

Traces of Poison—Israel's Dark History Revealed

Salman Abu Sitta, Ahrām Weekly, Cairo, February 27-March 5, 2003

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- Peace Palestine
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Israel, not Iraq, holds that distinction of being the first country in the region to use weapons of mass destruction with genocidal intent. Salman Abu Sitta* digs into a dark history.



At a time when TV screens are filled with images of perceived weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq among people who are on the verge of starvation, the West turns a blind eye to the first biological terrorist in the Middle East, Israel, where the largest depot of WMD between London and Peking is located.

When confronted with the anomaly, the United States ambassador to the UN, John Negroponti, responds with typical cynicism, "Israel did not use these weapons against its people or its neighbours". Assuming that the ambassador is well-informed, this statement is a patent lie. Israel used biological weapons even before it was created on Arab soil in 1948 and ever since. The purpose, according to Ben Gurion, is genocide, and if not complete, the purpose is not to allow the dispossessed Palestinians to return to their homes.

POISONING ACRE WATER SUPPLY:

In the wake of Haifa's occupation on 23 April 1948 by the Zionists, under the nose of the British Mandate forces commended by General Stockwell, a man still historically discredited for this failure, thousands converged on Acre, a nearby city, which was still Arab under the "protection" of the British forces.

Acre was to be the next Zionist target. The Zionists besieged the city from the land side, and started showering the population with a hail of mortar bombs day and night. Famous for its historical walls, Acre could stand the siege for a long time. The city water supply comes from a nearby village, Kabri, about 10kms to the north, through an aqueduct. The Zionists injected typhoid in the aqueduct at some intermediate point which passes through Zionist settlements. (see map)

The story can now be told, thanks to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) files which have now become available, 50 years after the event. A series of reports, under the reference G59/1/GC, G3/82, sent by ICRC delegate de Meuron from 6 May to about 19 May 1948 describe the conditions of the city population, struck by a sudden typhoid epidemic, and the efforts to combat it.



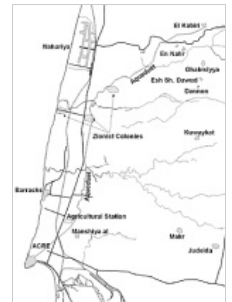
The Location of IIBR and the roads leading to it.

Of particular importance are the minutes of an emergency conference held at the Lebanese Red Cross Hospital in Acre on 6 May, to deal with the typhoid epidemic. The meeting was attended by: Brigadier Beveridge, Chief of British Medical Services and Colonel Bonnet of the British Army, Dr Maclean of the Medical Services, Mr de Meuron, ICRC delegate in addition to other officials of the city. The minutes stated that there are at least 70 known civilian casualties, others may not be reported. It was determined that the infection is "water borne", not due to crowded or unhygienic conditions as claimed by the Israelis. It was decided that a substitute water supply should now come from artesian wells or from the agricultural station, just north of Acre (see map), not from the aqueduct. Water chlorine solution was applied, inoculation of civil population started, movement of civil population was controlled (lest refugees heading north towards Lebanon will carry the typhoid epidemic with them, as intended by

the Zionists).

In his other reports, de Meuron mentioned 55 casualties among British soldiers, who were spirited away to Port Said for hospitalisation. General Stockwell arranged for de Meuron to fly on a military plane to Jerusalem to fetch medicine. The British, who left Palestine in the hands of the Jews, did not want another embarrassing incident to delay their departure.

Brigadier Beveridge told de Meuron that this is "the first time this happened in Palestine". This belies the Israeli story, including that of the Israeli historian Benny Morris, that the epidemic is due to "unhygienic conditions" of the refugees. If that was so, how come there was an almost equal number of casualties among British soldiers? Why did such conditions not cause epidemic in such other concentrations of refugees, under far worse conditions, in Jaffa, Lydda, Nazareth and Gaza?



Acre Aqueduct feeding the city was poisoned by typhoid injected by Zionists in May 1948.



Photograph of the Shukri Al-Taji Mansion which became IIBR, the centre of biological terrorism.

