

Punishing Gaza

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

Global Research, November 06, 2007

6 November 2007

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

On September 20, Haaretz reported: “The security cabinet voted unanimously yesterday to increase sanctions against the Hamas-run Gaza Strip (and declare) the region a ‘hostile entity.’ ” A further statement read: “We will reduce the amount of megawattage we provide to the Strip, and Hamas will have to decide whether to provide electricity to hospitals or weapons lathes.” Israeli officials also decided to punish Gazans by restricting:

- fuel as well as electricity from Israel to Gaza;
- the passage of goods and people through border crossings that are already severely restricted; and
- visits to prisoners even further than how limited they are already.

An increased monitoring of funds was also announced as well as stating border crossings would be closed for up to 48 hours in response to (crude small homemade) Qassam rocket fire, and that Israel would supply nothing further to Gaza residents “except for (whatever Israel considers) humanitarian needs.” Hamas’ response was swift and sharp. Spokesman Fawzi Barhoum called the cabinet’s decision and sanctions a “declaration of war” and said “we must unite the ranks to come together in the conflict with the cruel enemy....This is another attempt to force us to surrender (our sovereignty).”

At first, the world community hardly blinked with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon acting as irresponsibly as his predecessor. He urged Israel to reconsider its decision but denounced Hamas for its “continued indiscriminate rocket fire....into Israel (and that he) understand(s) Israel’s security concerns over this matter.” Nothing in his statement mentioned Israel’s daily attacks and killings of Palestinians or the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza after Israel closed its borders last June, isolated the Territory from the outside world, and cut off most essential supplies and services to its people.

Karen Koning-Abu Zayd is the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Commissioner-General for Palestine Refugees. On October 30, she showed more concern than her boss by saying Israel’s decision to cut fuel and electricity to Gaza violates international law. She noted Israel’s concern, but stressed “how can you want to punish people, all of them in Gaza (as) most of them....are not behind these activities....if you don’t have electricity, you don’t have water, you probably don’t have food.” This action will have a “very serious” effect on the population.

Two other UN officials also went public with their criticisms. UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler was one of them. He called on the European Commission to suspend commercial relations with Israel until it stops preventing Palestinians from receiving

food without restrictions. He reported to the General Assembly that 22% of Palestinian children already suffer from malnutrition because they lack access to food.

UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, John Dugard, also weighed in. He called on State Members in their capacity as High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. He asked them to ensure Israel complies with its provisions regarding the protection of civilians in times of war. One of them under article 54 states: "Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited," as well as "attack(ing), remov(ing), or render(ing) useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas (for their production), crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works.... " Article 55 then obligates an occupying power to ensure "the food and medical supplies of the population."

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) chief Walter Fust also expressed alarm after a recent Gaza visit. He called conditions "untenable" and "shocking" with 30% of children (in his judgment) malnourished and hospitals and health centers in a precarious state.

Things then changed on October 30. Haaretz reported Israel's "High Court of Justice ordered the state to respond within five days to a petition submitted by dozens of human rights groups (10 of them according to other reports) to halt its (Gaza fuel and electricity) cutoff," but it stopped short of banning the action. Justices may have been concerned after the European Union (EU) criticized Israel's move on October 29 calling it an act of "collective punishment." EU commissioner for external relations, Benita Ferraro-Waldner, said she was "very concerned" about the decision, that it's not a solution, and that the EU doesn't "want the population to suffer."

It's hard knowing if this signals change or whether to take the commissioner's concern seriously. The European community, along with Israel and the US, denounced Hamas' democratic election in January, 2006 as the legitimate Palestinian government. It's response ever since was to end all outside aid and impose crushing sanctions and an economic embargo on the Territories as well as politically isolate the new Hamas government.

The results were devastating. Even before the latest crisis, Gaza's industrial production had fallen 90% and its agricultural output was half its pre-2007 level. In addition, nearly all construction had stopped, unemployment is around 80%, and the level of poverty is shocking based on World Bank data showing over 80% of Gazans live on less than \$2.40 a day. Further, the Palestinian Al Huq association of jurists called Israel's summer, 2005 Gaza disengagement fraudulent as "Israel retains full control of the Gaza Strip's land borders, population registry, airspace and territorial sea," and the IDF invades the Territory at will.

