Shame on You, Madeleine Albright

In her interview on NBC’s Meet the Press (Sunday, October 8, 2000), U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright represented the epitome of the willful blindness, moral vacuum, human insensitivity, political cynicism, and strategic ignorance that have characterized the U.S. handling of the Arab-Israeli "peace process" and the Palestinian Question in particular.

When asked about the U.S. abstention on the U.N. Security Council’s Resolution 1233 deploring the (anonymous) "provocation carried out at Al-Haram Al-Sharif in Jerusalem on 28 September 2000" and condemning (also anonymous) "acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force against Palestinians," Albright immediately waxed apologetic.

She was defensive not about diluting the text of the resolution and eliminating any explicit reference to Israel’s culpability, not about abstaining when the U.S. should have cast an affirmative vote in condemnation of the horrific and tragic loss of Palestinian lives (mainly children), and not about American passivity before the very visible crimes against humanity that are being committed by Israel with impunity and arrogance.

Rather, Madam Albright expressed contrition at not casting a veto on this hesitant, apologetic, and inadequate expression by the international community of minimal recognition of Palestinian humanity and suffering.

Why? Because the U.S. wants to "safeguard" its role as an "evenhanded peace broker."

To the Palestinians, this came as a complete surprise since the U.S. has never been evenhanded or fair or even remotely human in its brokerage of the peace process.

Given the chance to atone, however modestly, for such double standards and bias, the U.S. once again insists on failing the test of moral integrity and humanity.

Worse yet, Madam Albright (with a straight face) declares in a cold and deliberate tone that the Palestinians have "placed Israel under siege."

I immediately assumed that she had confused her nouns, and that she had inadvertently given the converse version of reality.

In the next breath, however, and with the same deadpan, expressionless, emotionless, glazed look, Madam Albright repeated: "Those Palestinian rock throwers have placed Israel under siege," adding that the Israeli army is defending itself.

At the risk of tediousness and redundancy, it is appropriate to remind Madam Albright of a few basic facts that may have escaped her notice:

It is Israel that is the belligerent occupant of Palestine (and not the other way around). Israeli tanks and armored vehicles are surrounding Palestinian villages, camps, and cities (and not the other way around).

Israeli (American-made) Apache gunships are firing Lau and other missiles at Palestinian protesters and homes (and not the other way around).
It is Israel that is confiscating Palestinian land and importing Jewish settlers to set up illegal armed settlements in the heart of Palestinian territory (and not the other way around).

The settlers on the rampage in the West Bank are Israelis terrorizing Palestinians in their own homes (and not the other way around).

The homes that are being demolished at the hands of the Israelis are Palestinian homes (and not the other way around).

The armed soldiers and Special Forces at checkpoints throughout Palestine are Israeli (and not the other way around).

The more than 100 murdered civilians and thousands of injured are [almost all] Palestinians being shot by Israeli occupation troops (and not the other way around).

It is Israel that has closed down the Palestinian airport at Gaza, thereby preventing badly needed medical supplies from reaching the Palestinians (and not the other way around).

The crossing points to and from Palestine, as well as entrances and exits to and from all Palestinian inhabited areas, are manned and controlled by Israeli soldiers who have completely prevented all freedom of movement (and not the other way around).

To state the obvious once again, Madam Albright, Israel is committing atrocities against the Palestinians with total impunity, and yet you maintain "Israel is besieged."

To add insult to injury, you admonish the Palestinian leadership for not ordering their people to "stop the violence," as though you're entirely oblivious to the fact that all it takes is an order from Ehud Barak to his "disciplined" occupation army to stop killing Palestinians.

No, we will not lie down and die in silence, even to accommodate you, Madam Albright, for cold-blooded murder is not a phenomenon we condone.

May I suggest that the siege is in the minds of American officials and apologists for Israel who willfully persist in blaming the victim, in finding a false symmetry between occupier and occupied, in adopting a double standard on the value of human lives and rights while totally dehumanizing the Palestinians, in treating Israel as a country above the law and Palestinians as a people not worthy of the protection of the law, in manipulating and inventing a peace process that would accommodate such a racist and stereotypical version of reality rather than a reality of justice and evenhandedness, and in evading and distorting moral responsibility toward the Palestinian victims rather than celebrating the violence of the oppressor.

Granted, Madam Albright, Slobodan Milosevic is a war criminal (despite the fact that his army did not massacre the Serb opposition that brought about his downfall), but what about Ariel Sharon and even your good friend Ehud Barak? Whose blood is dripping from their hands?

Granted, Madam Albright, "the people have spoken" in Yugoslavia, so why don't you listen when the Palestinian people cry out for justice?

As a woman, a mother, and a grandmother, you surely understand the pain of children and their parents when they get hurt; what about the agony of senseless and brutal murder being visited on Palestinian children?
May I suggest, Madam Albright, that before you go on television before the whole world to pontificate on issues Palestinian, you start by examining the facts and then start to examine your own conscience.

This article was reprinted with permission from Al-Ahram Weekly out of Cairo. Hanan Ashrawi is a member of the Palestine Liberation Council and a former Minister of Education in the Palestinian Authority.