

## Being a Target

### Praise for *The New Intifada*

*The first selection in this booklet was published in The New Intifada (VERSO, London & New York, 2001).*

Library Journal, November 1, 2001 “...a compelling story... A balanced and up-to-date picture for today’s world; highly recommended...”

Village Voice, October 30, 2001 “an exemplary collection of essays... the dose of fact and humane passion that our public debate requires.”

Seminary Co-op Bookstores “...eloquent and often poignant first-hand accounts from the front-line of the Intifada, providing a deeper sense of the tenor and horror of the conflict.”

### About Alison Weir

In winter 2001, freelance journalist Alison Weir spent a month traveling alone throughout the West Bank and Gaza to see for herself what was going on. Upon her return she founded If Americans Knew, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing Americans with accurate information on this critical region. She has spoken on Capitol Hill, at the Center for Policy Analysis, and at numerous universities and other venues throughout the U.S. “Being a Target” contains two emails she sent during her trip.

*“Alison Weir presents a powerful, well documented view of the Middle East today. She is intelligent, careful, and critical. American policy makers would benefit greatly from hearing her first-hand observations and attempting to answer the questions she poses.”*

**Tom Campbell**  
Director, Calif. Dept. of Finance  
former U.S. Congressman

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## Being a Target

### Reports From Gaza & “Close Your Organization or Die...”



**Alison Weir**  
Founder of If Americans Knew

*An email to my family and friends on February 18, 2001:*

**I** don’t want to be overly dramatic, but I was sort of shot at yesterday.

I say “sort of” because I don’t think the Israeli soldiers in their tower were trying to hit me, or the people with me... if that had been their purpose I have no doubt that they would have. There is massive evidence here that their aim is quite good. I think they were simply asserting their power. And I think they were trying to intimidate me, as a foreigner, into leaving the area.

There were no “clashes.” There was no stone-throwing. Everything was quiet. I was being shown around Khan Yonis, a bullet-riddled refugee camp in southern Gaza filled with ragged barefoot kids and angry, resigned, perplexed parents. “Why are they doing this to us?” people kept saying to me... “Why they do this Palestine people? They say we guns. Where guns? Why

America help Israel? Why America not help Palestinians?"

Houses were riddled – and I mean riddled – with bullets. There were 2-foot wide holes in roofs where mortars had come through. People showed me around their homes – for the most part they had moved into areas away from the outside, where, they hoped, they would be safe – huddled on mattresses on the floor. They showed me around one house right at the periphery of the camp. It had lovely, bullet-riddled archways inside, the remains of a tiled kitchen. When the children saw I was curious about the bullets, they gathered them for me by handfuls – smashed, distorted pieces of metal that tear through walls and people. Ill try to bring some back. I wonder if Israel will let me bring my souvenirs of their country.

They opened a door a few inches for me – they were afraid to do more, they know what happens if you do – and I could see a guard tower a few hundred meters away. Even I was afraid – usually so easily brave, armed with my middle-class American feeling of invulnerability – I've read too many reports of injuries in just such situations... seen too many pictures of people with bandages over eyes that had been shot out. Earlier in the day I saw a picture of four boys probably about 7-12 sitting on chairs in a waiting room somewhere, looking at the camera with no expression on their faces, and each with a large piece of gauze where one of their eyes should be. They were the lucky kids – these were only rubber bullets, and they hadn't gone on into the brain...

Did I say no expression? Perhaps the expression is beyond describing... of being old far beyond their small bodies.

So when I looked out at the guard tower where soldiers with sniper scopes and binoculars were no doubt watching us, I, too, was nervous.

We continued to wander around the camp – groups of smiling children coming up, saying salaam, hello, giggling. The streets were Gaza sand – the ocean is probably only half a mile away... but these children never get to swim in it. There are soldiers inbetween.

Instead they play in the dirt.