ICRC delegate, de Meuron admired greatly the heroic efforts of Arab doctors, Al-Dahhan and Al-Araj from the Lebanese Red Cross hospital in Acre, Dr Dabbas from Haifa and Mrs Bahai from Haifa.

The city of Acre, now burdened by the epidemic, fell easy prey to the Zionists. They intensified their bombardment. Trucks carrying loudspeakers proclaimed, "Surrender or commit suicide. We will destroy you to the last man". That was not a figure of speech. Palumbo, in *The Palestinian Catastrophe*, notes the "typical" case of Mohamed Fayez Soufi. Soufi with friends went to get food from their homes in a new Acre suburb. They were caught by Zionist soldiers and forced at gun point to drink cyanide. Soufi faked swallowing the poison. The others were not so lucky, they died in half an hour.

Lieutenant Petite, a French UN observer, reported that looting was being conducted in a systematic manner by the army, carrying off furniture, clothes and anything useful for the new Jewish immigrants and also part of "a Jewish plan to prevent the return of the refugees". Lieutenant Petite also reported that the Jews had murdered 100 Arab civilians in Acre, particularly those who refused to leave.

More horrors have been reported by de Meuron. He spoke of "a reign of terror" and the case of the rape of a girl by several soldiers and killing her father. He also wrote that all male civilians were taken to concentration camps and considered "prisoners of war" although they were not soldiers. This left many women and children homeless, without protection, subject to many acts of violence. He also notes the absence of water and electricity. He demanded from the Zionists a list of civilians detained as "prisoners of war", demanded to know their whereabouts and permission to visit them. More importantly he asked that Acre be placed under ICRC protection and care. Anyone who reads the familiar dry and matter-of-fact language of ICRC would not fail to notice the tone of abhorrence of Zionist actions in de Meuron reports from Acre.

This episode, which started with poisoning Acre water supply and ended with the collapse of the city, the depopulation of its inhabitants, and its occupation by the Jews, whetted their appetite to try this crime again.

GAZA POISONING:

Two weeks later, after their "success" in Acre, the Zionists struck again. This time in Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of refugees had gathered after their villages in southern Palestine were occupied. The end however was different.

The following cable was sent from the commander of the Egyptian Forces in Palestine to General Headquarters in Cairo:

"15.20 hrs, 24 May [1948] Our Intelligence forces captured two Jews, David Horeen and David Mizrahi, loitering around army positions. They were interrogated and confessed they had been sent by Officer Moshe to poison the army [and the peoples'] water supply. They carried with them water bottles divided in the middle. The top part has potable water and the bottom part has a liquid contaminated with typhoid and dysentery, equipped with a rear opening from which the liquid can be released. They confessed they were members of a 20-strong team sent from Rehovot for the same purpose. Both have written their confession in Hebrew and signed it. We have taken the necessary medical precautions".

In Ben Gurion's War Diary, the following entry is found on 27 May 1948:

“

[Chief of Staff Yigal Yadin] picked up a cable from Gaza saying they captured Jews carrying malaria germs and gave instructions not to drink water". This is typical of Ben Gurion's oblique writing of history. He was fully aware of the weight of history when such crimes are discovered. Nuremberg trials were held only three years before. More on the background of this cable was given in Yeruham Cohen's book, *In Daylight and Night Darkness*, Tel Aviv, 1969, pp66-68 (in Hebrew).

The criminals were executed three months later. On 22 July 1948, the [Palestinian] Higher Arab Committee (AHC) submitted a 13-page report to the United Nations accusing the Jews of using "inhuman" weapons and waging a genocide war against the Arabs through the use of bacteria and germs, developed in specially-built laboratories. The report also accuses the Jews (the word Israel was not used) of spreading cholera in Egypt and Syria in 1947/48. The story was picked up by the award-winning journalist, Thomas J Hamilton of the *New York Times* and published on 24 July 1948. The story now has a new twist—adding Egypt and Syria to the Jewish field of operations.

