

Israel: The time for worldwide boycott is now

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On Friday, 29 February 2008, Israel's deputy defense minister Matan Vilnai threatened Palestinians in Gaza with a "holocaust," telling Israeli Army Radio: "The more Qassam fire intensifies and the rockets reach a longer range, [the Palestinians] will bring upon themselves a bigger holocaust because we will use all our might to defend ourselves."

This date will go down in history as the beginning of a new phase in the colonial conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, whereby a senior Israeli leader, a "leftist" for that matter, has publicly revealed the genocidal plans Israel is considering to implement against Palestinians under its military occupation, if they do not cease to resist its dictates. It will also mark the first time since World War II that any state has relentlessly — and on live TV — terrorized a civilian population with acts of slow, or low-intensity, genocide, with one of its senior government officials overtly inciting to a full-blown "holocaust," while the world stood by, watching in utter apathy, or in glee, as in the case of leading western leaders.

For an Israeli leader who is Jewish, in particular, to threaten anyone with holocaust is a sad irony of history. Are victims of unspeakable crimes invariably doomed to turn into appalling criminals? Can anything be possibly done to break this vicious cycle, before the state that claims to represent the main victims of the Nazi holocaust commits a fresh holocaust itself?

Before addressing those questions, however, isn't it exaggerated and pointedly counterproductive, one may ask, to compare Israel's crimes against the Palestinians, no matter how brutal and inhumane they have been, to Nazi genocide? Besides, isn't each crime unique and worthy of attention in its own right as a violation of human rights, of international law, of universal moral principles? The answer is yes: each crime is unique, and nothing Israel has done to date comes even close, in quantity, to Nazi crimes. But when victims-turned-perpetrators openly admit their intentions to carry out a unique form of offense that they are most familiar with, and they actually commit repeated acts that are qualitatively reminiscent of that crime in their unbridled racism and the ghastly level of disregard for the value and dignity of the human life of the "other" that is inherent in them, then their threats ought to be taken seriously. Everyone is called upon to react, to act in any way to stop this crime-in-progress from reaching its logical conclusion.

The Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority (PA), despite its lack of political independence and its disputed mandate, is called upon to immediately exonerate itself from the popular accusation of complicity. Azmi Bishara was among the most prominent of those who issued this harsh indictment, in reaction to the announcement by the head of the PA in Cairo that al-Qaida had infiltrated Gaza, and that the projectiles fired indiscriminately by the Palestinian resistance at Israeli towns and settlements provide the excuse for Israel's aggression. The credibility of this complicity assertion was compelling enough to prompt

Mahmoud Abbas to condemn the Israeli crime in unprecedented austerity and hyperbole, describing it as “more than a Holocaust.”

Arab regimes, especially Egypt’s and Jordan’s, as unelected, illegitimate and subservient to the US as they may be, are still expected to distance themselves from Israel’s lethal war of aggression on Gaza. After all, their continued diplomatic and commercial ties with Israel, as well as their implicit justification of Israel’s crimes through their repeated and gratuitous vilification of Hamas, have convincingly labeled them in the eyes of their respective publics, not to mention the wider Arab public, as accessories in crime.

European governments, chiefly in France, Britain and Germany, have to also answer to the serious charge of collusion in Israel’s crimes against humanity, prevalent among wide Palestinian, Arab and Muslim majorities. They have not only stayed silent in the face of Israel’s willful killing of innocent civilians, many of whom are children, in the course of the last few days in Gaza; they have continued to treat Israel with reverence, celebrating its so-called 60th anniversary, a gruesome event of ethnic cleansing and colonial ruin itself, showering it with economic, political and scientific support that significantly contributes to its impunity.

The US government, on the other hand, cannot be accused of abetting Israel’s acts of genocide in the same league as all the above sinister accomplices. It is and has always been a full and proud partner in planning, bankrolling and executing those crimes against the Palestinians, not to mention its own unmatched criminal record in Afghanistan, Iraq and, before both, Vietnam. When our own Nuremberg moment arrives, when Israeli war criminals are finally prosecuted in an international court, a substantial space in the defense chamber will have to be reserved for US commanders and political leaders. Without American partnership, expressed in immeasurable military, economic and diplomatic aid, Israel could not have committed all its racist and colonial crimes with such impunity.

Going back to the question of whether anything should and could be done to stop Israel, the answer is a certain yes. South African apartheid crimes were challenged not only by the heroic struggle of the oppressed masses on the ground in South Africa; they were also fought by worldwide campaigns of boycott, divestment and sanctions against the regime, with all its complicit economic, academic, cultural, and athletic institutions. Similarly, international civil society can, and ought to, apply the same measures of non-violent justice to bring about Israel’s compliance with international law and basic human rights. Even the threat of sanctions has proven effective enough in the past to halt Israel’s repeated campaigns of death and devastation.

If all those images of tens of Palestinian children torn to pieces, all those recurrent episodes of wanton killing and destruction by an occupation army against a predominantly defenseless civilian population, go unpunished, the world may well witness a new holocaust indeed.

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