

Ceasefires, Israeli-Style

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Waging war while talking peace is customary Israeli practice. On January 19, Haaretz headlined: "Israel declares unilateral cease-fire. The security cabinet last night authorized a unilateral cease-fire (to take effect) at 2AM (Sunday morning), ending three weeks of intense fighting."

Declaration notwithstanding, nothing changed. Gaza remains occupied, under siege, and totally isolated. Borders are still closed. On January 28, The New York Times said "truckloads of humanitarian aid" are stuck in Egypt because of Israeli and Cairo restrictions. Little can get in, and attacks merely downshifted to a lower gear.

Shortly after Sunday's announcement, an Israeli aircraft killed a Gaza City resident. IDF troops opened fire in Wadi al-Salqa village, southeast of Deir al-Balah. Homes in al-Qarara village were attacked. Helicopter gunships struck areas west of Khan Yunis, and F-16s bombed near the Science and Technology College in the same area. Israeli naval vessels shelled coastal areas and turned back ships with humanitarian aid. Agricultural land was raised. Arrests were made. Gaza continues to be terrorized.

For the week ending January 28th, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) reported continued Gaza and West Bank incursions and attacks:

- the IDF shot and killed a Gaza farmer on his land;
- 17 Gaza and West Bank Palestinians, including four children and two journalists, were wounded;
- 32 West Bank incursions were conducted;
- 64 West Bank civilians, including 15 children, were arrested;
- a private West Bank home near Bethlehem was seized as a military site;
- Gaza remains under siege and total isolation; conditions overall keep deteriorating;
- two Jerusalem homes were demolished; 53 civilians were left homeless; and Israel continues Judaizing Jerusalem through repeated land seizures.

The same pattern repeats daily, and reports indicate more American and EU complicity. The US Navy patrols the Red Sea to prevent weapons "smuggling," and Army Corps of Engineers are on the Egyptian - Gaza border to locate tunnels and destroy them. EU nations will monitor Rafah and perhaps other Gaza - Egypt border crossings, and France, Britain and other European countries offered naval vessel patrol help in the Red Sea.

On a January 26 Gaza visit, EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, refused to meet with Hamas. He called it “a terrorist movement” responsible for three weeks of Gaza fighting, the enormous devastation, and for using civilians as “human shields.” In response, Hamas official, Mushir al-Masr, expressed shock “to see a European official giving cover to massacres and terrorism committed by the Zionist enemy against the Palestinian people. Palestinian resistance is as legitimate as the resistance of European countries that fought against foreign occupiers.” International law affirms this.

On January 27, Haaretz reported that the fragile ceasefire was near collapse after an IDF soldier was killed. An air strike followed, and Israeli tanks again were on the move. “Heavy gunfire was audible along the border in central Gaza and Israeli helicopters hovered in the air, firing bursts from their machine guns, Palestinian witnesses said.”

On January 29, Maan News reported that nine Gazans, mostly children, were wounded by an F-16 missile in Khan Younis following overnight strikes at the As-Salam district of Rafah. In addition, IDF tanks “invaded Gaza near Deir Al-Balah, bulldozing agricultural land,” then withdrew in early morning. On the same day, 14 West Bank arrests were made, civilians seized from their homes in Bethlehem, Hebron and Bet Suweif village. A day earlier, the IDF invaded Zboba village, near Jenin, conducted house-to-house searches, enforced a curfew, forced families from their homes, ransacked their belongings, and arrested eight more men.

Incursions like these occur daily. Palestinian Prisoner Society president Qaddura Fares said 300 Gazans were arrested during three weeks of fighting and more when it ended. Israel conceals their names and where they’re held. Some are wounded and untreated. All are denied access to lawyers and ICRC representatives.

On January 30, Haaretz reported that “Israel plans more ‘pinpoint’ strikes against Hamas (and other resistance) in Gaza....to let Hamas know that strikes against Israel would not go unanswered, one source said.”

In her first news conference as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton blamed Hamas, said Israel has a “right to self-defense, (and that) rocket attacks....cannot go unanswered.” Hardly surprising from any US official, Republican or Democrat, although Clinton’s belligerence is high on the Richter scale.

