

Zionist wrath vs the Palestinian people

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The recent Gaza protests underscore the undefeated spirit of the Palestinian cause despite State aggressions

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Eleven days of relentless air and artillery bombardment was the measure of punishment reserved for Gaza in the most recent visitation of Zionist wrath. The easy alibi offered in previous acts of mass murder — the volleys of rockets fired into Israeli towns by resistance organisations in Gaza — was supposed to efface the gross disproportion of the response. Prior provocations by Israel were factored out: Such as the threatened eviction of Palestinians who have lived long years in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, and the thuggish police disruption of worship at the city's historic Al Aqsa mosque, beginning the last Friday of Ramzan.

At a meeting with the global diplomatic corps during the assault, Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu spoke of the Gaza rockets as an intolerable threat to civilian life that had to be deterred. Israel's deterrence operations would continue till the objective was achieved. A day after a truce was agreed with the tiny, isolated and over-crowded enclave, Netanyahu exulted in his achievement of all substantial objectives.

Expert opinion within Israel was sceptical. Netanyahu had no clear exit plan when he began the operation and only ceased when he encountered a mounting tide of international opprobrium. Pressures brought to bear by Israel's Arab allies, such as Egypt and Jordan, may have played a role,

as also the prospect that newly forged friendships with the Gulf emirates might fray. The attack on Gaza also triggered large-scale communal violence within Israel's pre-1967 borders, with the Palestinian minority at one stage joining hands with the occupied West Bank in a general strike.

Since the truce, Netanyahu's rhetoric of incitement has not abated. Police cordons and restrictions around Al Aqsa continue, as do evictions of Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem. There is, in short, no respite from the ethnic cleansing that began with the Palestinian Nakba or catastrophe of 1948.

With the odds stacked formidably against them, Gazans came out on the streets immediately after the ceasefire was announced, chanting slogans of victory. They had taken a severe battering: 263 dead including 68 children, schools destroyed, many thousands rendered homeless, and essential life-saving facilities such as clinical laboratories and hospitals stressed beyond breaking point in a time of pandemic.

Was the Gazan victory parade then a perverse celebration of a death cult? War, since that is what it was, is about political objectives and the gratuitous infliction of pain on another is often an end in itself. Was Hamas, effectively the governing authority in Gaza, celebrating the 12 deaths it had inflicted on Israel through the rocket fire that it sustained despite the brutal punishment?

Since enacting the charade of withdrawal from Gaza in 2004, this is the fourth time that Israel has gone to war against its people. Earlier assaults, in 2009, 2012 and 2014, have caused many more casualties. Yet for Gaza, whose land, sea and air routes are under strict Israeli cordon, resistance is a long-term enterprise, to impress upon the world community, including those least troubled by rampant racism, of the essential inhumanity of Israel's project.

Colonialism is about territorial conquest, but in its settler variant involves a vital demographic component. Ethnic cleansing served that demographic objective at Israel's creation, creating a tide of refugees but leaving behind a small residue of Palestinians within the conquered frontiers. In 1967, when Israel's war of aggression brought all of Palestine under its sway, the population that did not conform to its identity of Jewishness was more than a residue. It was potentially a majority of humanity between the Mediterranean and the River Jordan.

For a while, the Israeli economy flourished on the demographic dividends of conquest. Vast numbers of Palestinians from occupied East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank, filled the Jewish nation's need for low-cost labour, until the intifada, or uprising for freedom that began in 1987, brought home its disruptive potential. With encouragement from allies in the West and generous European handouts to the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), now a domesticated and sadly diminished force, Israel then began a project of making Palestinians their own slave-drivers, while corralling them within tiny, dispersed and isolated enclaves.

That enterprise failed in 2000, with PLO leader Yasser Arafat's brusque rejection of the demeaning offer made under US patronage for a final status settlement. Now intent on proving that it had no partner for peace, Israel effectively provoked another mass uprising by sending its thuggish soldier-turned politician, Ariel Sharon, on a walkabout in the Al Aqsa precincts.

Once shunned by a political establishment that was eager to utilise his services while maintaining deniability, Sharon was soon the master of Israel's destiny. As Prime Minister, he brought a ruthless pragmatism to planning the nation's future, spelling out his plans in 2003 at an annual

security conference in Herzliya, the city named for Zionism's founder. "If there is no progress toward peace in a matter of months," he announced, "then Israel (would) initiate unilateral security steps to disengage from the Palestinians."

The disengagement would involve the closure of some Israeli settlements in the Gaza and the West Bank, but the strengthening of certain others. Palestine would in effect become a shrivelled up territorial entity, broken up into fragments, dotted with heavily protected Jewish settlements and traversed by roads reserved for Jews.

Netanyahu opposed the disengagement plan when it was implemented, part of the toxic competition that is Israeli politics. But today he carries it forward eagerly, since it is the only way to make real the foundational myth of the Jewish nation — that it is built by a people without a land on a land without a people.

Palestinians though, for a non-existent people, have been a persistent demographic headache for Israel. Expulsion, or "mass transfer" as it is called in Israeli political discourse, ceased being an option in 1948. And yet the territory had to be held without the people.

Israel's declaration of independence in 1948 spoke of Palestine as a wasteland that Jewish immigration had brought to bloom. Though obligated under the declaration to promulgate a full-fledged constitution for the nation by October that year, the Jewish state has been in consistent default, making it one of a handful of states without a written constitution. That apart, Israel has another quite unique distinction: Today it remains the only nation that has left its geographical frontiers undefined.

In 1992, while in the thick of the first intifada, Israel enacted a "basic law" on "human dignity and liberty", ostensibly embodying the "values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state". Beyond that, it guaranteed all "persons" — rather than only "citizens" — the basic entitlements of freedom and opportunity, including the right to leave the country at will. The right to return though, was reserved only for Israeli nationals. And the promise made in the declaration of independence, that Israel would remain "open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles" remained on the books.

In 2018, soon after marking the 70th anniversary of the declaration of independence, the Knesset enacted an amendment to the basic law, declaring Israel the "nation state of the Jewish people". Self-determination as a right within the state would be "unique to the Jewish people". The Israeli state would act to preserve Jewish culture and legacy among the so-called diaspora and encourage Jewish settlement as a "national value".

The territorial scope of these assertions remained undefined. An explicit affirmation of extra-territoriality followed: That the Israeli state would "ensure the safety of sons (sic) of the Jewish people and its citizens who are in trouble and captivity due to their Jewishness or their citizenship".

As the bombs rained down in Gaza, US President Joe Biden could not bring himself to any greater reproach than blaming the victim. "Israel has every right to defend itself," he said, in a tired reiteration of a discredited old nostrum. Following the truce, he summoned up another reproach for the victims: A long-term solution, he said, depended upon everybody acknowledging Israel as a Jewish and democratic state for all time.

“Jewish” and “democratic” are two descriptors that are wildly mis-aligned in their reference to the Zionist state. To say that the Palestinians should accept this incongruity is to invite their self-obliteration as a people with a history and identity. The Hamas rockets fired against the overwhelming military might of Israel do not bespeak, as the West believes, a suicidal intent. They are the insistence of a people that will not admit defeat or be party to its own extinction.



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