

Massacre of Peaceful Gaza Demonstrators: An Israeli Crime Against Humanity

April 10, 2018

On March 30, over 30,000 Palestinians - children, women, and men - gathered near the Gaza border with Israel. As they assembled several hundred yards away from the border fence, 18 peaceful demonstrators were gunned down by Israeli military snipers using live ammunition, with over a thousand reportedly suffering bullet wounds. Many of the demonstrators had come as whole families, with picnic supplies.



The Palestinian protests continued for a second week on April 6, when Israeli snipers again used live ammunition, killing 10 demonstrators. Time will tell whether this turns into a new Intifada.

March 30, 2018 showed Israel's descent into unabashed crimes against humanity, carried out openly by its military, and defended afterwards equally openly by its political and military leadership.

While its military attacks on Gaza in 2006, 2008-09, and 2014 resulted in far greater loss of life, in these cases Israel claimed that it was hitting military targets and not deliberately aiming at civilians. (Of course, it did kill thousands, mainly civilians.) In the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre in Lebanon, Israeli forces did not carry out directly the actual killing of thousands of Palestinian refugees themselves, but left that to reactionary Lebanese militias allied with them. In March 2018, mass murder was openly carried out and openly defended after the fact.

The idea for a peaceful demonstration near the border fence was launched by Gaza social media activist Ahmad Abu Artema, a political independent. It gained support from the Islamist Hamas movement, which has governed Gaza for over a decade. (Isabel Kershner and Iyad Abuheweila, "Confrontations at Gaza Fence Leave 15 Dead," *New York Times* 3-31-18). Hamas promoted the event as a peaceful one: "Our orders are strict, to engage in peaceful forms of action," stated Hamas official Bassem Naim (Piotr Smolar, "Dix-huit Palestiniens tués vendredi par l'armée israélienne: autopsie d'une répression meurtrière à Gaza", *Le Monde* 4-3-18).

In response to the announcement of the demonstration, Israeli spokespersons cried bloody murder, literally: "The Hamas leadership is risking your lives," tweeted the ultra-reactionary defense minister Avigdor Lieberman (Kershner and Abuheweila, "Confrontations"). Retired general Yoav Galant told journalists that if demonstrators approached the border, they risked "a bloodbath," while Army Chief-of-Staff Gadi Eizenkot warned of "the deployment of more than 100 elite snipers" (Piotr Smolar, "Dix-huit Palestiniens tués").

In the aftermath, Palestinians and their allies pointed to clear evidence that a large-scale massacre of peaceful demonstrators had occurred. Not one Israeli soldier was even wounded. Israeli snipers fired at demonstrators who were well over 100 meters away from the border. The most Israeli authorities could claim was that some protestors had thrown projectiles toward them, but apparently without any of them reaching their targets, or having the chance of reaching them.

For their part, Israeli leaders literally crowed at their "victory" over unarmed demonstrators: "Bravo

to our soldiers," wrote Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu ("Après un journée de protestation à Gaza, les Palestiniens enterrent leurs morts," *Le Monde* 4-1-18)

An ancillary effect of the Gaza massacre could be to bolster support for the Islamist Hamas movement among the Palestinian people. Hamas is basically the Palestinian branch of the socially and politically conservative Muslim Brotherhood, which means that its charter says nothing about the elimination of social hierarchies within Palestinian society. On women's rights, for example, this document states, with more than a little nostalgia for the past: "The role of Palestinian women is fundamental in the process of building the present and the future, just as it has always been..."

In contrast, the more secular Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)-inspired Draft Palestinian Basic Law (Constitution) of 1995 states, "Women and men shall have equal fundamental rights and freedoms without any discrimination." Its 1968 version went further: "The Movement tries to liberate the individual from all social ills, especially the discrimination women face, the thing that hinders their potentials and effective contributions at all disciplinary levels." This shift is also a marker of the PLO's degeneration from a more liberationist movement to a corrupt out-of-touch bureaucracy that governs the West Bank in cooperation with Israeli authorities.

The essential conservatism and narrow partisan agendas of both Hamas and the PLO has led younger and more radical sectors of Palestinian society to demand an end to their feuds, while also searching for new perspectives and forms of organization from which to continue the struggle.

Today, the people of the entire Middle East are tired of endless imperialist and civil war, and of the harsh repression that ended the Arab revolutions of 2011. They are at a point where they can no longer take it, and the outbreak of protest elsewhere in the region - or something even more serious - is highly likely in the aftermath of the massacre.

Inside the US, the political leadership has greeted the March 30 massacre with silence. Of 535 members of the House and the Senate, only three, Senator Bernie Sanders (VT) and Representatives Betty McCollum (MN) and Barbara Lee (CA) spoke out to condemn the massacre.

Israel was also testing its weapons systems on human targets March 30, like the armed drones it used to spray teargas on the demonstrators. Israel produces its own drones, for itself and the world arms market, and March 30 served as a sort of advertisement. It has recently sold drones to Modi's Hindu nationalist government India, where they are being used to suppress the people of Kashmir. Modi may now be interested in buying more.

But most of Israel's military hardware is of US origin, and is being spectacularly augmented under the unprecedented \$38 billion ten-year deal for military assistance agreed to by the US in the waning days of the Obama administration.

Add to that the Trump administration's unconscionable decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, thus recognizing Israel's permanent occupation of the city that Palestinians claim as the capital of their future state, and it becomes more evident than ever that US imperialism stands behind Israel, from occupation to occupation, from massacre to massacre, and from invasion to invasion.

Moreover, both Egypt and Saudi Arabia, respectively the largest military and financial power in Arab world, have recently indicated their support for Israel, with Saudi Arabia confirming this in the aftermath of March 30.

Thus, Netanyahu's Israel seems to be riding high in its struggles against the Palestinians, confident of its impunity in suppressing and murdering them, and hiding behind its walls and military

strength. But this triumph is built upon sand, on the assumption that the Palestinian people will eventually give up and accept second-class status under Israeli occupation.

The history of oppressed nations and peoples shows the opposite. Some 250 years ago, Poland was conquered and divided up among its neighbors, the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian empires. It was proclaimed to the skies that Poland was dead. It took nearly 150 years, but the Polish people never gave up. Nor did their allies on the left, among them Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Karl Marx, and the movements they inspired, like the Parisian masses who took on the monarchy in 1848, shouting as they marched, "Long Live Poland!" The Poles persisted, staging mass uprisings in 1830, 1846, 1863, and 1905, and also lending their support to liberationist movements of other peoples, as in the Paris Commune of 1871. In 1918, as the three occupying empires crumbled, an independent Polish state arose again, proving how hard it is to eradicate the legitimate national aspirations of an entire people.

Keeping that history in mind, we conclude: Long live Palestine, today and in the future!