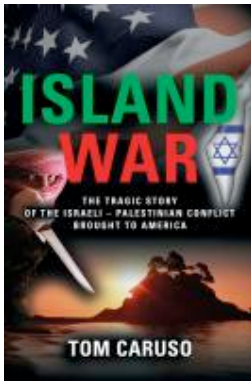


ISLAND WAR

THE TRAGIC STORY
OF THE ISRAELI – PALESTINIAN CONFLICT
BROUGHT TO AMERICA

TOM CARUSO



Island War is a historical novel with the political and military conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians as the backdrop that traps the United States in their epic struggle. The war between these adversaries is brought to America's homeland and results in the conquest of a small island and thousands of hostages being taken. A rogue Palestinian militant masterminds this plot and brings about a paradigm shift to the war on terror.

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Island War



The tragic story of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict
brought to America

Tom Caruso

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Chapter One – Collateral Damage

The American made F-22 Raptor took off from its isolated base in the Israeli desert and quickly ascended into the atmosphere, circling around in a gigantic arc as it gained altitude for its attack. Streaking through the clear blue sky, straining and thrusting forward as it gained speed, banking hard, and leveling off, it bristled with an array of sophisticated weaponry and cutting edge technology. The F-22, the epitome of American military aircraft technology, was an awesome weapon of stealth, speed and destruction, capable of incredible devastation, which it was destined to soon deliver. The Lockheed Martin-Boeing 5th generation, multi-mission jet, could fly at supersonic mach 2 speeds and simultaneously conduct air to air and air to ground combat. It could out dog fight anything in the air, jam and evade enemy radar, soar beyond the reach of most anti-aircraft batteries, and deliver a massive payload with pinpoint precision. However, for this mission, with a limited objective and no potential enemy interference, few of those astounding capabilities would be necessary to employ.

The powerful and much feared Israeli Air Force was a formidable military machine, equipped with the latest American and Israeli technology. Its professional and highly experienced pilots were basically unmatched and unchallenged in the skies over the Middle East and the eastern portion of the Mediterranean Sea. This prestigious arm of the Israeli military, although smaller in numerical size, was the equal of American, Russian, or Chinese air forces in terms of skill, professionalism, and striking ability.

It reigned supreme in this corner of the world and could control the airspace for nearly a thousand miles in all directions. Complete air superiority was assured and unquestioned. This mission would go totally unchallenged in the air or from the ground.

Within a few minutes of take off, the well trained and highly skilled pilot and his deadly aircraft were in attack position, high above Gaza, preparing for and awaiting final orders. The pilot's radio, silent up to this point, came to life and the encrypted and secure message began, 'Base to Masada 1, base to Masada 1, all clear for final approach.'

The word Masada, fortress in Hebrew, and what it represented, held special meaning for all Israelis, especially those charged with its defense. These ancient desert ruins, perched atop the heights of a plateau, were the last vestige of Judean resistance to the might of ancient Rome and its unstoppable and conquering legions. The Jews of Masada would hold out for two long, desperate years and only succumb to the Romans in the face of overwhelming force. Alone and surrounded with no possible relief forthcoming, they knew their fate was sealed as they watched the resourceful and skilled Roman engineers build a road ramp to their once impregnable heights. Once completed, Masada's walls were forcefully breached and the Romans triumphantly entered the fortress that had defied them for so long. However, in a final display of resistance to spite their enemy, the Masada defenders would do the unimaginable and deny them an honorable victory. As a last measure of defiance to their lost cause, they would take their own lives rather than become slaves to the Romans. The Roman victory would be hollow. Masada's

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powerful meaning then and now remains the same. Israel must never give in and must do everything in its power to defend itself, whether that meant fighting the Romans of ancient times or now fighting their current enemies who are bent on her destruction. Alone in a sea of hostile nations, Israel cannot afford to lose a war.

The pilot responded promptly, "Masada 1 to base, Masada 1 to base, locking onto target, all systems are green, permission to launch?"

Without hesitation, the pilot received his answer, 'Permission granted, proceed.'

The die had been cast. With methodical efficiency, an emotionless detachment, a righteous commitment to task, and no conceivable or credible opposition, the mission would be carried out flawlessly. The target having been painstakingly selected and pre-programmed into the computer was now in the crosshairs of destruction. The pilot calmly lifted the safety latch and firmly squeezed the trigger. The lethal message was on its way, as the pilot quickly executed a hard banking maneuver to begin his return to base. From take off to a safe landing back at the air force base, the whole operation would last less than 15 minutes, but set in motion unforeseen consequences that would last for years, affect countless lives, and precipitate a war on the other side of the world.

