

Eyes in Gaza

Review of Mads Gilbert & Eric Fosse: Øyne i Gaza (Norsk Gyldendal 2009)
ISBN 978 -82-05-39381-3 – English translation under the title of this review in preparation.

Shortly after Christmas, on December 27, 2008, Israel attacked Gaza in a ferocious attack, ending only the day before Barack Obama's inauguration as President of the USA on January 20, 2009 [1]. The Authors, two renowned Norwegian professors in anaesthesia and surgery, resp., arrived in Egypt two days later and (after one days delay through the Egyptian authorities) on New Year's Eve. They are thus the World's eyes to another tragically chapter in the Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

An important part of the book's content is reflected in the article already published during the war in Lancet [2], an outstanding actuality for a medical journal. Several interviews were given to the press in Gaza (later in Egypt and Norway) by the two doctors. Unfortunately, it cannot be said that the deep remorse expressed by persons abroad in the least changed the course of this large crime against humanity.

The authors are taking great pain at an objective description with many figures to underline the claims, but it certainly makes the book more readable that also separate cases are described rather detailed. Also their own living conditions (in cold surroundings because all windows were broken, with little food and equipment, that was already scarce and worn out as the war began) and certain episodes make the book readable:

Many windows were broken as a big mosque across the street, full of prayers, was bombed before their arrival; another reason was the sonic booms made by low-flying F16 fighters. The first day of the war had been the worst with more than 300 fatalities (in total, the war demanded 1,415 dead and many more severely wounded, roughly a third children but very few 'militants'). The first day, some 80 operations had been performed, later 6-44 daily (with a maximum the day the vegetable market was bombed). In order to manage this flow, two patients were arranged for parallel operations, and also in the entrance to the operating room, operations were occasionally carried out.

A new kind of explosives (DIME) was extensively described from the victim's point of view. Three other problematic weapons were known to have been employed but appears not to have been met (reviewer's remark: white phosphor, depleted uranium and cluster bombs). Experimental development of new weapons is a steady scope of Israel's many wars, although they get most weapons from USA.

Rescue missions were a danger in themselves. In spite of appropriate marking, ambulances were attacked and many paramedics killed. In one case, about 100 Palestinians were commanded into a house that was thereafter bombed; rescue forces were refused access for four days and then allowed, but not approaching more than several hundred meters. Many of the entombed Palestinians were by then dead.

The most severely wounded patients required intensive care, and there were not enough respirators to all who needed. With acceptance of the Israelis – a humanist gesture – 16 ventilated patients were permitted evacuation to Egypt. Not halfway down the Gaza Strip, this gesture ended – enough fresh air! The two physicians should have been evacuated on this occasion but were forced to return with their patients. A couple of days later, on January 10, 2009, they succeeded getting out of the strip, joining another convoy, but now the Egyptians refused to let them in. Only after a terrible night, during which they narrowly escaped an Israeli air-force attack on the border station (although in Egypt), they were given permission to proceed.

A chapter (13) of the book describes the consequences of the prolonged blockade on the hunger and general poverty in Gaza. In the last chapter, the Israeli war-crimes are considered. The book itself, perhaps more than the Goldstone-report [3], is a document of one of the greatest crimes against humanity in the third millennium (which in its young age is already 'rich' in them). It bears witness to them, as the international community's eyes in Gaza.

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1 <http://www.schou.de/terrorwar/2nd%20Gaza%20Warx.pdf>

2 Gilbert M, Fosse E. Inside Gaza's Al-Shifa hospital. Lancet 17 Jan. 2009;373:200- 2

3 http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/docs/UNFFMG_C_Report.pdf