

Making Gaza “Scream”

Humanitarian Crisis Deepens

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Making Gaza “scream” is same kind of scheme the Nixon administration planned for Chile after social democrat Salvador Allende won a plurality of the votes in September, 1970. Before the Chilean Congress confirmed him as president in October, an infamous Nixon CIA Director Richard Helms handwritten note read: “One in 10 chance perhaps, but save Chile!...not concerned with risks involved...\$10,000,000 available, more if necessary...make the economy ‘scream.’ ” By it, he meant saving the country from a socially responsible leader, like Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, using his nation’s wealth equitably and not just for its privileged elites. “Scream” it did through Nixon’s “soft line” scheme “to do all within our power to condemn Chile and Chileans to utmost deprivation and poverty,” in the words of his Chilean ambassador Edward Korry.

It lasted three years until a “hard line” one replaced it on another September 11 Chileans won’t soon forget in 1973. It was when a CIA-orchestrated military coup ended the most vibrant democracy in the Americas, replacing it with the brutal 17 year reign of General Augusto Pinochet.

The US has a notorious record of imposing economic or political sanctions against any nation daring to operate outside of Washington Consensus political and market rules. It’s also quick to levy trade sanctions for corporate friends whose notion of “free trade” is the one-way kind benefitting them. The Clinton administration was a frequent abuser of these practices imposing them unilaterally against 35 or more countries during its eight years in power. They were also in place against the Soviet bloc during the Cold War and other nations aligned with it. The Bush administration currently has them in place against such countries as Iran, North Korea, Cuba, Syria, Burma, Belarus, Sudan, and Venezuela. It’s our way of saying we’re boss, what we say goes and no outliers are tolerated even when they only wish to govern independently from us or are targeted by a close ally we support.

That’s the plight of the Palestinians who’ve been “screaming” for six decades following Israel’s “war of independence” they call al-Nakba, the catastrophe. In May, 1948, they were deprived of four-fifths of their former land and the remainder for the past 40 years. Conditions then became especially harsh after January 25, 2006 when they rejected ruling Fatah’s institutionalized corruption and willingness to be Israel’s enforcer for the benefits it afforded its leaders. They defied predictions and democratically elected a majority of Hamas members to Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) seats because they promised to do what Fatah wouldn’t – serve their own people, not the state of Israel against them.

Ever since, they’ve paid dearly for their choice. Israel, the US and West ended all outside aid, imposed an economic embargo and sanctions, and politically isolated the ruling Hamas government. Repressive Israeli rule was tightened and harsh intervention and daily attacks

in the Territories followed. It included fomenting internal conflict on Gaza streets leading up to Hamas defeating the heavily US and Israeli-armed opposition Fatah insurgent forces, regaining control of its own territory in a surprising show of strength.

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas, in league with Israel and the US, then declared a “state of emergency” June 14 and illegally dismissed Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniyeh and his national unity government. On June 15, he appointed former IMF and World Bank official Salam Fayyad prime minister (whose party won 2% of the 2006 election votes), and on June 17 swore in a new 13 member illegitimate “emergency” cabinet with plans for future elections excluding Hamas. On June 16, the US said it would lift its ban on the Abbas government and did it formerly on June 18.

On July 1, Israel began releasing frozen Palestinian tax funds transferring \$120 million in a first installment to Abbas in the West Bank. The amount is one-sixth what Palestinians say they’re owed (around \$700 million) from tax revenues Israel illegally withheld beginning February 1, 2006 after Hamas’ election January 25. Hamas is denied all aid from Israeli and western sources in a continuing effort to keep its Gaza-led government isolated, economic sanctions on it in place, and its people kept in desperate need of help not forthcoming.

More on that below. In the meantime, Israeli prime minister Olmert spokeswoman Miri Eisin said “Israel is committed to working with the new Palestinian government. We hope that together they (meaning the Abbas West Bank self-imposed government) will be able to build a strong administration which will give them a better capability to enter into full negotiations.”

She neglected to mention Abbas’ “emergency” government has no legitimacy, its US and Israeli funded and supported action was a brazen coup d’etat against a democratically elected government, and by “full negotiations” she means bowing to Israeli demands and abandoning the rights and needs of the Palestinian people.

Hamas called Israel’s disbursement to Abbas “financial bribery (and) political blackmail” meant to keep Gaza and the West Bank divided and Palestinians in a state of internal conflict saving Israel some of the bother of stirring it up itself. Prime minister Ismail Haniyeh says the Palestinians’ only recourse is “resistance. The Americans won’t give us anything. Israel won’t give us anything. Our land, our nation will not come back to us except with steadfastness and resistance” against what Israeli prime minister Olmert calls “cooperation (from Abbas in the West Bank that) will....enable us to make progress on the diplomatic track.” Of course, it’s to benefit Israel at the expense of the Palestinian people who aren’t likely to accept the fate its quisling president and Israel have in mind for them.

Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza Deepens

Here’s how several concerned NGOs headline Gaza’s deepening crisis. It won’t improve as long as Israel, the US and West continue their war against the democratically elected Hamas government most Palestinians still strongly support.

Oxfam Great Britain is a member of Oxfam International, a development and relief organization working to alleviate poverty, human suffering and injustice worldwide, currently operating in over 30 countries. It highlights the crisis in Gaza in its June 19 article titled “Locked in Gaza” describing the “increasing desperation of Gazans as shortages of fuel, water and food are reported.” Israel keeps people there “locked in Gaza,” unable to

move even for those desperately needing medical care in Israel for what's unavailable at home.

It mentions two Palestinians were shot dead June 18 trying to cross the checkpoint separating Gaza from Israel, almost a daily occurrence in the Territories. It says water in Gaza is a major problem as there's little electricity to pump it. Food is running out as well as all of it comes from outside Gaza city. Markets are empty, people have little or no money, borders are closed, the threat of starvation for many is real. Israel allows no international NGOs to operate in Gaza so the people aren't being helped when their need is greatest.

On July 6, Oxfam issued an updated press release. Its assessment of conditions in Gaza was grim warning "thousands of refugees across Gaza will face imminent cuts in water and sewage services if more fuel is not provided in the coming days and weeks." It said the Gaza Coastal Municipality Water Utility (CMWU) had to cut its water supply in half from eight to four hours a day because of fuel shortages affecting 65,000 people in the Strip's largest camp. Fuel is also running out for sewage drainage pumps in the Saflawi neighborhood. Without it, "sewage (may spill) into the streets....in days, contaminating the remaining water supply....spreading life-threatening disease (in) the densely-populated camp."

It continued saying other parts of Gaza face the same problem, affecting its entire 1.5 million population. Fuel may be exhausted in days at the hottest time of year when water demand is highest. In the face of this impending crisis, the Abbas government in the West Bank is doing nothing to alleviate it. Gaza is totally dependent on outside help unable to do its job because Israel closed border crossings and sealed off the entire Territory from the outside world.

A UN report is no more encouraging from an article on Media for Global Development June 15. It says the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees was forced to scale back its work while Gaza was in conflict. It "severely limited its ability to (bring in vitally needed) humanitarian supplies" to the 80% of Gazans dependent on them. It calls 40% of the population "food insecure" meaning they could starve without help. It explained even in the absence of street fighting there are critical shortages of food, water, medical supplies, fuel and other essentials. Outside help is critically needed, but Gazans aren't getting it because Israel closed the entry points between Egypt and the Strip stopping critically needed supplies from entering.

The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, B'Tselem, raised its alarm as well June 17 with an article titled "Urgent Appeal from Israeli Human Rights Groups to Israeli Defense Minister: Open Gaza's Borders to Prevent a Humanitarian Crisis." It says hundreds of refugees are trapped between the sealed Erez crossing and Hamas inside Gaza, including the sick and injured from recent events in the Territory. It also cites critical food and medical supply shortages and urgently says: "The state of Israel cannot stand idly by at a time when the fundamental human rights of Gaza residents are being violated and the right to life is being threatened."

It mentions eight Israeli human rights organizations warning of a crisis that will worsen as long as Israel "continues to close borders and isolate Gaza from the outside world by preventing the supply of essential goods, trapping residents inside the Gaza Strip, and preventing Gaza residents who traveled outside the Strip from returning home" including the chronically sick and injured.

With essential border crossings closed, supplies aren't coming in. Fresh food, such as meat, fruit and dairy products are disappearing. The World Food Program warns of dangerous food shortages. B'Tselem calls Israel's border closings and disconnect of Gaza's electricity and water grid an act of collective punishment against all Gazans in violation of international law. The Israeli human rights organization calls on the state of Israel to end these actions.

The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH) is a Jerusalem-based NGO "dedicated to fostering democracy and good governance within Palestinian society." It aims "to serve as a Palestinian platform for global dialogue and cooperation guided by the principles of democracy, human rights, gender equity, and participatory governance."

That said, MIFTAH's article June 23 headlined "Growing Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza." It warns of a major humanitarian disaster being inevitable unless Israel eases its border crossing restrictions and allows in vitally needed supplies. At present, only a two to four week supply of food remains. Essential food and other supplies "are waiting to enter Gaza" but have been denied entry by Israel since Hamas' takeover in June. It mentions the German chapter of UNICEF reporting on the "deteriorating condition of Gaza's children (from) lack of proper sanitation." It heightens the risk of diseases and contagion from some of them with limited medications on hand. So far, Israel is adamant citing "security considerations" for keeping border crossings closed. By that it means it intends to keep punishing all Palestinians collectively for having elected Hamas its government.