The sleek, powerful, lethal, and guidance equipped smart missile, once launched, was on its own. Its state of the art computer was constantly calculating and recalculating its data, and adjusting itself to the target's precise coordinates. The American made missile, a product of Raytheon, a major weapons manufacturer, was a highly sophisticated creation of advanced

science. It had a flight range of hundreds of miles, was an all weather weapon capable of success in nearly all conditions, and had a powerful penetration depth and massive payload. There would be few structures that could withstand its full effect. Its payload size, deep penetration capabilities, and explosive power were all designed for maximum destruction of even the most protected and hardened targets.

The precision guided missile streaked from high out of the cloudless blue sky, locked onto its target, relentlessly and irretrievably cast, honed onto its final destination as programmed and struck with devastating force. It struck with a force exponentially greater than what was necessary for complete and utter destruction of the intended target. It came invisibly from out of the sky, from miles away, unseen and heard by anyone on the ground, until it met its fateful target. The sophisticated, technologically advanced, multi-million dollar aircraft and the million dollar weapon of modern warfare and mass destruction were targeted against a stationary brick and mortar structure of nearly inconsequential value. It was an unequal contest of twenty first century technological modernity versus the eighteenth century backwardness of the remote past. The outcome was inevitably one sided between these two mismatched opponents.

Nevertheless, in seconds of unimaginable horror, with deafening noise and blinding light, the targeted house and all its inhabitants exploded into a massive maelstrom of unrecognizable form. Countless fragments of what were moments before, a house of brick, mortar, wood, and glass, now rose up and outward into a massive, expanding sphere of detritus. The resultant cloud

darkened the immediate area as it rapidly rose skyward hundreds of feet in all directions, blocking out the sun.

The entire neighborhood of small and poorly constructed dwellings, some several hundred years old, felt the violent impact and the area shook with the force of an earthquake. The explosion caused a rumbling and rattling of homes and belongings, and shattered windows as the shock waves rippled out into the entire area. The residential block of structures was quickly enveloped in this man made cloud and momentarily disappeared from view.

Then in only a handful of seconds later, the grisly suspended mass of building material and human remains began to settle back to earth as the airborne particles, some large and some small, yielded to gravity and pelted the ground like a violent hail storm. The heavier and larger objects, blocks of cement, sections of roofing, and chunks of wood, fell first with a series of pounding thuds. In some cases, these flying projectiles came crashing into and through nearby homes causing further injury and damage. Smaller unidentifiable objects soon followed, falling in a wide area of the village and sounding like a sudden heavy rainstorm. Next to settle back to earth were the very small particles, signaling an abatement of the storm. Lastly, over the next few minutes came the very light, dust-like particles that slowly floated down to coat everything under the clearing cloud. The surrounding area, hundreds of yards in all directions, was blanketed with this sickening dust and particles of every imaginable origin and description.

Within several surreal minutes, an eerie quiet overtook the scene of complete devastation. The silence was unnatural for this crowded and teeming neighborhood.

The house lay in ruins, a heap of debris, with all seven unsuspecting inhabitants, pulverized and erased from existence, never knowing what hit them. They had been torn into minute and unrecognizable shreds of flesh and bones by the massive blast and the flying brick, glass, and random household articles that sliced through their bodies in an instant. This was followed seconds later by a crushing avalanche of wreckage that scattered their remains throughout the neighborhood and buried fragments of their bodies deep within and below tons of what was their home. The intended target had been thoroughly destroyed and the Israelis would deem the operation a successful mission. Only much later would they discover otherwise and begin to realize the price to be paid for this misguided attack.

Fear spread quickly and the inhabitants of this poor corner of Abasan, a small Gaza village that borders Israel, came alive with movement in the streets once the immediate shock and billows of smoke and dust subsided. Everyone rushed to see what had happened, now realizing that it was a bomb, an explosion or some kind of attack. The dusty streets surrounding the area became a jostling and overflowing mass of curious and anxious residents, all moving toward the site of the devastation. Men, women and children of all ages hurriedly converged on the ruined and desolate site. Some were screaming, some crying, others cursing, and a few collapsing in horror at the wretched sight. This was another tragic event for this pathetic community that had seen more than its share of tragic events.