At a Cairo news conference, US Middle East envoy George Mitchell said America “is committed to vigorously pursuing lasting peace and stability in the region.” He met with Egypt’s Mubarak, then headed for Tel Aviv meetings with Ehud Olmert, Tzipi Livni, Ehud Barak, Shimon Peres, IDF’s chief of staff Gabi Ashkenazi, and Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu to say America is committed to:

- Israel’s security;
- the “road map” assuring no possibility of peace;
- no policy change to allow Palestinians their right of return;
- Israel’s illegal settlement expansions;
- stopping Hamas weapons “smuggling” to deny their right of self-defense;
- dealing only with Mahmoud Abbas so “the Palestinian Authority (PA) will get a foot in the

door in Gaza;" and

— in spite of being Palestine's legitimate government and proposing a one and a half year truce (conditional on ending Gaza's siege and reopening all border crossings), Mitchell won't meet with Hamas to "pursue lasting peace and stability in the region;" he rebuffed Hamas' overture; affirmed the Bush administration's one-sided diplomacy; said nothing about continued Israeli attacks, arrests, and settlement expansions, paid lip service only to Gaza's humanitarian crisis, insisted that the PA be in charge of Gaza's borders, reiterated that Hamas is a "terrorist group," then headed for Ramallah to meet with Mahmoud Abbas and his coup d'état government.

Addressing a (New York-based) World Jewish Congress in Jerusalem on January 28, foreign minister Livni affirmed Israel's "right to act to defend ourselves against those activities in Gaza, including weapons 'smuggling' and build-up of military capabilities. Israel is going to act according to a new equation. We are not going to show restraint anymore. (Anymore?) We need to change the rules of the game until they (Hamas) learn that the rules have changed and the equation has changed."

Haaretz said Olmert told Mitchell that Gaza's borders won't reopen until Hamas releases IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. Unmentioned are thousands of imprisoned Palestinians, many held without charge, hundreds with no access to family or outside contact, most tortured, and all denied due process.

On January 28, Hamas rejected Olmert's terms. The Israeli English language Ynetnews.com quoted a member of its Cairo delegation, Salah al-Bardawil, saying: the ball is in Israel's court. "The demands are known (and so is the price). It is no secret that there are 11,000 Palestinian prisoners sitting in Israeli prisons. No tie shall be made between the truce and Shalit. If Israel wants him released, it must pay the rightful and asked price."

Bardawil rejects a Gaza "security zone" giving Israelis "an excuse to kill anyone who comes close to it, even if they are farmers and innocent civilians, claiming that they are members of the resistance organizations." For Israel, all civilians are legitimate targets, even women, children, the elderly, and infirm. Daily, they suffer grievously throughout Occupied Palestine.

Nonetheless on February 1, Al-Arabiya TV reported that Hamas accepted Egypt's one-year truce proposal beginning February 6. The delay will give its delegation time to make it official in Cairo. Details so far are sketchy but apparently involve PA monitoring/controlling border crossings and Hamas and PA authorities coordinating their activities. Earlier Hamas accepted a one and a half year truce conditional on re-opening borders so humanitarian and other essential aid can enter freely.

Gaza Professor Said Abdelwahed's Email

Three weeks of fighting have taken a terrible toll, yet appalling suffering continues. Consider the children. "Bereaved and traumatized, (they) need psychotherapists and special care! Who will take care of them? Local psychotherapy organizations can't do it and for more than one reason." Yet the need is overwhelming.

"Children have bad memories (from) ugly nights, nightmares and bad dreams. (It's been) an ongoing show of miseries, untold stories, stress and depression! The day before yesterday," fear of renewed Israeli attacks surfaced. Buildings and Gaza City schools "were evacuated

immediately! Pupils ran out of schools knowing not where to go. F-16s flew overhead. They broke the sound barrier and scared everyone.”

“The world community talks about arms smuggling to Gaza! What kind of arms” are they talking about? The fighting proved that “Palestinians have no weapons that can annoy Israeli aircraft, helicopters or tanks. The whole geography and psychology of Gaza have changed. It’s like an earthquake. Homes have been destroyed. Whole neighborhoods. Thousands are now displaced.”