CHOLERA IN EGYPT AND SYRIA:

The summer of 1947 was hot with diplomatic activity. The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was busy touring Palestine and Arab countries in order to propose the partition of Palestine such that the new Jewish immigrants to Palestine, who controlled only six per cent of Palestine under the British Mandate, be given a big chunk of Palestine (turned out to be 54 per cent) in order to establish a foreign state in the midst of Arab land.

The Arabs, still under the tutelage of Britain, were debating how to resist the Western-supported scheme to take away their land. The forces to reckon with were neighbouring countries with common borders with Palestine. Lebanon was weak. Trans-Jordan was still controlled directly by the British and King Abdullah was conciliatory to the Jews. This left Egypt, the stronger Arab country and Syria, recently freed from the clutches of the French Mandate. Syria was the centre of Arab resistance to the foreign occupation of Palestine. Training centres were established in Qatana to prepare Arab volunteers to enter Palestine under the banner of "The Arab Rescue Army". Egypt and Palestine were thus the most important targets.

In his 220-page continually updated report, entitled: *Bioterrorism and Biocrimes: The Illicit Use of Biological Agents since 1900*, dated February 2001, Dr W Seth Carus of the Center for Counterproliferation Research, National Defence University, Washington, DC, lists the following subtitle, p.87: Case 1947-01: "Zionist" Terrorists 1947-1948.

Under this section, he mentions that the cholera outbreaks in Syria and Egypt received extensive attention in the international press. The first

report about the cholera in Egypt was published in the Times of London on 26 September, 1947, p4. By the time the final cases appeared in January 1948, 10,262 people died.

He also states that the outbreak in Syria is much smaller. It was limited to two towns, about 60 kilometres south of Damascus, i.e. close to Palestine border. The first report appeared in the New York Times on 22 December, 1947, p5.

The Syrian army formed a cordon sanitaire and the casualties were limited to 44, including 18 deaths. Soon after, the Beirut French-language newspaper, Orient, reported that several Zionist agents, who employed cholera to disrupt the mobilisation of the volunteers' army, were arrested. Their destiny is unknown.

These incidents, together with Gaza poisoning, Carus states, were described in the AHC complaint to the UN and quotes the report in saying that:

“ The Jews plan to use this inhuman weapon against the Arabs in the Middle East in their war of extermination.

Carus adds information from other sources about the Gaza poisoning. Rachel Katzman, Horeen's sister, Carus stated, said: "I met one of [my brother's] commanders in a lecture in Jerusalem. I asked him whether my brother had really attempted to poison wells. 'These were the weapons we had', he said, 'and that's that.'"

Carus also adds another source about Acre poisoning: This source sates, "This account also claims that the Israelis poisoned the water supply of the Arab town of Acre, causing a major outbreak, and other Arab villages to prevent the villagers from returning, citing military historian Uri Milstein as a source" [Wendy Barnaby, The Plague Makers: The Secret World of Biological Warfare, London, Vision Paperbacks, 1997, pp114-116].

The writer has obtained a copy of an e-mail in which an Israeli peace activist asked Uri Milstein about Acre poisoning story. Milstein, the military historian, is described in the e-mail as "very knowledgeable, intelligent, courageous, original, honest"—although his views belong to the Israeli far-right (!). Milstein replied:

“ I am sorry to say it, but the story is true and the name of the operation was "Shlach Lachmecha"—that is "donate your bread", which is a part of Hebrew saying: donate your bread because sooner or later you will get it back, meaning you have to be generous and one day, you will profit from it yourself. Is this not a cute name for an operation to use biological weapons?

HOW DID BEN GURION START ALL THIS?

On the fourth of March 1948, Ben Gurion wrote a letter to Ehud Avriel, one of the Jewish Agency operatives in Europe, ordering him to recruit East European Jewish scientists who could "either increase [our] capacity to kill masses or to cure masses; both are important". This truncated quotation is given by Avner Cohen who cited an author in Ben Gurion Research Centre at Sdeh Boker.