I needed batteries for my camera, so we went to a tiny store. The owner gave us small glasses of strong coffee, and would take no money for the batteries.

Intense, frustrated, he pointed out what his life had become. He showed

don't apologize. You shoot 21-year-old Tom Hurndall in the back of the head, and you don't apologize. You shoot 26-year-old Brian Avery in the face "by accident," and you don't apologize. You kill Palestinian grandmothers, nine-year-olds, infants, and you don't apologize.

Approximately 85 percent of the people you kill in Palestine are "collateral damage," and you don't apologize.

Have you no manners?

In this country you kill some more. You killed Alex Odeh, Iris Kones, and at least five other Americans. You killed 35 American servicemen on the USS Liberty, injured 172, shot up their stretcher-bearers and destroyed their lifeboats.

But that's not all.

You've killed careers. You've killed businesses. You've killed hope. You've weeded out sprigs of integrity from our Congress, journalists of principle from our press.

But no more. Your reign of terror has ended.

There are too many of us. You've called "anti-Semitism" once too often. You've pressured one too many newspapers, one too many universities, one too many mayors. You've made one too many anonymous phone calls, emailed one too many crude messages. Threatened one too many organizations.

It is over. You will continue to win your battles, for awhile. But the war has turned.

We have awakened to the brutality of your injustice, and our numbers are growing. We are of every ethnicity and nationality, including your own citizenry, and we are joining together to uphold the holiness of our common humanity.

We are working to create a world of equality, of brotherhood and sisterhood, of compassion and respect, of laughter and love.

You are few, we are many.

You can't kill us all.

Please join us.

No. We're not going to die.

I know you're used to killing people who are in your way. Old people, young people, leaders, followers, mothers, fathers, teachers, doctors, factory workers, farmers.

It hasn't seemed difficult for you. Human beings are immensely vulnerable. When people have no armor, no defending army, no power, all it takes is a few bullets. Skulls are easily penetrable by tempered steel. Rib cages are shattered with ease.

All it requires, really, is sufficient ruthlessness.

From the beginning of your nation you've made it clear that you possess this in abundance. In 1948 you ethnically cleansed the once-multicultural land on which you chose to impose your uni-cultural nation, ridding yourself of hundreds of thousands of human beings who did not fit your national vision of purity.

You call this your nation's "War of Independence."

Please explain this to me. Independence from whom?

From the farmers whose ancestors had tilled that land for centuries?

From the fishermen whose ancestors had fished in the Sea of Galilee and been turned, it is said, into fishers of men?

From the maintainers and harvesters of olive groves planted a millennium ago, orchards now daily uprooted by your cruelly efficient military bulldozers?

Independence from humanity? From morality? From normality? From everyone else in the world?

And then you killed some more.

You called farmers trying to return to their farms "infiltrators" and killed them. You called the nations who had reluctantly but ineluctably sheltered them "harborers of terrorists" and killed their citizens. You invaded neighbor after neighbor after neighbor. Not a single one escaped your ferocity. Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon.

And you assassinated. How you've assassinated. Your assassins have roved the world with great success – except when you've killed the wrong person here and there. You kill a waiter, mistaking him for a "terrorist," and you don't apologize.

You crush 23-year-old Rachel Corrie "unintentionally," twice, and you

the inevitable bullet holes in his store, the larger hole where a missile had entered a store-room – destroying what looked like 50 five-gallon jugs of oil. He showed me his house next door – full of bullet holes, and told me about his children who luckily had remained uninjured, if trauma and subjugation don't count as injuries. He told me that all he wanted was peace, to live his life. Again, he asked why Israel was doing this, why America was doing this.

What could I answer? All I could try to do was explain that Americans don't know that this is going on – that their newspapers and television don't tell them. And so Americans think it is a complicated issue, and that it doesn't involve them.

Amazingly, I don't find people hostile toward me, as an American, even though they so clearly know America's role in their suffering. By the way, "suffering" is a word they use often in trying to tell me what their lives are like. They always smile at me, shake my hand. When they hear I am from America, they virtually always say, "Welcome."