The EU was silent about this and Israel's overall repressive rule, land expropriations, daily incursions, and regular attacks and killings in the Territories. It was unconcerned about the internal violence on Gaza streets last spring and gave tacit support to anti-Hamas US and Israeli-armed Fatah (Protective Security Force) paramilitary death squads led by warlord Mohammed Dahlan. It ignored Hamas' months-long unilateral cease-fire, its ending all suicide bombings, its call for peace, and its willingness to recognize the Jewish state if Israel accepts and recognizes a Palestinian one.

Its founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin said at the time Hamas would end its struggle "if the Zionists ended its occupation of Palestinian territories and stopped killing Palestinian

women, children and innocent civilians.” Israel and the West rejected the offer and all good faith efforts. They opted instead to punish Palestinians collectively and deny them their legitimate rights.

After Hamas defeated Fatah paramilitaries, the EU backed Mahmoud Abbas’ quisling West Bank government. It ignored Gaza’s punishing isolation and Oxfam Great Britain’s grim warning of the “increasing desperation of Gazans as shortages of fuel, water and food are reported.” It failed to denounce Israel and the US for creating the crisis affecting 1.5 million people. It stood allied instead with Washington and the Olmert government and did so ever since. The same is true of the UN. It’s hard thinking that’s changed, and it’ll take more than occasional high-sounding comments from a few officials to prove it.

In the meantime, Israel began reducing fuel supplies on October 28, and Gaza’s deputy Petroleum Authority director, Ahmed Ali, said diesel fuel and gasoline deliveries were 30% lower than usual. He then added: “This is a serious warning (and) the people of Gaza....are now in danger. The hospitals, water pumping station and sewage will be affected by the lack of fuel.” Israel’s Dor Alon energy company confirmed the reduction, and the Defense Ministry said the Sufa crossing used for transporting fuel to Gaza was closed.

On October 25, Defense Minister Ehud Barak ordered the phased cutoff, and his deputy, Matan Vilnai, said “We will dramatically reduce the flow of electricity (by about two-thirds) from Israel over several weeks” to let Gaza supply its own electricity that’s impossible as Israel knows. He added this measure is part of Israel’s “deeper, broader disengagement.” He neglected to say it’s an illegal act of collective punishment as Gaza relies on Israel for all its fuel (that includes diesel, gasoline and natural gas) and most of its electricity.

The Palestinian Center for Human Rights reported Gaza needs over 220 megawatts of electricity and consumes about 200 megawatts, 60% of which is bought from Israel. The Gaza Electricity Generation Plant supplies 65 megawatts and another 17 megawatts are bought from Egypt. When Israel directly controlled the Strip, it let Gazans establish enough electrical capacity for only 38% of their needs. Then during “Operation Summer Rain” in June, 2006, the IDF assaulted the Territory, bombed its only electrical power plant, and destroyed its main transformers with missiles. Months of rebuilding restored less than two-thirds of its original 100 megawatt capacity and made the area mostly dependent on Israel for supply.

After declaring Gaza a “hostile entity” on September 19, that’s now in jeopardy unless Israel reverses its stance and reconsiders other collective punishment measures as well. Currently, its authority allows only nine basic materials to enter the Territory. That hit local markets hard, and most ran out of many items causing sharp price rises up to 500% in some cases. Items banned include some medicines, furniture, electrical appliances, cows and cigarettes while others restricted are fruits, milk and other dairy products.

Then there’s the energy plan. It’s to begin cutting electricity for 15 minutes, then a half hour with daily increases as long as the punitive measure remains in effect that doesn’t apply to hospitals and other “vital installations,” Vilnai said. Things are now on hold, however, after Attorney General Menachem Mazuz temporarily halted the electricity cutoff following a “debate” in his office on October 29. He was apparently acting on UN and EU comments as well as his own High Court’s order to respond to a petition by 10 human rights organizations in five days to stop this punitive action. Mazuz said Israel had a right to sever economic and

commercial ties with Gaza, but its government is responsible for the Territory and more “research” was needed before cutting off electricity. What he meant, of course, is he’ll await a High Court ruling and then act.

Haaretz reported on November 3 that “State Prosecution on (November 2) defended the government’s decision (to cut fuel and electricity in a letter to the High Court) claiming it is not a form of collective punishment.” It said that the decision was appropriate and gave the same tired reasons it often uses to justify its harshest actions. Defense Minister Ehud Barak agreed. In a November 4 Jerusalem meeting with Condoleezza Rice, he assured the Secretary that “The sanctions (won’t) cause a humanitarian crisis” without further elaboration.