To understand the meaning of this quotation we must recall Ben Gurion's doctrine: the destruction of the Palestinian Society in Palestine is a necessary condition for the establishment of the state of Israel on its ruins. As a corollary to this doctrine, ethnic cleansing became an integral part of Zionism. If Palestinians cannot be removed by massacres and expulsion, they shall be removed by "extermination". Such words were specifically used in AHC letter mentioned above. The significance of this word is that it was rarely used by Arabs regarding their fate. Europe's horrors were either remote or not widely known then.

The caveat by Ben Gurion as "to cure the masses" is yet another twist by Ben Gurion with an eye on history. For it is inconceivable that the Arabs have the ability or the will in 1948 to cause "mass killing" of the Jews using biological weapons. As it happened, Ben Gurion was the first to use such weapons. His legacy, much more refined and expanded, remains true till today.

Avner Cohen, a senior fellow at the Center for International and Security Studies, and the Program on Security and Disarmaments at the University of Maryland, wrote a comprehensive paper on Israel's chemical and biological weapons, which was published in the Non-Proliferation Review, Autumn 2001. Notwithstanding his background, which furnishes a sympathetic understanding of Israel's motives, his paper traces in 50 pages of detail, from open sources and few interviews, the establishment and development of Israel's centre for biological terrorism.

Thrusting Israel in the heart of the Arab world, Ben Gurion was determined to achieve this extraordinary objective against all odds. "We are inferior to other peoples in our number, but no other people is superior to us in intellectual prowess", Ben Gurion remarked.

In the 1940s, he gathered around him Ernst David Bergmann, Avraham Marcus (Marek) Klingberg (from the Red Army) and the brothers Aharon and Ephraim Katachalsky (Katzir)—all experts in microbiology. They formed the nucleus of the Science Corps in the Haganah during the British Mandate. Ephraim Katachalsky was named commander of this new unit, renamed HEMED, in May 1948. A dispute arose between Chaim Weizmann who wished to establish a scientific institute for "clean" science, while Ben Gurion insisted on building a "dirty" centre for biological weapons. Both got their wishes realised. Weizmann Institute for scientific research was built in Rehovot. A new unit within HEMED, devoted to biological weapons and named HEMED BEIT, was formed as a branch of the Israeli Army. Its head was Alexander Keynan, a microbiologist from the medical school at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

With the depopulation of 530 Palestinian towns and villages in Al-Nakba of 1948, many buildings and homes became vacant and over half of the Jewish immigrants in the 1950s were housed in them. The Chief of Staff Ygal Yadin selected a home for the new biological weapons development unit in a mansion located within a large orange grove west of Nes Ziona. This unit, publicly known as Israel Institute for Biological Research (IIBR), is still there today. The building was expanded, surrounded by a three metre wall, movement sensors and watch towers.

While IIBR represents the front of a scientific institution, producing a "clean" papers and receiving invitations to scientific conferences, the real biological weapons developed is carried within IIBR in a highly classified centre (Machon 2, one of four) funded and controlled directly by the Ministry of Defence.

IIBR Web site states that the institute's staff comprises 300 employees, 120 of them PhD holders, in addition to 100 certified technicians. But these figures are misleading because there are many other scientists who hold positions in microbiology departments in faculties of medicine in Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Ephraim Katzir was rewarded for his service to the state by being elected as president of Israel in 1973. Aharon Katzir was killed in the Japanese attack on Lydda airport on 30 May, 1972.

Soon after the poisoning of Acre and Gaza, Ben Gurion launched a crash project to develop "a cheap non-conventional capability" in 1955. Why the rush? As Cohen reports, Munya Mardor, the founder of Israel's Weapons Development Authority (RAFAEL), says that Ben Gurion was "evidently concerned that we would not meet the deadline he had set, worrying that the enemy would have such capability and we would have nothing to deter or retaliate". It turned out that the rush was to meet the deadline for the Suez Tripartite Aggression of 1956. Ben Gurion was prepared to bomb Egypt with biological weapons if his campaign failed. As if that was not enough, Israel signed an agreement with France to build a nuclear programme in the same year. Ben Gurion's emissary to France was none other than the peace-loving diplomat Shimon Pinsky (Perez).