We wandered over to another house, on the other side of town. I saw a family home no longer livable – bullet holes everywhere, large hole in the roof – another once-lovely home, and probably loved home, with an interior garden and children's toys, and bullets scattered on the floor.

It was when we went outside of this home that the gunshots occurred. We were behind a wall, and so it didn't feel scary. Of course, feelings lie – I had seen numerous holes through such walls. They showed us another way out. At the time, I didn't take the gunshots personally. Once again, a middle-class American, I didn't think anyone was firing near me on purpose – I thought it was just an accident, a coincidence.

But as I've thought about it further, I think I was wrong. Why then? there? In that particular part of town?

And this would fit the pattern I've heard about lately. A few days ago when the UN team investigating human rights violations was here in Gaza they were shot at. The Canadian Ambassador was shot at. A young American documentary filmmaker I met this morning, James, had been in Khan Yunis a few days ago, and had been shot at. He showed me footage of the Israeli shooting at him: He is letting the camera roll as he walks on a dirt road following 5-6 small boys. None are throwing rocks. It is quiet. There is a tank at the end of the road – this is nothing unusual. They continue walking.

Suddenly there are gunshots, the camera tilts. No one is injured. But the Army has made its point. Except it didn't work. He went back today.

I asked him if he had a time-frame for making his documentary. He said until he ran out of money or got shot, whichever came first. It wasn't much of a joke.

Have you heard about the American stringer for AP who was shot a few months ago? – a young woman, her name is in another notebook (I'm at an Internet Cafe in Gaza City with the slowest computers on earth) – but I think she was about 26. Mark, a 30-year-old freelance English photographer I've just met, knew her, and told me about it. The Israelis shot her in the pelvis, destroying her spleen and uterus. They say it was an accident. She says they knew quite clearly that she was a journalist. Israel is apparently investigating how this could have happened. Was this reported in the press? Will we hear the results of the investigation? Wouldn't you think this would have been headlines? Shouldn't it have been? If she had been shot by Palestinians don't you think it would have been?

Another man today told me about working with a Fox film crew, when suddenly they were being shot at by the Israelis. They finally, barely managed to escape, and they filmed it all. But Fox never aired it. He told me the problem with the US coverage wasn't the crews, it was management back in the States. I believe him.

Some people in the refugee camp told me about a new gas bomb the israelis shot last weekend at them. They said it had black smoke, and a "good" smell. At least 40 people are still hospitalized from it – I'm going to pin the number down tomorrow – apparently there are people in several hospitals, so the true number could be considerably higher.

From the refugee camp we went to Al Amal Hospital, to meet the doctor and see the patients.. I saw a 22-year-old man in the ICU. He was moaning and had IVs in both arms. He said it felt like knives in his intestines. Sometimes he had trouble breathing. His mother and aunt were hovering over him. His little sister was sitting next to him. I went to another ward, and saw six more. I met a father who was obviously distraught – two of his sons were in the hospital. I saw two men have seizures while I was there – convulsing.

They all said the same thing. They had just been going about their lives

I've taken pictures of all of this – some on the digital camera, some on film. Unfortunately, the equipment to email the pictures is in Dheisheh... hopefully I'll get everything through the various checkpoints between here and there, and in a few days I'll be able to start sending photos of all this.

It's tragic being in Mawasi... the sea beautiful, the palm trees lovely, the people friendly... everywhere we went people insisted on serving us strong sweet coffee in delicate cups... and you knew that all of this was being destroyed. Including the people – several have been shot and killed in recent weeks. This is an incredibly lush place – beautiful tomatoes, strawberries, guavas, mangos... and the Israelis are plowing them all under.