“The fact is that words fall short of describing how things look now. It’s more horrible than the Holocaust.” Referring to dead children, Abdelwahed said: “I did not know before that 450 children and infants were Hamas affiliates or supporters....take care.”

World Affirmation of Continued Israeli Attacks

Palestinians remain isolated and abandoned. Disturbing truths are hidden from sight. The dominant media are complicit. BBC management won’t air an emergency fundraiser claiming doing so would show bias. A spokesman said: “The decision was made because of question marks about the delivery of aid in a volatile situation and also to avoid any risk of compromising public confidence in the BBC’s impartiality in the context of (a) news story.”

On January 29, Maan News reported that “Palestinian academics and media personnel as well as international activists, demanded the BBC leave Gaza over its refusal to air an appeal for aid.” Academics organized a sit-in near BBC’s Gaza office and denounced it for its action. Gaza Professor As’ad Abu Sharkh said: “The BBC has become a partner to Israel in its war on Gaza.” Others were equally vocal.

Throughout its history, BBC has been a reliable imperial tool. Its reputation remains unblemished. Veteran UK politician, Tony Benn, called its decision a “public betrayal....incomprehensible and it follows the bias in BBC reporting of this crisis.” In America, it’s much worse. Victims are vilified, aggressors praised, and no uncomfortable truths are aired or printed. Regardless of its crimes, Israel is untouchable.

EU Failure to Protect Human Rights in Occupied Palestine

On January 28, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) accused EU nations of failing to protect Palestinians’ human rights and demanded that remedial steps be taken. PCHR expressed dismay “by recent statements made by, and actions taken by, EU states regarding human rights violations” in Gaza and the West Bank.

In spite of weeks of slaughter, destruction and trauma, “EU member states abstained from a (January 12) United Nations Human Rights Council resolution condemning the (IDF’s) military offensive. A week later, Czech foreign minister and (EU Council) president-in-office, Karl Schwarzenberg, (said the EU) ‘should not act as a judge’ (against IDF humanitarian law violations).” In solidarity with Israel, he said: “I have never seen a war where humanitarian law was completely respected.”

Louis Michel, quoted above, went even further by claiming Hamas bore “overwhelming responsibility” for Israel’s offensive. These actions “highlight that the 27 EU member states are blatantly failing in their obligations as High Contracting Parties to the (1949) Fourth Geneva Convention to protect the lives of Palestinians in Gaza. The shameful silence of the entire international community....illustrates its utter failure to hold Israel accountable for its

masse violations of human rights (throughout Occupied Palestine) and especially in Gaza." International law demands accountability. Gazans remain imprisoned, and the West Bank is under military occupation.

Letting Israel slaughter, destroy, imprison, terror bomb, use illegal weapons, and willfully target civilians grants it license to keep doing it with impunity. PCHR wants accountability and for the EU not to "upgrade its political and economic relationship (through) the EU-Israel Association Agreement (on trade, political, and regional cooperation). (It's) conditional on Israel's respect for human rights." Tel Aviv blatantly disdains them. This no longer can be tolerated. Palestinians deserve justice. "EU member states must finally make a stand for the respect of law and protection of civilian lives."

Obama's Middle East Policy "A Mirror Image of Bush"

It's from Palestine Chronicle Editor-in-Chief Ramzy Baroud in his article titled: "For Palestinians, Obama's Message is Crystal Clear." Despite promising change, "how different will Obama truly be when his administration is done carrying out a few symbolic gestures to appease the ever-eager public" at a time when great economic distress takes precedence? Despite promising "a new era," continuity remains US - Israeli policy, and note Obama's statements.

His first January 22 public one affirmed one-sided Israeli support in saying: "Let me be clear - America is committed to Israel's security. And we will always support Israel's right to defend itself against legitimate threats.... Hamas must meet clear conditions: recognize Israel's right to exist; renounce violence; and abide by past agreements." It must also abandon its right to resist, to self-defense, to self-determination, to a sovereign Palestinian state inside pre-1967 borders, to be free from military occupation, from repeated Israeli incursions, and to remain Occupied Palestine's legitimately elected government.