Rashid, eighteen and the oldest sibling of the Farag family, returning from an errand, also heard the tremendous noise of the explosion from a distance. He

too instinctively ran along with others toward the scene of the devastation. The rush of rescuers, ambulances, police cars, and the hordes of neighbors and on-lookers temporarily blocked and slowed his arrival back toward the scene of the explosion.

"What happened, what happened?" Rashid asked repeatedly to any and all as he moved closer and closer to the scene.

No one really knew at this time and at this distance from the site, and no one could reply with any certainty. His mind raced as he moved along with the ever growing and jostling crowd. Was it a bomb maker who made a deadly mistake, was it an attack between warring Palestinian factions, or possibly an Israeli commando raid against a suspected militant hideout?

"What was hit?" he asked randomly and repeatedly to anyone he came in contact with, but again at this distance and time, these more distant residents knew little.

As he continued his approach and got closer to his block, he speculated that he would know the victims in this tight-knit neighborhood. Extended families grew up together in this small corner of the world and typically didn't venture far. They couldn't, they had little money or means to travel or move about, and the Israeli imposed travel restrictions were very tight. Generation after generation were born, lived, and died sometimes having never ventured more than a few dozen or so miles from their home. Certainly, many never left this tightly sealed small enclave called the Gaza Strip.

Turning one more corner as he ran with the flow of humanity, he realized it was his block that was the scene of the devastation. Now he knew for certain that

whatever had happened, he would know the place that was the scene of the accident or attack. He knew that if anyone were injured or dead, that it would likely be someone he may have known all his life. These thoughts and others flowed uncontrollably through his mind as he approached ever closer to the scene of devastation.

As he turned into the last street before arriving at his block, he now realized that this would be a close neighbor, maybe even a relative, as families tended to live close to one another. His heart raced with fear and unknown anticipation. He kept running along feeling like he had been in route for hours. He needed to get there and get there now.

Then as he continued on and arrived at the scene he was stunned to realize that it was his house that was struck. It was no longer there, it was simply gone. In its place all he saw was a huge and unnatural gap in the buildings and a great deal of rubble. The houses on either side were also nearly completely destroyed with only sections of walls remaining upright. The shock hit him and coursed through his body like a lightning strike. His eyes widened to take it all in and he stood motionless for a frozen moment as the reality of the situation washed over him. Regaining his sense of urgency, he raced forward, pushed through the thick crowd and mayhem and toward the rubble that once was his home. His mind now exploded with random thoughts, and he became incoherent with words that inexplicably streamed from his mouth.

"What happened, who did this, why, no, no, no, my family?"

He pushed and shoved his way through the last barrier of on-lookers and stood in bewilderment and rage

at what he now could clearly witness. Before him lay a gigantic mound of cement fragments, twisted and broken wood, scraps of household items, and heaps of unidentifiable detritus.

He was spotted and embraced by his uncle, Nuri, who lived nearby and had been one of the first to arrive on the scene.

"Rashid, my son, go no further, you don't want to see this terrible sight," his uncle implored.

"My family, mother, father, did they make it out?" Rashid begged, hoping for a miracle.

"No my son, no one could have survived," his uncle explained.

"What happened, who did this, why were we attacked?" Rashid asked.

Nuri replied without hesitation, "The Israelis, I am sure, who else? They are the only ones with such powerful weapons and who would do such a thing."

"Why, why would they do this?" Rashid pleaded. "We are not involved in the intifada, nor do we have any connection to any militant organization."

"I do not know," his uncle replied. "They need no reason, they do whatever they choose and no one can stop them."

"We posed no threat to them, this cannot be."

"I know my son, your father did not believe in violence."

"This makes no sense, why would the Israelis target us?"

"We may never know their reason for this cowardly attack, but no one else had the means and determination to strike like this."

Right then at that moment Rashid knew that his uncle was correct. The Israelis had the unchecked power and overwhelming might to strike anywhere in Gaza at any time. They also possessed the determination to strike down any militant or suspect they believed had struck or would strike at their country. The Palestinians, and no other Arab country for that matter, were any match for the sophisticated weaponry and military prowess that the Israelis wielded in the Middle East. Might didn't necessarily make right, but the fact that it ruled in this part of the world was undisputable. That was a lesson learned early in the life of every Palestinian.

The best that the Palestinians could do was to attack with their limited means and cause more fear than significant damage. Their realistic goal was to survive, win concessions, and ultimate statehood. Much like the Southern Confederate States in America's Civil War, staying alive and wearing down the will of the Northern States, ultimately became the best strategy that the South could hope for. So too, the Palestinians needed to keep going, keep the struggle alive, and eventually the Israelis would tire of the struggle, and out of sheer frustration, trade land for peace.