Again and again, I can't believe the incredible arrogance, cruelty, selfishness I'm seeing. Israel wants this land, so it is taking it. They don't even bother coming up with an excuse for most of this... they just do it. The people here are in their way... and since no one is stopping Israel, and we are supplying them with the never-ending means, they continue...

*The first essay was published in The New Intifada (VERSO, London & New York, 2001) and on numerous websites.*

## **“CLOSE YOUR ORGANIZATION OR DIE..”**

*Left on our office voicemail at 2 a.m. on Oct. 3, 2003:*

Hi.

I heard your speech today in UC Berkeley; the debate. I'm telling you this right now. On Monday, at 2 PM, you better not be in your office. Because me and my buddies, who were trained in the Israeli Army, will come and kill every single one of you son-of-a-bitches for what you are doing to destroy Israel. So watch out. This is not a joke. On Monday you better watch out. Don't come to work. And close your organization or you're going to die.

Dear Israel and your frenzied defenders:

take crops out to sell, using donkey carts to try to take them down the beach, occasionally getting stuck in the sand.

Yesterday I visited Mawasi, a lovely agricultural district along the beach that Israel has closed off and is steadily destroying. I saw 100 year-old palm trees they had bulldozed, acres and acres of palms, olive trees, vegetables, that Israel leveled. I talked to farmers whose families have worked on this land for untold generations, who now have no livelihoods, their fields destroyed and confiscated.

I was lucky to even get in to Mawasi. It's been closed off, and everyone warned me that it was dangerous. The grandmother where I was staying was so upset at the thought that she used what English she could: "No go! No go Mawasi!" But I managed to walk through the checkpoint, and the soldiers with their M-16s ever ready, let me pass. Some local people met me on the other side and took me to meet various families, farmers, the local officials. They all, as always, asked me to tell America what is happening to them, to protect them from Israel. This is a very poor place, the officials were wearing kafiyahs, thread-worn coats.

At one point we were driving next to the beach and they briefly stopped the car so I could walk down to the water and pick up a seashell. As I headed back to the car I saw an Israeli Military truck approach slowly. They saw me, and continued on. When I got in the car, the people said, "If you weren't with us, we would be in too much trouble..."

You can feel the fear when we even see a soldier or a settler in the distance. These people are being terrorized ...

One woman who teaches science in Khan Yunes said that when she tried to come home from work last Thursday with her two sons Israeli soldiers wouldn't let them through the checkpoint. She was forced to travel down to Rafah to stay with a sister. After a few days she tried again. This time they let her through, but then she and her sons got caught in a sudden crossfire between Israeli soldiers and a few Palestinians shooting out from their bullet-riddled community. She said she and her sons had been terrified, and her sons don't want to go to school anymore. She's teaching them at home now.

Kids' educations are totally disrupted here... again, randomly and arbitrarily. Roads get closed off, schools closed, and children are deprived from learning.

when suddenly "bombs" came into their houses. some had been outside, and had gone in to rescue people because they thought the house was on fire. But they said there was no flame, just black smoke, and a good smell. In most cases nothing happened immediately, but after 10 to 15 minutes they collapsed... some became unconscious.

Israel is, as usual, denying that there was anything unusual about this gas. As usual, they are lying.

Apparently, this also explains a lot of the bias in the US press. The reporters in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv get their numbers and "facts" from military spokesmen. Information from Israeli sources is printed, information from Palestinian sources isn't.

You see, an Israeli is one of us. A relative, a friend's relative, a colleague's relative. We hear distorted versions of what is going on from these friends, and colleagues, and we think they know what they're talking about. And that they're not biased. Because they sound so reasonable and confident and knowledgeable. They say just enough about what is wrong about Israel, about the "two-sides" to seem neutral. This is bs.

The problem is when you know the truth, it is far too much to describe, far too cruel... far too diametrically opposite what we used to think and what everyone still thinks to express. It is hard not to sound fanatic, over-wrought, biased. The lie is too big, the repression too complete, the Palestinians' lives too horrible to write about reasonably. I find it difficult to write anything – rare for me – because there is so so so much. You have to retrieve and re-define the very words out of the newspeak that Israel has created of "closures" and "bypass roads" and "security."