"Obama's unparalleled clarity" is unequivocal. Israeli rights matter. Palestinian ones don't. "For Gazans, and most Palestinians, things cannot be any clearer." Obama promises continuity, not change. Palestinians are on their own. Their struggle for liberation continues.

Hopeful Justice in Spain

On January 29, AP reported that Spanish judge Fernando Andreu "began an investigation into seven current or former Israeli officials over a 2002 bombing in Gaza that killed a Hamas militant and 14 other people, including nine children." Andreu sees a possible crime against humanity in targeting Salah Shehadeh in which an F-16 dropped a one-ton bomb in Gaza City. He's proceeding "under (the universal jurisdiction) doctrine that allows (Spanish) prosecution of (such crimes and ones alleged to be terrorism or genocide), even if they are....committed in another country."

In June 2008, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) sued Israeli officials in the National Court of Spain naming then Israeli Air Force commander Dan Halutz, defense minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, senior air force commander Doron Almog, national security chief Giora Eiland, defense ministry official Michael Herzog, IDF chief of staff Moshe Ya'alon, and General Security Service head Avi Dichter.

Andreu called the bombing "clearly disproportionate and excessive" and said he agreed to investigate the charges because Israel stonewalled his request for information. He added if

he determines that innocent civilians were targeted, he might bring “even more serious” charges. The Spanish National Court said that genocide may be charged if intent to exterminate Palestinians can be proved.

Former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s comment was expected: “It’s absurd; Israel is fighting against war criminals and they are charging us with crimes.” The charges make “a mockery out of international law.” One of the accused, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, called the charges “ludicrous and outrageous (and that) terrorist organizations are using the courts to prosecute a state that works against terror.” Ehud Barak said they’re “hallucinatory.”

With Washington and western endorsement, blaming victims is customary Israeli practice. It expects a wave of criminal lawsuits and international pressure to investigate IDF war crimes in the aftermath of its terror bombing Gaza.

Amnesty International (AI) Ammunition

On January 17, AI got access to Gaza and “found first hand evidence of war crimes, serious violations of international law, and possible crimes against humanity.” More investigation continues, but already “the stories are harrowing,” including Israel’s “use of white phosphorous.” AI calls for “a full-fledged independent investigation” to uncover all crimes in the conflict.

Calls for an Academic and Cultural Boycott

On January 29, Haaretz reported that “In the wake of Operation Cast Lead, a group of American university professors has for the first time launched a national campaign calling for academic and cultural boycott of Israel.” Its mission statement says:

“In light of Israel’s persistent violations of international law, and Given that, since 1948, hundreds of UN resolutions have condemned Israel’s colonial and discriminatory policies as illegal and called for immediate, adequate and effective remedies, and Given that all forms of international intervention and peacemaking have until now failed to convince or force Israel to comply with humanitarian law, to respect fundamental human rights and to end its occupation and oppression of the people of Palestine, and In view of the fact that people of conscience in the international community have historically shouldered the moral responsibility to fight injustice,” and joined together in boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns....

“We representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience (everywhere) to impose broad boycotts and implement initiatives against Israel similar to those (against) South Africa.” We ask for support “for the sake of justice and genuine peace.” Demands listed are:

- ending Israel’s illegal occupation, colonization, and Separation Wall;
- recognizing full equality for Arab Israelis; and
- “respecting, protecting, and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties” as UN Resolution 194 mandates.

A Rare Davos Economic Forum Confrontation

Annually in Davos, Switzerland at the World Economic Forum, the world's corporate Mafia dons meet to discuss prospects for greater global exploitation.

On January 29 to a packed audience and on television, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan faced off with Israeli president Shimon Peres in debate, then stormed off the stage in disgust when the moderator cut him short and ended discussion. After Peres defended attacking Gaza in a lengthy monologue, Erdogan accused him of "killing people. I find it very sad that people applaud what you said. There have been many people killed. And I think that it is very wrong and it is not humanitarian."

