

[Display full version](#)**January 12, 2009****Headlines for January 12, 2009****Death Toll in Gaza Approaches 900**

Israel has poured thousands of reservists into Gaza as Israeli troops push deeper into Gaza City in the seventeenth day of fighting. Nearly 900 Palestinians have now died, including 275 children. Another 4,100 Palestinians have been injured. The Israeli death toll is at thirteen.

Israel Criticized for Using White Phosphorus in Gaza

Human Rights Watch has called on the Israeli military to stop using white phosphorus in Gaza. Multiple air bursts of artillery-fired white phosphorus have been observed in Gaza. Marc Garlasco of Human Rights Watch said, "White phosphorous can burn down houses and cause horrific burns when it touches the skin." Israel has denied using the incendiary device.

Israel Admits Error in Bombing of UN School

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reports a preliminary investigation into Israel's bombing of a United Nations school last week has revealed that Israeli troops missed their target by some thirty-three yards. Forty-two Palestinians died in the school bombing. Israel now admits no militants were launching rockets from the UN compound. Israeli forces were trying to hit a target just outside the school.

Bush Rejected Israeli Request to Prepare for Iran Attack

In other news, the *New York Times* reports President Bush deflected a secret request by Israel last year for specialized bunker-busting bombs it wanted for an attack on Iran's main nuclear complex. Israel also asked for refueling equipment that would allow their aircraft to reach Iran and return to Israel. And they asked for the right to fly over Iraq. The *Times* also reveals new information about how President Bush authorized covert action inside Iran to sabotage Iran's suspected effort to develop nuclear weapons. Part of the covert program involved renewed American efforts to penetrate Iran's nuclear supply chain abroad, along with new efforts to undermine electrical systems, computer systems and other networks on which Iran relies.

Over 500,000 Lose Job in December; Official Unemployment Rate at 7.2%

The nation's official unemployment rate has jumped to 7.2 percent as employers eliminated over 500,000 jobs in December. In all of 2008, 2.6 million people lost their jobs, the largest slump in employment since 1945. Economists estimate the actual unemployment rate is 13.5 percent if you include underemployed and discouraged workers, who have stopped looking for a job. On Friday, the military contractor Boeing announced it would eliminate 4,500 jobs, mostly in the Washington state area. Many economists predict the unemployment rate will continue to rise in 2009.

Duke University Professor Campbell Harvey: "Right now it seems like we are losing about half a million jobs every month. So the situation is very dire. And combined with this, there's no obvious end in sight. There's no single economic indicator that would suggest that we're near the end or the trough of this recession. So, basically, we're faced, in my opinion, with an additional three million losses ahead in 2009."

Witness Against Torture Holds Fast Calling for Closing of Guantanamo

Sunday marked the seventh anniversary of the opening of the US military prison at Guantanamo. In Washington, activists with the group Witness Against Torture have started a nine-day fast.

Obama: Guantanamo Will Not Be Closed in First 100 Days

On Sunday, President-elect Barack Obama was asked on ABC's *This Week* if he plans to close Guantanamo in his first 100 days.

President-elect Barack Obama: "That is a challenge. I think it's going to take some time, and our legal teams are working in consultation with our national security apparatus, as we speak, to help design exactly what we need to do."

Obama Suggests No Prosecution for Bush Admin Crimes

During the same interview, Obama was asked if he will appoint a special prosecutor to independently investigate the crimes of the Bush administration, including torture and warrantless wiretapping.

President-elect Barack Obama: "We're still evaluating how we are

going to approach the whole issue of interrogations, detentions, and so forth. And obviously we're going to be looking at past practices. And I don't believe that anybody is above the law. On the other hand, I also have a belief that we need to look forward as opposed to looking backwards... My orientation is going to be moving forward."

Obama Nominates Panetta and Blair

On Friday, President-elect Obama formally nominated Leon Panetta to be CIA Director and retired Admiral Dennis Blair to be National Intelligence Director. Obama said Panetta and Blair have been given a charge not to engage in torture.

President-elect Barack Obama: "Under my administration, the United States does not torture. We will abide by the Geneva Conventions that we will uphold our highest values and ideals. And that is a clear charge that I've given to Admiral Blair and to Leon Panetta. And I think it is important for us to do that not only because that's who we are, but also, ultimately, it will make us safer and will help in changing hearts and minds in our struggle against extremists."