Anver Cohen says that the location of IIBR is classified and not shown on maps or aerial photographs. It is still possible, however, to determine its location with accuracy.

WHERE IS IIBR?

In the 1930s, the road from Ramleh to Nabi Rubin, a popular religious site visited annually, passes through Wadi Hunein, a good sandy soil with spots of marshes. The wealthy Al-Taji Al-Farouki family from Ramleh purchased large tracts of this land and developed it into successful citrus groves which exported hundreds of thousands of Jaffa orange boxes to Europe. Shukri Al-Taji built for himself a beautiful mansion—a two-storey rectangular building on top of a hill, on a plot of land, 134,029 m² in area. The plot number is 549/32 and the property deed is entered in the Land Registry under E42/260 on 16 March 1932. He also built a mosque on the asphalt road from Jaffa to Qubeiba. On another hill, one kilometre to the west, his cousin Abdel-Rahman Hamed Al-Taji built a house which consists of several buildings. The mansions in the midst of vast orange groves depicted an idyllic scene in quiet surroundings.

This is the location chosen by Yigal Yadin for his biological weapons research. Shukri Al Taji mansion became the home of IIBR. The IIBR Web site (www.iibr.gov.il) proudly shows on the opening page its building entrance, which is nothing but Shukri's mansion with its arched façade and tall lush trees. Shukri died broken hearted in Cairo some ten years later.

If you drive from Nes Ziona going west on road 4303, then turn left at road 42 heading south, you will find IIBR at your right at a distance of 500 metres. The coordinates of IIBR are:

According to Palestine/ Israel grid: 128.263 E, 147.022 N

New Israel grid: 178.263 E, 647.022 N

Geographical coordinates: E 34D 46' 27 N 31D 55' 7

The area is called "Ayalon" in Hebrew. Directly to the west on the sea coast is the missile launching pad of Palmahim.

Other Al-Taji buildings were expropriated and used. The mosque is transformed into a synagogue, named "gulat Israel". Abdel-Rahman's house became a mental hospital.

CHASING THE CULPRITS:

Sara Leibovitz-Dar is a persistent investigative journalist. The trauma experienced by her parents in their native Lithuania left an indelible mark on her. She abhorred injustice and, particularly, the meek acceptance of it. She investigated the Gaza and Acre poisoning and shooting down of the civilian Libyan aircraft. The Israeli military historian, Uri Milstein, identified for her the names of the officers responsible for biological crimes.

In 1993, Sara tried to interview the commander who was responsible for Acre poisoning. He refused to talk. "Why do you look for troubles that took place 45 years ago?" he asked. "I know nothing about this. What would you gain by publishing?"

Again, Sara interviewed the officer responsible for Gaza poisoning. He refused to respond, "You will not get answers on these questions. Not from me and not from anyone". Sara was persistent. She asked Colonel Shlomo Gur, former HEMED chief, whether he was aware of the secret operations in 1948. "We heard about the typhoid epidemics in Acre and about the Gaza operations. There were many rumours but I did not know whether they were true or not", he responded.

Sara published her findings in Hadashot under the title "Microbes in State Service", on 13 August, 1993, pp6-10. Sara, who now moved to Ha'aretz, concluded with the following comment,

"What was done then with deep conviction and zealotry is now concealed with shame". True to the Israeli tradition, Sara declined twice to respond by e-mail to an enquiry from the writer.

Not all are afraid to talk. Naeim Giladi is an Iraqi Jew who was lured to Israel by Mossad agents in the early 1950s. Working with the zealotry and dedication of a new Zionist, he soon found out that within the Ashkenazi establishment "there was not much opportunity for those of us who were second class citizens", he told the editor of The Link in New York where he immigrated after leaving Israel. "I began to find out about the barbaric methods to rid the fledgling state of as many Palestinians as possible. The world recoils today at the thought of

bacteriological warfare, but Israel was probably the first to actually use it in the Middle East. Jewish forces would empty Arab villages of their population often by threats, sometimes by gunning down a half-dozen young men so that the Arabs could not return. The Israelis put typhus and dysentery bacteria in the water wells to prevent the refugees from returning". [The Link, Vol. 31 Issue 2, April-May 1998].