Israel’s infrastructure minister, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, agrees as well and feels these measures are needed and are a final attempt to avoid a military action some observers see coming. Israel’s Gaza commander, General Moshe Tamir, already admits to almost nightly incursions into the Territory and practically signaled a planned assault.

Haaretz also reported on October 30 that Israel’s Defense Forces (IDF) conducted their largest military drill in the north Galilee region since the 2006 Lebanon war. It ran four days and involved ground, air and naval forces as well as intelligence and S4 units. The paper noted a similar exercise preceded the Lebanon war so it happening now is ominous.

The Jerusalem Post echoed that sentiment on October 31. It quoted Defense Minister Ehud Barak saying a large-scale IDF operation against “Palestinian rocket squads” was drawing near, and “the time is approaching when we’ll have to undertake a broad operation in Gaza.” The report mentioned Gaza commander Tamir saying Hamas was “building an army” and had smuggled in unprecedented capabilities. Israeli Shin Bet Security Agency chief Yuval Diskin claimed Hamas had accumulated over 112 tons of explosives, and Tamir signaled Israel is prepared to act as a result. The Jerusalem Post earlier quoted IDF Southern Command chief General Yoav Galant saying he’s been “pushing for a massive operation for the past year” and now may be close to getting one.

Hamas responded to this growing threat on November 1. It called on all Palestinian resistance factions to declare a high state of alert in anticipation of a large-scale Israeli incursion into the Territory. It issued a statement saying: “Hamas is well-prepared to engage in a battle with the Israeli army, once (Gaza) is invaded, as Hamas is confident of victory, given its strong trust in God.”

A major IDF assault may be imminent as Israel continues attacking civilians in Gaza and the West Bank daily. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights report for the last week of October said 15 Palestinians were killed, 29 others wounded, and 78 more arrested. In addition, during the seven day period, IDF forces made 49 hostile incursions into the Territories, and for the past 16 months maintained a devastating siege on the population.

Washington’s Upcoming Annapolis Peace Offensive

Middle East observers know what most honest ones will admit. The intermittent, now revived “peace process” is merely pretense head fake. It’s more theater than substance or a serious effort to resolve this long-running conflict, and look at the proof:

— daily IDF incursions, attacks and killings in the Territories;

- continued land expropriations;
- crop destruction and agricultural restrictions;
- home demolitions;
- restricted movement through hundreds of checkpoints as well as curfews and border and other closures any time for any reason;
- building permit restrictions and construction prohibitions;
- denial of essential services; and
- other politically motivated daily repression and “matrix of control” harassment.

This all continues without letup with the full acquiescence and support of the West plus billions in annual aid from Washington.

Furthermore, Hamas is barred from the peace process, and without its participation there can be none. Its exclusion and the desperate conditions in the Territories expose the glaring hypocrisy overhanging the staged affair. Just like the fraudulent “road map,” this latest incarnation is going nowhere with more proof on November 4 from Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. She told Secretary Rice Israel’s security comes first, and “only then (can there be) a Palestinian state.”

Electronic Intifada editor Ali Abunimah compares the process to “one of those big budget Broadway extravaganzas; they go on for years (and) with each revival the cast changes,” but the outcome is always the same as intended.

Abunimah notes the “latest revival” has Condoleezza Rice in a lead role play-acting to end the long-running conflict. George Bush is on stage as well trying to cast off his image as a warmonger and enabler of “Israeli colonization” and now pretends to want peace “with an eye on his legacy.”

And so it goes with the other key actors in this melodrama pretending the process is real – quisling Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas who agreed to let Washington act as a “neutral arbitrator,” Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert who jumped on the idea, and “special guest star” and reinvented war criminal Tony Blair in his new role as Middle East peace envoy. Last June he ended a failed 10 year run as UK prime minister when his audience booed him off the stage. He’s been practically invisible since but will resurface in Annapolis later in November once a firm date is announced.

Abunimah notes how reality at times intervenes. It did in mid-October after Abbas’ representatives met with Israeli counterparts to arrange a “declaration of principles” for the Annapolis meeting that are still unresolved. The IDF expropriated 300 more acres of Palestinian land near “occupied East Jerusalem (to expand the huge) Jewish-only settlements (bisecting) the West Bank (that) render a contiguous Palestinian state impossible.”