Washington Post moderator David Ignatius cut him off. Erdogan said "Please let me finish." Ignatius responded: "We just don't have time. We really do need to get people to dinner." Erdogan again: "Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. I don't think I will come back to Davos after this." The audience appeared stunned. Erdogan brushed past reporters but not before his wife said: "All Peres said was a lie. It was unacceptable."

Erdogan, of course, played to a home audience, and it paid off. Back in Istanbul, he got a rapturous welcome. He later spoke with Peres by phone and agreed not to let the incident affect Turkish-Israeli relations.

Israeli - Turkey confrontation began when Gaza was attacked. It continued in Cairo when Israeli defense ministry political security bureau head, Amos Gilad, refused to meet with Ahmet Davutoglu, Erdogan's senior foreign policy advisor. Davutoglu was Turkey's conduit between Hamas and the West. Israel and Egypt stonewalled him. Israel and Turkey have strategic ties. It remains for high-level fence-mending to repair them.

Israeli Professor Avi Shlaim in the London Guardian

On January 7, he headlined: "How Israel brought Gaza to the brink of humanitarian catastrophe." Shlaim once served in the IDF, never questioned Israel's legitimacy inside the Green Line, and now teaches international relations at Oxford. He examined the conflict in context and said "Establishing the state of Israel in May 1948 involved a monumental injustice to the Palestinians." At the time, British Middle East Cairo office head, John Troutbeck, wrote foreign secretary Ernest Bevin that Americans were responsible for creating a gangster state headed by "an utterly unscrupulous set of leaders."

Given Israel's history of violence and latest Gaza aggression, Troutbeck's comment was prescient, but he omitted his own country's complicity that's still solid to this day.

Shlaim condemns what he calls "Greater Israel('s) permanent political, economic and military control (over Palestine)...the result has been one of the most prolonged and brutal military occupations in modern times." In Biblical language, "Israel turned the people of Gaza (and the West Bank) into the hewers of wood and the drawers of water, into a (reserve) source of cheap labour and a captive market for Israeli goods." Palestine "is a classic case of colonial exploitation in the post-colonial era. Jewish settlements....are immoral, illegal, and an insurmountable obstacle to peace."

"Israel likes to portray itself as an island of democracy in a sea of authoritarianism. Yet Israel has never in its entire history done anything to promote democracy (for its Arab citizens and population in the Territories)."

Palestine under Hamas is “the only genuine democracy in the Arab world,” except for perhaps Lebanon. Yet “America and the EU shamelessly joined Israel in ostracising and demonising (its) government...” The situation is “surreal...with a significant part of the international community imposing economic sanctions not against the occupier but against the occupied, not against the oppressor but against the oppressed.”

Palestinians are vilified for their own misfortunes. Israel, America, and the West call them “terrorists,” Hamas “just a bunch of religious fanatics (besides), and Islam incompatible with democracy” when, in fact, they’re normal people with ordinary dreams and have as much right to them as anyone.

Israel claims self-righteous victimhood while unleashing overpowering brute force. In Hebrew it’s called “bokhim ve-yorim, crying and shooting....The brutality of (its) soldiers is fully matched by the mendacity of its spokesmen....(its) propaganda is a pack of lies.” A chasm separates rhetoric from reality. Indiscriminate terror bombing is how it tries to spare civilians. Its philosophy is “an eye for an eyelash.”

Militarism can’t bring security. Only reconciliation and diplomacy works, but Israel stays hard line. Shlaim concludes that his country is “a rogue state with an utterly unscrupulous set of leaders.” They disdain international law, use terror weapons, slaughter civilians, and hold Islam in contempt.

“Israel’s real aim is not peaceful coexistence....but military domination.” It compounds past mistakes “with new and more disastrous ones.” It pursues a classic definition of insanity: repeating the same mistakes, expecting different results, and using newspeak propaganda for justification. Poor Israel. Its credibility is gradually eroding. Growing millions hold it in contempt. Its choice ahead is simple. Reform or perish, yet Israel persists in staying hard line.

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