

Suffering in Kashmir and Palestine

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While the world is pre-occupied with coronavirus and its impact on lives and the international economy, one must not forget that suffering due to oppression knows no season and has no vaccine, but is not without a cure. Sadly, for years, and especially since August, the world has watched India increasingly pressure and repress the Kashmiri people, as India now embarks on a colonizing project on the model of Israel's brutal oppression of the Palestinian people.

Let's review the situation.

On August 5, 2019, the government of India revoked Article 370 of the Constitution, thus nullifying whatever autonomy Kashmir, long considered 'disputed' had. This was accompanied by a complete lockdown of Kashmir, in which no one, included journalists and diplomats, was allowed to enter or leave. Social media was also shut down, depriving the people of Kashmir from any contact with family and friends outside of the country. Additionally, the presence of Indian troops, already there in large numbers, was increased, with the ratio now of at least one security officer (police, member of the military) for every 30 residents, including men, women and children. This constitutes an extremely repressive police state.

One month after the revoking of Article 370, India's consul-general to New York made the following comment: "I believe the security situation will improve, it will allow the refugees to go back, and in your lifetime, you will be able to go back ... and you will be able to find security, because we already have a model in the world. I don't know why we don't follow it. It has happened in the Middle East. If the Israeli people can do it, we can also do it."

This has already begun, with the beginning of the construction of 'outposts' in Kashmir, which, like in Palestine, will soon become full-blown settlements.

Why is the world simply sitting back and allowing this to happen? There are several reasons:

- The United Nations, in 1948, passed a resolution to resolve the India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir. The resolution did not bind those nations to any legal action, but implied that it bound them 'morally'. Activist Assata Shakur, formerly of the United States but a long-time resident of Cuba, once stated the following: "Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them." Expecting India and Pakistan to be 'morally' bound to do the 'right thing' is the ultimate pipe dream, perhaps only matched by anyone's expectation for Israel to feel a moral obligation to do what is right. The United Nations is also responsible

for the 70+ year atrocity known as the Israeli occupation of Palestine. But such wording gives the international community, hardly led by people of strong moral values, the ability to say there is nothing they can do.

- A second, and perhaps even more significant reason for the world to ignore Kashmir, as it ignores Palestine, is because Kashmir, like Palestine, is a mostly Muslim nation. Throughout the west, Muslims have been vilified. In the United States, it is cliché to say that any crime committed by a white man indicates that he has emotional problems and needs assistance to be re-integrated into society; a crime by a Black man indicates that he is a criminal and should be shot on sight and, if not, should be incarcerated for life. And a crime committed by a Muslim is always an act of terrorism, deserving of the most stringent penalties, and requiring all Muslims everywhere to disavow the act, pledge their allegiance to the United States above anything else, and from then on keep out of sight as much as possible.

Over the course of nearly seventy-three years, Palestinians have watched the size of their nation shrink, due first to United Nations decree, and then to Israeli terrorism. The Kashmiri people, for basically the same length of time, have suffered cruel repression, and now Indian Prime Minister Modi has decided to emulate Israeli brutality against the Kashmiris.

What can the international community do for either Kashmir or Palestine? This is not a puzzling question, but one with obvious answers.

1. Condemn in the strongest terms the repression of Kashmir by India, and Palestine by Israel. Do this constantly.
2. Sanction India and Israel. The BDS (Boycott, Divest and Sanction) movement has cost Israel dearly in terms of economic consequences, due to people around the world who will not buy its products, and reputationally, as academics and people from the entertainment world refuse to appear there. It is time for nations around the world to take their cue from their citizens, and cease all trade with India and Israel.
3. Support the International Criminal Court first in its determination that it does, indeed, have jurisdiction over Palestine, and then on insisting that investigators be allowed into Gaza to perform their duties.
4. Demand an end to the occupation of both nations, and of the blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The similarities of the repression of Kashmir and Palestine are striking. And now, with the coronavirus on everyone's mind, that repression is being even further ignored.

Governments have demonstrated that they will do nothing to further the human-rights of struggles of the Kashmiri and Palestinian people. Therefore, it is up to the people around the world to demand action. The barbaric cruelty of the Indian and Israeli governments cannot be allowed to continue. Today is it Palestine and Kashmir; tomorrow, it could be any country that a more powerful one decides it wants to colonize, and precedent for doing so is being established.

International crimes must be identified, prosecuted and punished as are individual crimes. And crimes against humanity, as perpetrated by India and Israel, should both shock and motivate the world. We who recognize these crimes must do all that is in our power to make

our governments react appropriately.

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Featured image: A sign stating 'Danger, demolition. Entry is prohibited' was placed by Israeli authorities on top of the rubble of the Khalialehs' houses (MEE\Sondus Ewies)

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