

## "Afflict the comfortable

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The Palestinian National Committee for the Campaign for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions [has] reissued and reaffirmed its call ... to redouble the efforts for boycott, divestment, and sanctions modeled on the anti-apartheid movement. This is necessary. This is moral. This is the nonviolent resistance we can all participate in. And it's more urgent than ever.

—Ali Abunimah, on *Democracy Now!*

## & comfort the afflicted."

The Arab American Institute has links to organizations that are collecting donations for relief to Gaza. (<http://www.aaiusa.org/issues/3734/aai-statement-on-gaza-crisis>)

### UNRWA

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is accepting donations:

[http://www.un.org/unrwa/emergency/donation/emergency\\_activities.html](http://www.un.org/unrwa/emergency/donation/emergency_activities.html)

### ANERA

American Near East Refugee Aid is accepting donations for medical supplies:

[http://secure2.convio.net/anera/site/Donation2?df\\_id=1280&1280.donation=form1](http://secure2.convio.net/anera/site/Donation2?df_id=1280&1280.donation=form1)

### Palestine Red Crescent Society

Cash donations are being accepted into an established bank account

[http://www.palestinercs.org/news\\_details.aspx?nid=39](http://www.palestinercs.org/news_details.aspx?nid=39)

### Medical Aid for Palestinians

Donations for medical supplies (in pounds not dollars) can be made at:

[https://www.bmycharity.com/V2/main\\_V2.aspx?p=donation&id=395758](https://www.bmycharity.com/V2/main_V2.aspx?p=donation&id=395758)

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people for justice in palestine

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# This is about

# GAZA

## Don't look away:

***YOUR*** tax dollars pay for the murder of Palestinian children.

A mother  
in Rafah  
bent over  
the corpses of  
her three  
dead children  
screaming,  
unable to stop

From: "Before Our Very Eyes: Israel's Attempted Endgame in Gaza" by Jennifer Loewenstein Counterpunch, December 29, 2008, <http://www.counterpunch.org/loewenstein12292008.html>

# GAZA IN FLAMES

by Jason W., for People for Justice in Palestine (iowapjp.org)

As I write, Israel is engaged in another round of savage attacks in Gaza, with nearly 300 victims so far. Predictably, the US government and media largely single out Hamas as the culprit in the breakdown of the truce agreed between the two sides last 19 JUNE. But though Hamas does conduct itself irresponsibly, this analysis ignores the big picture.

The truce really ended on November 4, which by coincidence was election day in the US. Israel conducted a major raid against Gaza to destroy what it claimed was a tunnel being built for the abduction of an Israeli soldier. In the resulting battle, five Hamas fighters were killed. Hamas then unleashed a retaliatory barrage of rocket fire against targets in southern Israel. No Israeli casualties were reported.

"Israel said Tuesday's raid was not a violation of the ceasefire, but rather a legitimate step to remove an immediate threat" (BBC, "Rockets fired after Gaza clashes", 11/5/08).

The new clashes came in the context of Israel's refusal to do anything substantial to lighten the siege against Gaza, which has destroyed economic life there. The territory has been reduced to a condition of abject misery. There is widespread malnutrition, a health care crisis, and frequent power and water shortages. At least half the population depend on food aid from international organizations. The majority of the population are children under 18.

Even the conservative ECONOMIST newspaper noted in late August that "though a ceasefire is more or less holding, Gaza is still under siege" ("Ceasefire plus blockade", ECONOMIST 8/28/08) Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, expressed shock at conditions in the Strip during her recent visit there. She told the BBC that it was "almost unbelievable" that the world did not care about a "shocking violation of so many human rights". The truce had brought no change in the lives of the people. (BBC "Gaza Residents Terribly Trapped", 11/4/08)

The ensuing clashes in November brought new hardship to the territory, which is outlined in a useful article by Sara Roy.\* ("If Gaza Falls....", London Review of Books.) For three days in November, the UN Relief and Works Agency completely ran out of food because of Israel's interruption of supplies. 20,000 people could not get their rations. And that is just one example of what has become an epidemic of shortages.

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\* Roy is a political economist at Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies. She is an expert on Gaza and, in many articles and books, has documented how, during the whole course of the Occupation, not just in recent years, Israel has pursued policies calculated to dismantle the territory's economy (cf. eg. THE GAZA STRIP: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DE-DEVELOPMENT). She is also Jewish and the daughter of Holocaust survivors.

During its most recent actions in Gaza, the cutting off of supplies in November and now the air-raids against Gaza City and elsewhere, Israel has often barred diplomats and reporters from entering the territory to survey the damage. If its cause is so just, what does it have to hide? (cf. BBC "UN 'has run out of Gaza food aid'", 13 Nov. 2008: "Israel refused permission for a group of senior European diplomats to visit the coastal enclave. It has also prevented journalists, including those from the BBC, from entering the territory")

Israel claims that its blockade policy and its savage attacks are necessary to protect its civilians. But though the primitive Qassam rocket assaults and the shelling of towns in southern Israel are a major problem, they are also highly inaccurate and rarely cause casualties (twenty-some fatalities since 2000). They do not justify imposing hunger and misery on 1.4 million Gazans, most of them children.