Another witness who spoke, former Mossad agent, Victor Ostrovsky, claims that lethal tests have been performed on Arab prisoners inside the IIBR compound.

THE DUTCH INVESTIGATION:

On 4 October, 1992 at 6.21pm, El Al Flight 1862 left Amsterdam's Schiphol airport on route to Tel Aviv, carrying three crewmen, one passenger and 114 tons of freight. Seven minutes later, it crashed in a high-rise apartment complex in Bijlmer. El Al Flight 1862 became the worst air disaster in Dutch history, killing at least 47 (the actual number is unknown because many victims were immigrants) and destroyed the health of 3000 Dutch residents. Cases of mysterious illnesses, rashes, difficulty in breathing, nervous disorders and cancer began to sprout in that neighbourhood and beyond.

The Dutch government, in collusion with Israel, lied to its citizens saying the plane was carrying perfumes and flowers. Some flowers! It took the energetic and persistent science editor in the Dutch daily NRC Handelsblad, Karel Knip, several years to discover the facts. Knip published on 27 November 1999 the most detailed and factual published investigation about the workings of biological terrorism housed in IIBR.

First he found out that the plane was carrying 50 gallons, among other things, of DMMP a substance used to make a quarter ton of the deadly nerve gas Sarin, 20 times as lethal as cyanide. It was carrying a shipment from Solkatronic Chemicals of Morrisville, Pennsylvania to IIBR in Israel, under a US Department of Commerce licence. This is contrary to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) to which the US, but not Israel, is party.

With dogged determination, Knip reviewed the scientific literature produced by IIBR and the microbiology departments of the Faculty of Medicine in the University of Tel Aviv and the Hebrew University since 1950. He was able to identify 140 scientists involved in biological weapons (BW) research. The number could be more as scientists have dual positions or they move around. Many take their sabbaticals invariably in the United States. There are strong links with Walter Reed Army Institute, the Uniformed Services University, the American Chemical and Biological Weapons (CBW) Center in Edgewood and the University of Utah.

Remarkably, Knip was able to identify three categories of IIBR production: diseases, toxins and convulsants, and their development in each decade of the five past decades. (See table)

The research moved from virus and bacteria to toxins because they are many times more poisonous. Nerve gases known as Tabun, Soman, Sarin, VX, Cyclo-Sarin, RVX and Amiton are all deadly gases and function in the same way.

Knip went further. He sought the assistance of experts in this field such as Professor Julian Perry Robinson, University of Sussex, Brighton, Dr Jean Pascal Zanders of SIPRI, Stockholm and Professor Malcolm Dando, University of Bradford. They guided his research and explained his findings.

Knip also discovered close cooperation between IIBR and the British-American BW programme. This programme deals with viruses and bacteria spread by rodents and insects and covers smallpox, fungal diseases and Legionnaires disease. It is to be noted that there was a breakout of this disease in Philadelphia some years ago, and, surprisingly, in an Eilat hotel in mid-January this year.

The interest in the plant poison Elate-Ricin is confined to very few institutions beside IIBR. It will be recalled that amateur biologists were arrested in UK in January attempting to prepare Ricin.

The novel and dangerous trend in BW research in IIBR is the development of incapacitants which paralyse, disorient, cause uncontrollable movements and severe pain in the stomach. Most of these incapacitants have antidotes to repair the damage done. These incapacitants have been and are used against the Palestinians in the Intifada.

There is also extensive collaboration on BW research with Germany and Holland. That is probably the reason for the Dutch official silence over the deadly crash over Amsterdam.

The cooperation with the US is quite open. The Congress "Joint Medical, Biological and Nuclear Defence Research Programs" openly lists cooperation with Israel on nerve agents and convulsants under the guise of finding antidotes. It is plainly simple to realise that in order to develop the antidote it is necessary to identify the poison itself. Dr Avigdor Shafferman, IIBR director, is a frequent contributor to this programme. (see www.acq.osd.mil/cp/nbc98/annexd.pdf)—Annex D.