Bush Admits OKing Torture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed

Meanwhile, President Bush acknowledged that he personally authorized the torture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was held in a secret CIA prison where he was waterboarded over 100 times. Bush made the disclosure on Fox News Sunday.

President Bush: "One such person who gave us information was Khalid Sheikh Mohammed... And I'm in the Oval Office, and I am told that we have captured Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and the professionals believe he has information necessary to secure the country. So I ask, 'What tools are available for us to find information from him?' And they gave me a list of tools. And I said, 'Are these tools deemed to be legal?' And so, we got legal opinions before any decision was made."

Conyers Pushes for Nat'l Commission on Presidential War Powers and Civil Liberties

In related news, House Judiciary Chairman John Conyers has introduced legislation setting up a National Commission on Presidential War Powers and Civil Liberties.

Illinois House Votes to Impeach Blagojevich

In Illinois, the State House of Representatives has voted to impeach Governor Rod Blagojevich for abuse of power. The vote was 114-to-1. The Democratic governor will face trial by the State Senate next week. Meanwhile, Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois said Sunday it was likely that former Illinois Attorney General Roland Burris would be seated as the state's newest senator this week despite the impeachment of Blagojevich.

Afghan Militants Attack Base in Pakistan

On Saturday, hundreds of Taliban militants poured across the Afghan border into northwestern Pakistan in a large frontal attack on a paramilitary base. The attack left at least forty militants and six Pakistani soldiers dead.

Son of Charles Taylor Sentenced to 97 Years for Torture

The son of former Liberian President Charles Taylor has been sentenced to ninety-seven years in prison for mutilations and executions carried out in Liberia, in the first US prosecution for torture committed abroad. Charles "Chuckie" Taylor, Jr., was convicted in October by a jury in Miami, Florida on eight torture and conspiracy charges for killings, beatings and atrocities committed while he headed a paramilitary force in Liberia. The charges said he and his colleagues burned their victims with hot irons, molten wax and boiling water and applied electric shocks to their genitals. The thirty-one-year-old Taylor is a US citizen who was born in Boston. Taylor was the first person charged under a 1994 extraterritorial torture statute, which allows prosecutors to charge a US citizen or someone present in the United States with acts of torture or conspiracy to torture outside the country.

Lori Berenson Moved to New Jail Due to Complicated Pregnancy

The Peruvian government has moved US activist Lori Berenson to a prison in Lima to get healthcare during a complicated pregnancy. Berenson has been imprisoned since 1995. She was convicted of secondary accomplice to collaboration to terrorism. She was first sentenced to life in prison, then she was sentenced to twenty years. She has denied the charges against her. She could be paroled as early as 2010.

Leonard Peltier to be Moved to New Prison

Native American activist Leonard Peltier is scheduled to be moved to another prison today. February 6 will mark thirty-three years since his arrest. He was convicted of killing two FBI agents during a shootout on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1975. Peltier has long maintained his innocence and is widely considered a political prisoner in the United States.

10,000 Gallons of Slurry Spills Out at Coal Plant in Alabama

In environmental news, there has been another accident at a coal plant run by the Tennessee Valley Authority. 10,000 gallons of slurry have spilled from a retention pond at the Widows Creek Fossil Plant in Alabama. Some of the waste escaped into the Tennessee River. The spill comes less than a month after more than a billion gallons of toxic coal ash leaked out from a retention pond at a TVA plant in Tennessee.

Group Campaigns to Ban Drivers from Using Cell Phones

The National Safety Council has launched a campaign to ban the use of all cell phones while driving, including hand-free sets. Researchers have found that drivers using mobile telephones are as impaired as drivers who are legally drunk. The National Safety Council estimates 2,600 people die each year from auto accidents involving a driver on a cell phone.

"Waltz with Bashir" Wins Golden Globe

And the film *Waltz with Bashir* won a Golden Globe last night for Best foreign film. The animated feature was written and directed by Ari Folman, who served in the Israeli military during Israel's 1982 war with Lebanon. *Waltz with Bashir* explores the role his unit played in the massacre of Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. The big winner of the Golden Globes was the film *Slumdog*

Millionaire, which won four awards.



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