The truth is that we have wound up in this impasse largely because of policy failures by the Israeli government and the Bush Administration, not the Palestinians. First they sidelined Arafat, which had the tendency of boosting Hamas. Then they rejected the unity government worked out in early 2007 by Fatah and Hamas, which would have committed the latter to abide by the PLO's Oslo agreements with Israel, including recognition of Israel. They tried to arm Fatah to overthrow Hamas; but the latter turned the tables on Fatah in June 2007 and took over the Gaza Strip. The rest, as they say, is history. (cf. David Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell", VANITY FAIR, April 2008)

It is Israel and the US which have rejected diplomacy in the crisis, not the Palestinians. When Fatah failed to bring down the democratically-elected Hamas government, Israel responded by tightening the siege and engaging in occasional fits of mass violence. They turned down Hamas's offer of a truce in December 2007 and finally accepted it in June 2008.

The truce, which lasted from June 19 until 4 November, was imperfect at best and there has been sporadic rocket fire. But the Israeli raid on 4 November was in a different league from the other technical violations. Hamas could hardly have been expected not to respond. Since Israel could not have reasonably anticipated the truce to survive such a fierce and provocative incursion, we have to interpret the incident as reflecting Israel's deliberate decision to end the truce. And we have to ask why Israel chose to blow everything up at just this moment.

The stated reason, of course, is absurd. Gilad Shalit was abducted in June 2006 because the IDF did not know about the tunnel. If they know a tunnel's location, it should be easy to employ countermeasures to prevent it being used for the abduction of a soldier. Violating a ceasefire is not necessary. Hamas, like Israel, would have been engaged in many other types of military preparation during the whole truce period; any one of which might have been used as a pretext for an attack. Why did Israel chose to strike just then?

The real answer lies in Israeli domestic politics. An election is approaching in February 2009 and hardliner Benjamin Netanyahu has been leading in the polls. The Israeli public is largely disappointed at the outcome of the Second Lebanon

War (July-August 2006), which failed to topple Hezbollah. Many want to see Gaza punished for the continuing pin-prick rocket attacks. Israel has ample reason to believe, based on past experience, that force will not provide a solution. But often people seem to enjoy the use of force as an end in itself.

"Until (the Israeli government) started talking tough, the hawkish opposition leader, Binyamin Netanyahu, was leading in the polls. Now the gap has narrowed" (BBC, Katya Adler, "Israel's Mixed Motives for Strikes", 27 Dec. 2008)

Both Tzipi Livni, the current Foreign Minister and Kadima Party candidate for Prime Minister and Ehud Barak, the current Defence Minister and Labor Party leader, stand to benefit politically from a new clash against Hamas at this time. They must have calculated that Hamas, as a matter of honor, would not renew the truce when it officially expired on 19 December. They would have found strong allies in the military, many of whom were never happy with the truce to begin with. Thus, as soon as the truce expired, they could let loose an orgy of bloodshed as political theatre. Notably, they struck in the middle of the day, at graduation ceremonies filled with Hamas police recruits, in order to satisfy the electorate with a suitably high body count. The interregnum in Washington is also convenient.

The current episode closely resembles an earlier incident in Israel's political history. In April 1996, Shimon Peres launched a major attack against Lebanon during his political campaign against Netanyahu. This foray, known as "Operation Grapes of Wrath", received a green light from the Clinton Administration, which apparently thought it necessary for the success of the Oslo Peace Process, which Netanyahu opposed and Peres attempted to revive after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin the previous November. Peres was retaliating against Katyusha rocket attacks by Hezbollah, which were then also noted for their inaccuracy. Nearly 400,000 Lebanese fled their towns and villages in southern Lebanon to escape the Israeli fire, yet the attacks failed to stop the Hezbollah rockets. On 18 April, Israeli shells killed 102 unarmed refugees at the UN base at Qana, and Israel was forced by international public opinion to call a halt. An American-brokered ceasefire was signed, 27 April 1996.

Oxford historian Avi Shlaim concludes that one purpose of the assault was "to recast Peres as the hard man of Israeli politics ahead of crucial general elections." (Avi Shlaim, THE IRON WALL: ISRAEL AND THE ARAB WORLD, New York: WW NORTON, 2001, pp.560-561) Ironically, Peres went on to lose that election to Netanyahu by a razor-thin margin.

Despite everything, the evidence of the last two years all points one way. The best way for Israel to afford a reasonable measure of security to its citizens is by pursuing diplomacy, not force. A new Palestinian unity government, a ceasefire and an end to the Gaza blockade are the only real way forward.

It remains to be seen whether the incoming Obama administration can muster the will, the skill, and the energy necessary to undo the disastrous mistakes of the last eight years.