The Preparatory Commission for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague turns a blind eye to the Israeli criminal activities. Ironically, Israeli researchers guide OPCW on methods to detect Chemical Weapons. Israeli researchers R Barak, A Lorber and Z Boger of IIBR, CHEMO Solutions and Rotem Industries respectively propose methods to detect chemical warfare agents. No international body seems to be willing to apply these methods on Israel.

The mechanism to do this monitoring is available. The American Armed Forces Medical Intelligence Center has the wherewithal to inspect suspect laboratories. But it is unlikely to see a team of inspectors headed by an American Blix searching the secret chambers of IIBR.

This may, however, not apply to conscientious scientists. Professor Keith Yamamoto, of the University of California and Dr Jonathan King of MIT criticised the American BW research and showed that attempting to modify toxins (as IIBR does) can hardly be considered "defensive" research. But Israel's turn in such criticism seems far-off at present.

THE PALESTINIAN VICTIMS:

The biological crimes perpetrated against the Palestinians in Acre and Gaza in 1948 are still being enacted today.

In 1997, Mossad agents tried to assassinate Khaled Mish'al, Hamas Political Bureau's director in Amman. King Hussein was furious at the

blatant violation of Jordan's sovereignty and of the Peace Treaty with Israel. As the attempt failed, thanks to Mish'al's bodyguard, Israel sent a lady doctor with the antidote. The toxin used is likely to be SEB applied through a special gun which has a range of 50 metres. and could inject the toxin in the neck.

The stories about nerve gas applied against school children abound. So are the cases in which CBW are used. Neil Sammonds lists these cases:

- * Chemical defoliants against Palestinian crops in Ain Al-Beida in 1968, Aqraba in 1972, Mejdal Beni Fadil in 1978 and Negev in 2002.
- * Chemical Weapons, including hydrogen cyanide, nerve gas and phosphorous shells in the 1982 war on Lebanon.
- * Lethal gas against Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners.

But the case which was widely publicised all over the world and fully documented by several international NGOs is the application of incapacitants, particularly in Khan Younis, in February 2001. The pictures of victims twisting with severe pain and uncontrollable convulsions were splashed on TV screens everywhere.

James Brooks of "Just Peace in Palestine/Israel" gave a detailed account of this BW attack on civilians day by day as it happened. First, the victims thought it was tear gas. It had a faint odour like mint. It smelled "like sugar", one victim reported. It changed colour "like a rainbow". Fifteen minutes later, the victim felt that his "stomach was torn apart, with burning sensation in [his] chest, could not breathe". Soon convulsions started. The victim would jump up and down, left and right, thrashing limbs around, with a kind of hysteria. Some victims were unconscious. The victim would vomit incessantly and then pain would return. This would go on for days or, for some, weeks.

In addition to the numerous press and human rights reports, convulsing poison gas victims in Khan Younis were filmed by the American filmmaker James Longley, in a documentary that "pushes the viewer headlong into the tumult of the Israeli-occupied Gaza". Longley compiled a 43-page document of interviews with 19 gas victims, their relatives, nurses and doctors.

These devilish incapacitants drew the protest of some NGOs but little else. No international investigation or censure of any kind, even though this was repeatedly used in March in Al-Birch, Nablus and West Bank and yet again in Gaza later that month.

Just the contrary. There was a wide-spread Zionist-orchestrated condemnation and disapproval when, in November 1999, Suha Arafat, the president's wife, charged the Israelis with the use of "poison gas" in the presence of the aspiring politician Hillary Clinton. The height of hypocrisy and cynicism was attained when the incensed Israeli authorities declared that Suha's factual statement is "a violation of the peace process"!

