

Annapolis Hypocrisy Hides Occupied Palestine Reality

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Against the sham backdrop of Annapolis, life in occupied Palestine is a daily struggle to endure and survive what Edward Said once referred to as Israel's "refined viciousness." This article addresses one week of it no different than most others. It shows the road to peace isn't through Annapolis nor can it be achieved without a willing partner or with the legitimate Palestinian government excluded. Talks are futile as long as Israel spurns peace, violates international law, attacks Palestinian civilians, seizes their land, destroys their homes, restricts their movements, conducts targeted assassinations, denies them essential services, and holds Gaza under a medieval siege in the world's largest open-air prison while blaming the victims.

Unreported is that the West Bank is also under siege that's been tightened in recent weeks on targeted communities. Palestinian civilians are severely impeded especially in their movement in and out of Jerusalem. Other communities affected include Nablus, Tulkarm, Bethlehem, Jenin, Hebron and Ramallah. None of this is reported in the mainstream.

Each week, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reports on conditions on the ground by documenting Israeli human rights violations in the Territories. They're systematic, unending and savagely brutal by a nation pretending to want peace in the latest theatrics going nowhere. Against a backdrop of talks, photo-ops and high-sounding rhetoric, here's the reality on the ground from November 22 to 28. It's much like most previous weeks and those yet to come. It's why talk of peace is pretense, and the struggle continues. Here's an unreported snapshot of life in occupied Palestine amidst all the Annapolis hoopla:

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF):

- killed 11 Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank; one victim was extra-judicially assassinated; two others were killed by banned flechette shells that propel metal fragments on detonation for maximum destructive effect against human targets; an Israeli Air Force raid killed another five Palestinians in Gaza early Saturday and wounded eight others as part of its regular terror-inflicting operations the IDF complements with savagery on the ground;

- wounded 28 Palestinians, including four children and an Israeli human rights defender; prevented ambulances from reaching victims to provide medical aid and transport to hospitals; one or more victims bled to death as a result;

- conducted 12 incursions into the West Bank and two into Gaza; targeted in the West Bank were al-Bireh and the neighboring al-Am'ari refugee camp; Ramallah; Jenin town and refugee camp; Azzoun village, east of Qalqilya; and Nablus and neighboring Balata and Ein Beit al-Maa refugee camps; Gaza targets included al-Shouka village, east of Rafah; in all

cases, civilians were victimized;

- conducted air strikes at locations in Gaza including against the Palestinian naval police in Khan Yunis and Hamas' Izziddin al-Qassam Brigades military wing;

- arrested 30 Palestinian civilians in the West Bank plus 12 in Gaza making the total number of arrests this year 2476 in the West Bank; year to date Gaza arrests weren't reported but may be comparable in number to the West Bank; as many as 12,000 Palestinians are in Israeli prisons under deplorable conditions, most are uncharged under administrative detention, and Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem estimates 85% of them are subjected to torture or abuse; Israel continues making more unreported illegal arrests than the number of prisoners theatrically released; most are near the end of their unjustified sentences;

- destroyed one house and razed 7 donums (about 2 acres) of agricultural land in Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza;

- destroyed buildings and factories in the Gaza Erez industrial zone that remained after others there were destroyed earlier;

- allowed one patient to die because she was denied access to treatment outside Gaza;

- continued construction of the illegal annexation wall in the West Bank on seized Palestinian land;

- used force to disperse peaceful demonstrations protesting the wall's construction in Bal'eom village, west of Ramallah, and al-Ma'sara, south of Bethlehem;

- continued illegal West Bank settlement activities;

- allowed Israeli settlers to continue attacking Palestinian civilians and their property; attacks also injured 13 Palestinian civilians traveling in a minibus;

- continued to violently beat Palestinians attempting to bypass checkpoints to enter Jerusalem; this happens mostly on Fridays when they wish to pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque;

- seized the homes of three Palestinian families for use as military sites; and

- Israeli settlers attacked a Hebron school causing damage; they broke windows, uprooted trees, demolished walls and tried to burn down the building; Settlers also attacked a private home; they set fires, broke windows and damaged a car and barnyard; in both instances, IDF forces were nearby but didn't intervene as they almost never do in situations like this so settlers can freely terrorize Palestinian civilians.

In addition, the IDF has kept all Gaza border crossings closed for almost 17 months as part of a total siege on the Territory. Rafah International Crossing bordering Egypt is Gaza's only connection to the outside world, and it's been closed since June 25, 2006. Currently, around 6000 Palestinians are trapped on the Egyptian side unable to return home. Most have depleted their funds and rely on spotty assistance. Deaths have resulted, now at least 19 in number.