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) offers the most detailed and harrowing account of how desperate conditions now are in Gaza. It says how "gravely concerned" it is since Israel tightened its siege by closing all border crossings, including the Rafah International Crossing Point on the Egyptian border. It urgently calls on all states, UN agencies and all international humanitarian organizations "to immediately take steps to pressurize (Israel) to allow the normal flow of basic supplies, including foodstuffs and medical supplies, into the Gaza strip to avoid an imminent crisis that threatens" 1.5 million Gazans. Three-fourths of them live in poverty and nearly as many are unemployed and have no other source of help. Gaza is the most densely populated place on earth. It's also the world's largest (Israeli-imposed) open-air prison. It's more locked down than ever with all border crossing points closed and sealed and Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) attacking the Strip daily.

As long as Israel is unwilling to open them, food, medicines, fuel and other essential supplies can't get in. Palestinians desperately needing medical care outside the Strip can't travel to get it. Gaza hospitals and health centers can't provide essential medical services. PCHR lists the site closures:

- the Rafah International Crossing Point on the Egyptian border through which Palestinians travel back and forth;
- the Karni commercial crossing gravely affecting food and other essential deliveries. Mentioned is the shortage of wheat with mills running out and having to shut down. Gaza needs 600 tons of wheat daily;
- the Sofa crossing through which raw materials enter halting most construction projects;
- the Kerem Shalom crossing through which food and medicines come;

- the Erez crossing affecting international and local organizations, patients and commercial traders; and
- the Nahal Oz crossing through which fuel transits.

PCHR calls on Israel to reconnect Gaza to the outside world and avoid a humanitarian disaster. It wants the “economic siege” on Gaza ended; human rights to be respected; and international law obeyed, including the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention (GCIV – ratified and accepted by 194 countries as of June, 2006) relating to the rights and protections of civilians in times of war “in the hands” of an enemy and under occupation by a foreign power.

It further calls for increasing essential aid from international humanitarian organizations to relieve the deteriorating conditions in the Territory and human suffering. It asks that the rights of all Palestinians be respected and that all efforts be made to ensure them.

PCHR also publishes daily reports and a weekly summary of events on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). They always center on Israeli Defense Forces’ (IDF) “continue(d) systematic attacks on Palestinian civilians and property.” Its latest weekly summary runs through July 4 and cites the following violence in Gaza and Fatah-run West Bank from daily Israeli incursions in both areas.

In Gaza and the West Bank:

- 10 Palestinians, including 6 civilians, were killed by Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), 3 by extra-judicial assassination in Khan Yunis;
- 27 Palestinian civilians were wounded by IDF gunfire;
- IDF conducted 31 incursions into Palestinian communities in the West Bank and 3 others in Gaza;
- IDF conducted a 2-day incursion into Nablus and neighboring refugee camps;
- IDF arrested 92 Palestinian civilians, including 19 children, in the West Bank;
- IDF continued imposing a total siege on the OPT;
- 12 Palestinians trapped on the Egyptian side of the Rafah International Crossing Point died for lack of attention to their medical needs;
- A Palestinian wounded in a car died as IDF obstructed his evacuation to a hospital; ambulances attending the sick and wounded are routinely attacked;
- IDF arrested 6 other Palestinians at various checkpoints; and
- In addition to a strict siege on Gaza discussed above, IDF tightened a similar one on Fatah’s controlled West Bank isolating Jerusalem from the rest of the Territory. Severe restrictions on movement are in place and additional checkpoints have been erected on main roads and at intersections. These events are part of daily life imposed on Palestinians by their Israeli occupiers making life for them intolerable and the reason they resist.
- After this report was released, IDF killed at least 11 Palestinians and wounded 25 others on July 5 in what Israeli military officials dismissively called “a routine operation.” In

response, Hamas officials accused Israel of provoking conflict while they're trying to end it and maintain law and order.

The Palestinian people have endured unbearable hardships and suffering like this for nearly six decades, the result of cruel unremitting Israeli repression of them. Yet they endure, resist and continue working for what they want most - to live freely and securely in peace in their own unoccupied land ruled by governments they elect to serve them. It's the dream of all oppressed people - to one day have the equity and social justice they deserve. By now, Israeli and western governments should know Palestinians won't ever stop struggling for the rights no nation has the right to deny them. One day they'll prevail because they won't give up resisting until they do.

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