There are as yet unseen and long-term effects of toxins and incapacitants. On 3 February, 2003, Dr Khamis Al-Najjar, director of Cancer Research Centre of the Ministry of Health in Ramallah reported an alarming increase in cancer cases, especially among women and children. The report covers the period 1995-2000 and shows 3646 cases, with more than half among females. The cases in Gaza are more than the West Bank. The report, citing the rate of increase, predicts that cases will triple in the near future. Taking note of the Israelis' paranoia about Palestinian demography and judging by their previous record, it is possible that the accumulative effect of the Israeli application of toxins and incapacitants has produced the increased incidence of cancer cases. A similar study is yet to be made on fetus and newborn babies.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Israel has signed but not ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention and is not a party to the Biological Weapons Convention. Israel does not recognise the application of the Fourth Geneva Convention on the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank and Gaza, as the rest of the world does. This is not surprising. Israel violates every rule in the book.

Article-147 of the Geneva Convention stipulates that to "willingly cause [civilians] great suffering or serious injury to body or health" is a "grave breach", which, according to Article-146, requires all High Contracting Parties to "search for persons alleged to have committed or to have ordered to commit such grave breaches" and must "bring such person regardless of their nationality before their own courts". If this is applied, Sharon and his officers will stand behind bars in a Belgian court for a long time.

There is a plethora of conventions which Israel constantly violated, starting with Geneva Protocol of 1925 on Poisonous Gas to the 1993 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons.

With this background, it seems a mockery of justice to despatch hundreds of inspectors to destroyed workshops and private homes in Iraq, while huge tons of weapons of mass destruction are staring them in the eye in Israel. Perhaps the 10 million people in 600 cities around the world who demonstrated against the war on Iraq on 15 and 16 February were trying to point out this irony in refusing this war. Some placards said so in clear terms.

Perhaps the domestic voice in Israel may be listened to more attentively. The Mayor of Nes Ziona, located a mere 10 kilometres away from Tel Aviv centre, complained that the proximity of IIR to his city poses a great danger to the population, in case of accident. He is right. The Science Committee in the Knesset reported 22 casualties including three fatal cases in the last 15 years. But these were mild cases.

What would be the situation if a big accident happens on a windy day, causing explosion of tons of toxics and its evaporation in the sky, in a congested neighbourhood, where three million people live in an area of barely 1,000 sq. kms, that is 35x35 km? Ben Gurion, while cooking his evil plans to "exterminate" the Arabs, did not envisage this scenario in his wildest dreams.

* The writer is president of the Palestine Land Society, London.

DISEASES

1950-1960

Yersinia pestis (plague)

Rickettsia species (typhus)

Rabies

1960-1970

West Nile virus

Leptospira species (e.g. Weil's disease)

Cryptococcus neoformans (a yeast)

Sindbis virus

Newcastle disease (birds)

1970-1980

African Swine fever

Coxiella burnetti (Q fever)

Western Equine encephalomyelitis

Semliki Forest virus

Brucella abortus (brucellosis)

Pasteurella multocida (fowl cholera)

1980-1990

Lassa virus

EMC (encephalomyocarditis)

Legionella

Rift Valley fever

Marek's disease (poultry)

Coccidioides immitis (fungus)

TOXINS

1960-1970

Elatericin

1970-1980

Saxitoxin

Tetrodotoxin

Pilocarpine-derivatives

Wasp venom

Elatericin-derivatives

Brevetoxin

SEB (Staphylococcus enterotoxin B)

Scorpion venom

1. Cobra venom SEA (Staph. enterotoxin A)

Cholera toxin

Bungarotoxin

Pseudomonas aeruginosa exotoxin A Shiga Toxin

1. Conotoxin

Diphtheria toxin

INCAPACITANTS

1. Bradykinin

Psychotropic substances

Cannabis (hashish)

Phencyclidine (hallucinogen)

1. Chlorpromazin (anti-psychoticum)

Cannabis-derivatives (tetrahydrocannabinol)

Fentanyl (narcoticum)

QNB-derivatives (hallucinogen)

Enkephalin

Endorphin

Morphin

1. Etonitazen

Phencyclidine derivatives

Benzodiazepin derivatives (convulsants)

Heroin

Cannabis derivatives (amino-cannabinoida)