The result is a humanitarian and economic disaster. The flow of essential food, medical

supplies and fuel as well as construction and other materials have been severely impeded or stopped altogether. Conditions became especially severe after the Israeli government declared Gaza a “hostile entity” on September 19, 2007 and escalated further collective punishment measures. Fuel supplies, already low, were cut again and are at critical levels. In addition, plans were to scale back electricity December 2 until Israel’s Supreme Court ruled November 30 the action must be postponed for at least a week pending a full presentation of the proposed operation.

The Court’s directive stopped short of an injunction halting the measure. Instead the justices said they “assumed that until the required additional information and necessary clarifications are received, the plan to limit electricity to (Gaza) will not begin to be implemented.”

Now a delay of at least three weeks is likely because authorities have 12 days to provide the requested information after which groups opposed have a week to file briefs with their positions. At the same time, the Court approved the government’s plan for further fuel supplies cuts that attorney Hassan Jabarin, representing the Adalah center for Arab minority rights in Israel, said “constitutes serious harm to the basic principle of international humanitarian law.” He added that international law prohibits collective punishment for any reason or using a civilian population for political purposes. Gaza fuel supplies were already low, and further cuts threaten all aspects of civilian life – health services, sewage disposal, drinking water wells, transportation, commerce, industrial production, agriculture and education.

Other collective punishment measures include allowing only nine basic materials into Gaza. The result is severe shortages of everything including vital supplies. Local markets ran out of many goods and can’t get banned ones. In addition, prices have risen sharply and in some cases fivefold making them unaffordable. People report being unable to get razors and shaving material, coffee, diapers, printing paper or even shoes, socks, underwear, wool clothes or jackets. Medical supplies are also exhausted so critical items like life-saving drugs and oxygen aren’t available.

Other banned items include furniture, electrical appliances, headstone materials for graves and cigarettes. Restricted also are fruits, milk and other dairy products. In addition, severe restrictions have been imposed on fishing. This affects 35,000 people in coastal communities, including 2500 fishermen as well as 2500 support staff and their families. In addition, Palestinians in Gaza aren’t able to enter Israel or the West Bank for any purpose including essential medical care unavailable in the Strip. The result is predictable – needless deaths and great human suffering.

UNRWA Gaza field office director, John Ging, expressed great concern about Israel’s actions with comments about “crushing sanctions, significantly adding to the human misery and suffering of 1.5 million civilians in Gaza (that) are in fact counterproductive to their stated purpose....You must be on the ground for days and weeks to begin to appreciate the full horror of the situation....living conditions continue their relentless downward spiral, to what can now only be described as truly appalling.”

Ging continued saying: “The impact on the medical situation for those affected is quite simply atrocious (with) essential drugs....in chronically short supply or have run out altogether (and) 800 patients needing treatment abroad (can’t) leave Gaza (and are

enduring great) physical suffering and mental anguish. The food situation is equally bad (for 80% of Gazans)." UN "handouts" can only provide 61% of their daily caloric intake to sustain life.

After two years of UN service in Gaza, Ging added that the occupation caused the education system to collapse with a 90% literacy and numeracy failure rate the evidence. He also felt "compelled to discard the usual niceties of diplomatic speak" for blunt talk about the appalling Israeli policy of collective punishment and inhumane illegal sanctions against defenseless civilians suffering hugely.

None of this was on the table at Annapolis, and Ging's boss, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, didn't raise them. Nor was the following discussed: the refugees' right of return, ending the occupation, the rights of Palestinian Israeli citizens, the annexation wall, dismantling West Bank settlements, Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital or a legitimate integrated Palestinian state and not one cantonized in the West Bank and separated from Gaza. The so-called "peace process" instead demands that Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state; give up their right of self-defense against the world's fourth largest military power; legitimize an ideology of racism, ethnic cleansing and colonization; and have a Palestinian security force be Israeli enforcers against the legal rights of their own people.

Fatah Palestinian Authority (PA) Security Force Repression Ordered by Quisling President Mahmoud Abbas to Please Israel and Washington

Many thousands of Palestinians in communities throughout Gaza and the West Bank took to the streets on November 27 in peaceful protests against the sham peace offensive they denounce. Demonstrations were organized by several political parties and civil society organizations and were held in the West Bank cities of Ramallah, Hebron, Tulkarem, Bethlehem and Nablus in defiance of a Fatah-imposed ban on them. As a result, they were repressively met by hundreds of Fatah security personnel. Fist fights broke out, dozens were arrested, and police beat demonstrators with batons to disperse them. They also used tear gas and fired indiscriminately in the air and into crowds that responded by throwing rocks. One civilian died from a gunshot to the chest. Thirty others were injured, some seriously.

Journalists covering the event were also attacked, beaten, detained and prevented from doing their jobs. In addition, the evening before (November 26) and throughout November 27, demonstration organizers were arrested. Some were later released. Others remain in custody. Similar protests also took place around the region as Palestinian refugees and their supporters in other Arab countries publicly demanded their right to return be honored according to UN Resolution 194 Israel won't even acknowledge, let alone observe.

