

# Pavlovian Obsession: Human Rights Watch Targets Ariel Sharon

By Gerald M. Steinberg/JNS.org

Like vultures circling a carcass, the leaders of New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) prepared yet another attack against Ariel Sharon. Within hours of his death on January 11, HRW proved that their Pavlovian obsession has not waned, publishing a press release that again highlighted this organization's double standards and irresponsible disregard of both facts and international law. Sharon, as HRW's stand-in for all issues related to Israel, was accused of every conceivable "war crime" and violation, while the history of mass terror and other forms of Arab and Palestinian brutality was erased. Once again, the radical ideologues and immoral Israel-bashers who control HRW demonstrated that in their eyes, Israelis are sub-human and therefore have no human rights.

The inflated accusations and abusive language in HRW's statement following Sharon's death stand in glaring contrast to their immoral silence regarding Arab and Middle Eastern terror leaders and tyrants. When Yasser Arafat died in November 2004, HRW issued no statement referring to im-

punity for crimes against humanity resulting from the Palestinian leader's central role in mass terror campaigns.

Additionally, HRW's statements following the death of Osama bin Laden are a textbook example of moral confusion and obfuscation, referring vaguely to "the devastating human toll that terrorism has brought to every continent of the world" and to the September 11, 2001 attacks and other attacks for which "bin Laden's al Qaeda organization is blamed." Regarding the American anti-terror operation that killed bin Laden, HRW decided that it did "not have enough information about the killing to draw conclusions about whether it was lawful or not.... The US government should provide all the relevant facts about Osama bin Laden's death to clarify whether it was justified under international law."

HRW's abysmal record in the Middle East is particularly salient in the endorsement of Libyan's tyrant Muammar Qaddafi and his sons as "human rights reformers." In May 2009, HRW Middle East and North Africa director Sarah Leah Whitson authored an article

in the influential US-based publication Foreign Policy, titled "Tripoli Spring" and subtitled "How Libya's behind-the-scenes reformer is actually, well, reforming." Whitson's praise was unequivocal: "the real impetus for the transformation rests squarely with a quasi-governmental organization, the Qaddafi Foundation for International Charities and Development." On December 12, 2009, HRW held what was presented as a news conference in Libya—the U.S State Department referred to this event as helping to "solidify Saif al-Islam's reputation as a 'reformer.'" Two op-eds written by HRW officials were published in the Guardian and by the Institute for Policy Studies. The first was titled "Is Libya opening up," and the second, written by Whitson, was headlined "Postcard from... Tripoli" and embraced the Qaddafi human rights reform fraud.

In contrast, Whitson and HRW have a long history of automatically and viscerally condemning Israel, based on little or no credible information. HRW's statement condemning Sharon upon his death briefly and selectively quoted from the judicial commission that investigated Sharon's responsibility related to the Christian Phalange killings of Palestinians in the 1982 Lebanon war, distorting the process and reports beyond recognition. This again highlights HRW's consistent anti-Israel obsession and ex-



Shimon Peres (second from left) and then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon seen during the 80th birthday celebration for Peres in the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem on September 21, 2003. Credit: Avi Ohayon/GPO/Flash90.

ploitation of universal human rights principles to promote personal and ideological agendas.

HRW also plays a central role in the processes by which national and international legal structures and principles are being abused as part of political warfare. While Sharon was serving as Prime Minister and had the grave responsibility for ending the Palestinian terror campaign of brutal bus bombings and other war crimes, HRW officials chose instead to support a cynical effort by Palestinian groups to bring a frivolous lawfare case against Sharon in Belgium. This case triggered a flood of efforts to exploit "universal jurisdiction" statutes and frameworks, including the International Criminal Court, that were created in order to bring genocidal

leaders to justice, for the pursuit of partisan political campaigns.

In 2009, the founder of Human Rights Watch, Robert Bernstein, highlighted the moral failures of his own organization, particularly in ignoring the systematic abuses of Middle Eastern regimes. Bernstein also referred to HRW reports on the Israeli-Arab conflict "that are helping those who wish to turn Israel into a pariah state." Indeed, as the latest obsessive attack demonstrates, it is HRW itself that is leading this campaign, based on double standards and misinformation, to delegitimize Israel.✪

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