So I think maybe I should try to take on just one topic at a time – and for now, this new gas... Today I was going to visit the Ministry of Health for more information, and then back to the Khan Younis hospitals with Mark to take photos. But he didn't show up at the scheduled time. Probably something just came up. But over here you always worry...

Tomorrow I'll go.

As I said, there is so so so much to try to describe. Who will ever believe all this? Israel couldn't possibly be this cruel, this arrogant. Who will believe it? They must have a good reason...

There are two sides here, of course... just the way there were in South

Africa's apartheid period...

I also visited two tiny encampments of women and children living in tents on the dirt. They were people who used to have homes in Khan Younis, but the Israelis decided to make a road through them – for “security?” to divide the people? to terrorize them? just because they wanted to? who ever knows? an absolute conqueror doesn't have to explain – so they bulldozed their homes and their date palms and orange groves. This is already far too long – I won't go into the details of how they bulldozed them, how the people fled...

And the people are living in the dirt, and show me a bent-up aluminum wash pan that they retrieved from where their homes had been – everything else, they said, was “under the land” Again, they asked me why america was helping Israel do this to them. Why did Bill Clinton do this? Would George Bush still do this? They're on a first-name basis with our presidents. And we don't even know about them. One old, newly poor woman knew all the international news – she had been given a radio and listens to BBC, French broadcasts, German broadcasts, etc. She hears the Israeli statements. The US government positions... She's living in rags in the dirt now. Four months ago she and her husband had two homes – they had just built another one for their son, who had been married just two months when his new home was bulldozed.

But you'll be glad to know the international community isn't ignoring these people. The Palestinians have been pleading for an international team for months to come over to protect them from the Israelis – but the US keeps blocking this. Why??? Why??? How could this be even imagined to threaten Israel's “security”??? But you'll be happy to know that the international community isn't ignoring them – it contributed the fly-covered, floor-less tents that the people are living in. Meanwhile, how much aid did we give to Israel today? Eight million was it? Sixteen million? And tomorrow we'll give it to them again, and the next day, and the next day, and the next day...

They gave me tea, as we sat surrounded by dirt, and told me to tell

America to stop doing this to them. I'll try. Maybe you could try too.

February 24, 2001

I just came back from Khan Yunis – the Israeli military closed off the road, so we and hundreds of other people had to leave our vehicles, climb down to the beach, go along there for about a mile, and then climb up to the road on the other side, where there were taxis and buses waiting to pick up people. I was with a family and we all rode a horse-drawn wagon through the surf.

The people I was with were just trying to get to their jobs, one as a doctor and one as a civil engineer; one had his wife and baby with him. Other people trudging along the beach were various men, women and children of all ages, many lugging bags, heavy parcels, etc. Luckily it didn't happen to be pouring the torrential rain we've had some other days...

The Israelis do this sort of thing at will. As one man said, “This is insulting. This is insulting to a human being.” We passed the Chief Justice of the Palestinian Supreme Court... who also, of course, was not allowed to go on the road.

Last night the Israelis tried to kill a member of the Palestinian peace team who had been a signatory at Oslo – he lived only because he happened to have left his office an hour before. The people with me were outraged – this was a man who had tried to negotiate for the pitiful peace Palestine was willing to settle for. Another dignitary, the president of the Palestinian National Assembly, needed to go to a conference yesterday. The Israelis wouldn't let him out of Gaza. Tomorrow Colin Powell is coming to meet with Yasser Arafat, who isn't here yet. Everyone is wondering how Arafat will manage to get in... perhaps by helicopter.

It is truly unbelievable to see the incredibly insulting and demeaning way that Israel treats Palestinians. They are squeezing them and squeezing them and squeezing them... there were people on the beach today trying to

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