The scene in Gaza was another story. Huge crowds of well over 100,000 (some estimates were 250,000) assembled to protest and were addressed by the legitimate Hamas Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh. He denounced the Annapolis talks saying they "don't represent the Palestinian people." The sentiment in the streets was powerful with chants of "No recognition of Israel, America is the head of the snake," and cries calling Abbas a traitor by tens of thousands of outraged and unrepresented people.

One woman summed up the prevailing sentiment saying: "We don't want more alleged peace conferences, which bring us more suffering. We prefer poverty to accepting shameful peace." Others expressed similar views preferring to suffer than to give up their legitimate rights long denied and won't be resolved at Annapolis or what follows next. And their allies

extend beyond Hamas. They include Islamic Jihad, the Islamic Liberation Party, Palestinian Liberation Organization-linked parties and responsible intellectuals who believe real peace won't come through Annapolis or other sham processes like it.

Life in the Occupied Territories goes on where Palestinians won't accept surrender for peace. Their struggle for freedom and justice continues. Israel remains defiant so expect many more weeks on the ground like the last one. It's so future generations can be free because past ones endured so much for them.

Ramallah Global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Summit

Palestinians have allies everywhere outside seats of power, and 300 of them gathered on November 22 in Ramallah. Activists, union members and NGO representatives came to plan a global civil resistance campaign against Israel's repressive occupation and rule. Their aim: an action plan for boycott, divestment and sanctions that proved successful liberating India from Britain and South Africa from white supremacist apartheid. Where negotiation fails, pressure may succeed and conference participants see it as a priority in the current environment.

The Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) convened the conference along with the OPGAI Coalition (Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative), PACBI (The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel) and Stop the Wall (The Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign). Dr. Allam Jarrar of PNGO called the conference an historic event 60 years after the Palestinian Nakba. Now "we are beginning to revise the strategy of our struggle for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among them our rights to self-determination, independence and (right of) return. The boycott campaign will re-vitalize popular resistance and restore dignity" as well as dispel the myth that Palestinians can only engage in negotiations that have never worked and won't now.

The balance of power can only shift through sustained and effective pressure, and Stop the Wall representative Jamal Jum'a believes that the BDS movement today is so diverse and widespread the Zionist Lobby can't destroy it. Neither can Annapolis obscure it. Only ineffective resistance can do it that must be avoided. To prevent it, consensus was reached that building a civil resistance campaign is crucial, and recommendations were made as follows:

They involve forming a Steering Committee for the Campaign and more:

(1) The local Palestinian BDS Campaign:

— consumer boycott of Israeli products by Palestinians; use of local alternatives instead; dialogue with Palestinian companies to support them and expand employment of the Palestinian work force;

— educate by reviewing the Palestinian curriculum to ensure its historic accuracy; enlist students in the BDS campaign; urge the Ministry of Education to urge private schools stop selling Israeli products and refrain from normalization projects with Israeli organizations;

— media awareness pressure to stop advertising Israeli products; public awareness measures to support the boycott; and

— mechanisms for campaign building and promotion by forming popular boycott

committees to raise public awareness, initiate action and build a popular culture supporting boycott instead of normalization that's futile; pressure PA officials to support the effort and express solidarity with other Global South popular struggles to gain theirs in return.

(2) An Arab World Campaign

— cooperate and coordinate with other Arab world anti-normalization committees; lobby for reactivating the Arab League boycott committee; inject BDS into the mainstream Arab media; urge Arab investors to support the Palestinian economy; promote Palestinian products in Arab countries.

(3) An International/Global Campaign

— an overall strategy to challenge Israel's legitimacy as a Jewish state and a colonial apartheid one; the boycott to include targeting Israel's economy, academia, culture and sports.

Success depends on building alliances with unions, faith-based organizations and other potential allies in the Arab world, throughout the Global South, and with marginalized Global North communities. In addition an emphasis must be placed on coordinating global activities and campaigns to build a worldwide BDS effort.

On its web site, the Palestine BDS Campaign targets Israel with punitive non-violent measures "until it complies with international law and universal principles of human rights." As representatives of Palestinian civil society, it "call(s) upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience (everywhere) to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel (like) those applied (against apartheid) South Africa....for the sake of justice and genuine peace." It must include an end to occupation and colonization, granting Arab Israeli citizens equal rights to Jews, and letting Palestinian refugees return to their homeland as stipulated under UN Resolution 194.

These are fundamental principles of international law applying to all nations. They're not negotiable, and no nation gets a pass. Peace isn't possible until Israel goes along and becomes a member in good standing in the world community. Up to now, it's never been one. It's about time that changed, and it's hoped an effective BDS campaign is the way to do it because other ways for 60 years haven't worked.

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