That had been the strategic plan of the Palestinians for years, but this strategy had not worked to date and in the minds of many, would not work for the foreseeable future, or at all. For many, there was no light at the end of the tunnel, just more darkness and despair. Other strategies needed to be employed that would expedite the process of gaining sovereignty and dignity for the Palestinian people.

Right then Rashid pledged to his uncle that he would avenge the murder of his mother, father, and 5 brothers and sisters.

"They must be made to pay for this," Rashid blurted out.

"They will pay my son, we will see to that," his uncle answered.

Rashid was the sole survivor in his family, a fluke of fate. But this still did not make any sense to this young man. The Farags were a poor family, without an ounce of strident militancy and no connections to the PLO, Fatah, or Hamas. Why would the Israelis target them? Rashid also wondered why Allah had allowed his family to be taken, but allowed him to be spared?

A tectonic shift in attitude was taking place for this gentle, kind, and caring young man. Like his father, he was not inclined to militancy. His father struggled and insured that his boys did not come under the influence of Hamas. The elder Farag had a favorite Gandhi quote that now came ironically to Rashid's mind. If you take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, the world will soon become blind and toothless. However, his mind, now filled with anger, turned in a different direction. It was a cruel and unfair twist of fate that his father and the rest of his family would be struck down like this. While Rashid's mind turned first to his father's favorite adage, it soon moved seamlessly to a different adage that his father also used. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. In his mind, the Israelis possessed absolute power in this corner of the world and wielded that power absolutely. Their unchecked power must be resisted and their arrogance and cruelty must be avenged. He was suddenly and irretrievably on the road

to becoming a much different person, a person so unlike his innate being.

Rashid was the brother that had always quite willingly looked out for his younger siblings. He was a good son who caused no problems for his parents and could always be counted on to do the right thing. What occasional money he could make he would willingly contribute to the family, keeping little for himself. Even on this fateful day, his willingness to help others would come into play and result in his life being spared. It was his nature to think of others, consider their feelings, and try to help those less fortunate than himself. These traits were widely recognized and admired by his peers and neighbors, and because he also possessed intelligence and physical strength, his peers looked up to him as a natural leader.

However, his world was just turned upside down. Dark, hateful, vengeful feelings that were unnatural for him sprang up to the surface. The old, gentle Rashid was gone, buried deep beneath his grief and anger. This intense wave of darkness would rule his world for the foreseeable future and totally overwhelm and mask his real nature.

War is random, taking one and leaving the next unscathed. It had no rhyme or reason. Now he had no family, he was alone. His mind was a confusing blur of thoughts and questions. Why was his family targeted? Would the Israelis come after him next? What if he had not offered and brought those two loaves of bread over to his ailing aunt, he too would have been home eating supper with his family and also been killed. Allah saved him and Allah had purpose for him. At this moment in

time, he knew not what that purpose would be, but unknown to Rashid, his uncle Nuri did.

His life changed in an instant. He would take that eye for an eye and then some. He would dedicate his life to eradicating the hated Israelis and their American supporters, for they certainly in his mind were behind this attack and murder of his innocent family.

But there were more immediate needs that came to mind after his first thoughts of revenge. Where would he go? Who would he live with? How would he survive? He was eighteen years old and now had no family, no home, and no regular income. His uncle, realizing that also, and realizing an opportunity, quickly interceded.

"Rashid, come with me, you know you can live with us," his uncle Nuri generously and sincerely offered.

Rashid didn't answer, but only started toward the heap of smoldering rubble, scanning and searching the ground with his eyes, and hoping that he would see some indication of life. The huge crater and the massive piles of debris that surrounded it were images that he couldn't take his eyes away from. They were images that became indelibly burned into his mind and that would stay with him and haunt him for the rest of his life.

"I can't think of that now, I must be here with my family," Rashid finally responded in a quiet and resigned tone.

"I understand my son."

Rashid stayed at the site of his beloved but now demolished home the rest of the day, searching and working with others to clear away what they could move. Neighbors, other members of this extended family, and a crew of workers also scoured the area and began clearing the debris the best they could, still holding out

some slim hope that someone had survived. Work would commence in 10 to 15 minutes intervals, and then the all quiet signal would be shouted. Everyone obediently went silent and all listened for any sound of life. However, everyone knew in their minds, if not their hearts, that they were wishing for the impossible. No sounds would be detected. Work would continue and the cycle would be repeated throughout the remainder of the day. When night came, the repulsive but necessary work of sifting through the debris came to a temporary halt. Tomorrow the heavy equipment would be brought in and the area would be cleared.