Land seizures have been continuous since the 1993 Oslo Accords. For the past 14 years, Israel expropriated an area the size of Washington, DC for Jewish-only development knowing none of the “peace process” participants would object. It’s been so extreme that noted

Israeli historian Ilan Pappé believes the settlements, army bases, roads and separation wall will let Israel annex almost half the West Bank by 2010 and dispossess Palestinians now living there.

And now Abunimah explains “Rice feigns (gallingly hypocritical) frustration saying: “Frankly it is time for the establishment of a Palestinian state.” She knows Israel won’t allow one nor will Palestinians accept it under the current bantustan configuration and the condition Pappé describes.

Nor is one possible given the power of extremist elements in the Israeli government led by proto-fascist Deputy Prime Minister Avigdor Lieberman. Haaretz reported he insists any Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution “include Israel’s Arab citizens (on) the basis (of) a land swap and population transfer.” He means no peace is possible unless 1.4 million Israeli Arab citizens are ethnically cleansed from the country. Nor will he allow core Palestinian issues to be discussed in Annapolis (or elsewhere) like “borders, settlements and the (right of return for) Palestinian refugees expelled by Israel.”

And the beat goes on. Life in occupied Palestine is intolerable and worsening as the latest sham peace extravaganza is heading to Annapolis once its “opening night” is announced with fanfare and phoniness.

A different sort of event will take place in London November 17 and 18 hosted by the London Middle East Institute and organized by the London One State Group and SOAS Palestine Society at London University. It’s called “Challenging the Boundaries: A Single State in Palestine/Israel.” It will include panel discussions and individual speakers featuring noted participants like author and Middle East expert Gilbert Achcar, Electronic Intifada editor Ali Abunimah, noted author Nur Masalha, and Israeli historian and expert on Israel and Zionism Ilan Pappé who’s now teaching at the UK University of

Exeter. The conference is about alternatives to a two-state paradigm and will advance ideas of a one-state vision that can become a workable political agenda for what seems to be the only credible way forward.

In another development, Al-Ahram Weekly reports Hamas will air its views at a “national conference” in Damascus that will coincide with Annapolis. Other Palestinian factions will also attend including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in a significant break with Fatah. Participating as well are the Damascus-based PFLP-General Command, the Islamic Jihad organization and senior Fatah members Farouk Al-Qaddumi and Hani Al-Hassan in a show of protest against “Abbas’ line” and “his subservience to America and Israel.” In addition to organized groups, hundreds of Palestinian and Arab intellectuals may attend that will add credibility to the event.

Conference organizers state they wish to reassert their opposition to “the attempted liquidation of the Palestinian cause” with special emphasis on “the right of return of five million (or more) Palestinian refugees.” They also intend “not to give political cover to US-Israeli schemes to terminate the Palestinian cause in Annapolis (that is) hypocritical (and) insincere.” And they further state: “The PLO leadership in Ramallah no longer represents the Palestinian people (because) it is a prisoner of the Israeli occupation and has lost whatever semblance of independence and free will it may once have had.” In addition, “the PLO leadership (lacks legitimacy as it’s) unelected, undemocratic and anachronistic.”

Hamas also revealed plans to follow Damascus with meetings in Gaza and the West Bank to further highlight what Hamas and others call “this mockery” of a US-Israeli-Abbas effort to compromise or scrap issues vital to the Palestinian people like the right of return and status of Jerusalem. Ideas to be discussed include selecting “alternative and parallel national bodies” to counter Fatah’s disregard for “the Palestinian national consensus.” Under consideration is a new National Council and Executive Committee in direct opposition to Abbas who (along with Secretary Rice) tried unsuccessfully to abort Hamas’ initiative. Little is expected from Annapolis, and some believe that may trigger a third Intifada and swing momentum to Hamas.

Shin Bet’s Yuval Diskin thinks not but others disagree. Oslo came out of the first Intifada, and Israel’s Gaza disengagement followed the second one. Nothing is off the table this time. Stay closely tuned.

Stephen Lendman is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization. He lives in Chicago and can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net.

Also visit his blog site at www.sjlendman.blogspot.com and listen to The Steve Lendman News and Information Hour on www.TheMicroEffect.com Mondays at noon US central time.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Stephen Lendman](#), Global Research, 2007

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Stephen Lendman](#)

About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III." <http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at [sjlendman.blogspot.com](http://www.sjlendman.blogspot.com). Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network. It airs three times weekly: live on Sundays at 1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca