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Part 1: "Genghis Khan With a Computer?"

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In this four part series exclusive to the Huffington Post, novelist and essayist Douglas Anthony Cooper examines the accusations of genocide that have been made against Israel by its critics.

Might Israel be an evil nation? It is a question I admit to asking myself. Am I on the wrong side of history? Liberals tend to question themselves -- they question their ideas and their allies. I have always considered Israel a friend. Might I be wrong?

Well-meaning people have been wrong before. Peter Handke, a writer whose early work was important to me, somehow convinced himself that Slobodan Milosevic was falsely accused of war crimes in Bosnia. Ingmar Bergman admitted in "Laterna Magica" that, "For many years, I was on Hitler's side, delighted by his success and saddened by his defeats."

Truly decent men on the left cheered for Stalin, then awoke to realize that they had been applauding butchery. (Some never woke up. Few sights are more pathetic than a famous

American academic insisting well into the 21st century that "Stalinism worked.")

I do not want to be one of them. One quotation in particular sticks with me, from an academic often cited by Liberals who despise Zionism: "Sometimes I feel that Israel has come out of the boils of hell, a satanic state." That is Norman Finkelstein, a Jewish academic who has spent much of his life analyzing this issue. He has called the nation: "Genghis Khan with a computer." I wanted to know whether he was right.

Normal Finkelstein's hypothesis -- echoed by thousands, including many in the *Huffington Post* community -- can in fact be tested. If you are Jewish -- if you are *human* -- you want to know whether he is right.

I did research. I did not go down into the pits to count bodies, but there are reputable scholars of genocide who have devoted their lives to scouring the morgues and the graves and the archives. Their findings are easily accessed. The tallies are used by propagandists on both sides of the debate, but everyone respectable agrees on the approximate numbers. We know how many have died.

When it came to Israel, in particular, I wanted to look into the very worst: the ugliest that modern Israeli history can offer. If I had been averting my eyes from atrocities, I wanted to know. I am not a fool and I am not corrupt -- if I were looking full into the face of evil, I would know.

I have my answer.

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People tend to misuse the word "genocide," because it is the only common term we have to describe unimaginable slaughter. Other words have been proposed, unsuccessfully: "democide," for instance. Strictly speaking, genocide is the deliberate effort to erase an entire people. History offers very few examples. You can murder millions, yet not be guilty of genocide -- it is a question of intent, not mathematics.

The Holocaust was an effort to erase not simply every individual Jew, but everything associated with the people. Their entire being. Their "genus:" class, or kind. Hence, "genocide." It was a proposal to eliminate Judaism on every level: physically, culturally, theologically. If there had been only a thousand Jews in the world, murdering them with this intention would have been genocide. Since there were millions, it required the slaughter of millions.

Many people, including those commenting on the *Huffington Post*, are not especially careful in their use of the term. We hear this, for instance, from Canadian Randy Ragoonanan who writes:

> "What people dont [sic] understand is that Israel's goal is for colonization of the Middle East towards Iraq, their genocide of the Palestinians is one of the goals but they would like to wipe out entire region, look at their war with Lebanon and Golan Heights. Israel wants to murder millions more ethnicities."

This kind of language is epidemic, but it is possible to address the basic charge without being pedantic every time the word comes up. Note that "genocide" in the strictest sense presupposes

"genocide" in the less precise sense: In order to commit genocide, you must at the very least aim to murder an entire people. On top of this, your intent must be the eradication of their nature.

In short, no matter how you define the word -- and academics argue this point fiercely -- the genocide of the Palestinians, who number in the millions, would involve at the very least Israel's concerted effort to commit murder on an unspeakable scale.

If you do not know the actual figures pertaining to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, I urge you to stop reading now. Try to figure out what you believe them to be. Write down the numbers that come to mind. Especially if you are one of the many who believe that Israel is a genocidal nation. Done? Good. It will be interesting to see where your perception lies in relation to the truth.

A *Huffington Post* reader named "Macready" knows where he stands. He writes in the comment forum: "the only suicide bombers I have ever felt sympathy and empathy with are the Palestinians . . . make no mistake Israel is committing genocide."

Macready participates a great deal in the *Huffington Post* community: 17,289 comments to date. Many of them are in fact benign, even thoughtful. So we ought to examine this accusation.

It is best to begin with the familiar: modern genocide, in the looser sense of the term. By this we mean slaughter on a scale so vast that an ordinary homicide seems almost trivial by comparison. Prodigious butchers rarely keep perfect books, but a consensus has slowly formed among scholars. Timothy Snyder has done important work regarding Stalin's death toll: a particularly difficult business because you must determine if and how famine should be taken into account. He settles on a relatively low number for Stalin: nine million, if you take into account foreseeable deaths from deportation, hunger, and incarceration.

Mao's regime of murder is also notoriously difficult to calculate. You can weigh scholars and get close: "If we line up the 14 sources which claim to be complete, the median falls in the 45.75 to 52.5 million range." If you discount the Great Leap Forward, and focus simply on deliberate slaughter, he remains responsible for the murder of 10 million Chinese. I shall ignore Hitler here, because those figures are said by critics of Zionism to figure in propaganda used to whitewash Israel's crimes. Finkelstein has famously called it, "The Holocaust Industry." You can dig up those numbers on your own.

Here are approximate figures for just some of the 20th century's other mass murders, leaning heavily on necrometrics.com, which is a solid meta-source. The Belgian Congo: eight million. Fascist Japan: four million (very approximate). Pol Pot's killing fields: 1.65 million. Kim Il Sung's purges: 1.6 million. The Turkish massacre of the Armenians: 1.2 million.

When you include nations responsible for the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, the list is mind-numbing. Here is a very partial list of current regimes guilty of murdering at least 100,000 unarmed civilians: Pakistan, Rwanda, Iran, Somalia, Vietnam, Liberia, Burma, Sudan.

And then there is Israel.

Most people are aware that Israel has not murdered tens of millions of Palestinians. I am sure that some consider the number to be over a million: innocent Palestinian women and children, murdered by the Jews. The more historically aware will realize that this probably could not be the case, given the region's population, but surely Israel is responsible for hundreds of thousands of

fatalities? If not the death of civilians, then at least the death of armed combatants. Here we must be on solid ground. In 1948, the Arab population under the British Mandate was close to 1,200,000 people. A genocidal nation -- correction, *the* genocidal nation -- must have undammed a river of blood. Huffington Post user AlexLiveFree warns us, urgently: "Israel's genocide of Palestinians needs to be stopped."

Those of you who took me up on my challenge earlier, to write down the figures you associate with the Israeli massacre of the Palestinians, might now wish to compare numbers.

Tomorrow Part II: Murder by Numbers.