11 Jewish civilians, including a 5-month-old, a one-year-old, a three-year-old, a seven-year-old, and three other children waiting for prayers to end outside a Haredi yeshiva. At a café across town, 11 more were murdered.

Five 18-year-old Jews were shot dead in Gush Katif. A 9-month-old infant was among the dead in an attack along the Mediterranean coast. Seven passengers on a bus were killed by a suicide bomber in the north of Israel. Sixteen Israelis were killed while dining in a Haifa restaurant. And 30 mostly elderly Jews, including Holocaust survivors, were slaughtered while celebrating Passover in a Netanya hotel.

“The Times is sorry for the errors and omissions.”

Will *The New York Times* do the decent thing and publish something to that effect, taking special care to include that incomplete list of the Israeli victims from that month’s wave of terrorism? Send the *Times* editors a link to Gilead Ini’s article. It just might provoke some soul-searching.

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