Rashid decided that he must spend the night at his home with his family. It was in his nature to try to help them if he could or at least honor them with his vigilance. It would be the last night he could spend with them. Deep down, he knew they were gone, but a small irrational, emotional part of him still held out hope. It was a long and lonely night, punctuated intermittently by the barking of a stray dog, or the scurrying of some hungry scavenging rats. Propped against a large chunk of a shattered cement wall, Rashid dozed off and on throughout the night, imagining more than once that he heard a noise, a possible call for help. He would awaken, listen intently, hear no human sounds, and drift back to a fitful sleep. The long night wore on and blended into the new day and there were no calls for help and no sounds of any miraculous survivors.

In the morning at first light, his uncle returned and brought Rashid some food and drink, and again told him to come home with him.

"Thank you uncle," Rashid said quietly. "I will and I am grateful to you and aunt Nadia. I will not be a burden to you, I promise."

"You could never be a burden to us, and there is nothing you can do here," his uncle explained. "Come home now."

But Rashid couldn't, he wanted to stay and see for himself that in fact no one had survived. He couldn't live with himself if he left and Allah had saved one of his family, and he could provide them with comfort. It was his nature to think of others.

The crews returned, but this time with a bulldozer and backhoe and they began the grisly task of clearing away the debris and the unrecognizable fragments of body parts contained within. No identifiable body parts were to be found. Fragments of his former life appeared momentarily and intermittently as the equipment groaned and strained at its task. A quick glimpse of a small piece of an old framed family picture, too shattered to be retrieved, caught his eye and brought on his buried rage. A twisted scrap of furniture, a piece of his father's chair, appeared for a moment and disappeared into a cloud of dust as it was torn from the heap. His anger began to well up within him and boil over. His family was gone and he could do nothing to alter that fact. His home and his life had been reduced to rubble, and were now unceremoniously scooped up and tossed into a waiting truck to be brought to a nearby landfill area.

When the last of the material was finally removed, Rashid turned and slowly walked toward his new home, sad, confused, and angry but grateful for his uncle and aunt. Little did he know that it was his uncle, Nuri Al-Jubali

that the Israelis thought they had targeted. He knew nothing of Nuri's secret life, his involvement with Hamas, and the unspeakable crimes he had committed against innocent Israeli civilians. He didn't realize that he and his family were secondary and inconsequential collateral damage. They were a mere footnote in this ongoing struggle, and soon to be forgotten by everyone except those directly affected. He would find out these details, but only later, slowly at first, and then fully only after he had been groomed and trained, and ultimately selected as the amir or leader of a daring expedition.

The Israeli missile strike, although missing its intended target, was a direct response to the on-going pursuit of Nuri and his growing cadre of jihadists. Nuri Al-Jubali had become a wanted man by the Israelis, someone who was totally and incorrigibly committed and dedicated to the cause of destroying the State of Israel and all their allies who were branded as infidels. Nuri was seen as a rising and dangerous leader within Hamas, someone who was intelligent, cunning, and capable of creating, planning, and carrying out unspeakable acts of violence on innocents whenever and wherever he found an opportunity. He was seen as a ruthless leader whose elimination was paramount in the eyes of Mossad, Shin Bet, and the Israeli Defense Force or IDF. His growing stature and support among the poor and destitute of Gaza was a festering and ever expanding sore. He had to be eliminated before he could inflict more pain, suffering, and death upon the Israeli populace. Although certainly considered a high value target, in this rare case, the Israeli intelligence community actually was significantly underestimating this enemy's skill, daring and scope of vision. He was more than just another

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dangerous rising leader. He was a ruthless visionary, ahead of his time, who would change the boundaries and landscape of this age old conflict and more dramatically also change the face of warfare.

Although Nuri's attacks so far had been limited and caused less damage than fear and anger, he continued to create victims in the unending cycle of attack and counter attack. Israel families grieved the loss of their loved ones, just as Rashid grieved the loss of his family. They felt all the pain and all the desire for revenge that Rashid now harbored. The one difference being that the Israeli government had the overwhelming means and the absolute determination to deliver on their behalf. They had consistently done so in the past and would continue to do so in the future.



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