

Israel Resembles a Failed State

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One year has passed since the savage Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip, but for the people there, time might as well have stood still. Since Palestinians in Gaza buried their loved ones — more than 1,400 persons, almost 400 of them children — there has been little healing and virtually no reconstruction.

According to international aid agencies, only 41 trucks of building supplies have been allowed into Gaza during the year.

Promises of billions made at a donors' conference in Egypt last March attended by luminaries of the so-called "international community" and the Middle East peace process industry are unfulfilled, and the Israeli siege, supported by the US, the European Union, Arab states, and tacitly by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah, continues.

Amid the endless, horrifying statistics a few stand out: of Gaza's 640 schools, 18 were completely destroyed and 280 damaged in Israeli attacks. Two-hundred-and-fifty students and 15 teachers were killed.

Of 122 health facilities assessed by the World Health Organization, 48 percent were damaged or destroyed.

Ninety percent of households in Gaza still experience power cuts for four to eight hours per day due to Israeli attacks on the power grid and degradation caused by the blockade.

Forty-six percent of Gaza's once productive agricultural land is out of use due to Israeli damage to farms and Israeli-declared free fire zones. Gaza's exports of more than 130,000 tons per year of tomatoes, flowers, strawberries and other fruit have fallen to zero.

That "much of Gaza still lies in ruins," a coalition of international aid agencies stated recently, "is not an accident; it is a matter of policy."

This policy has been clear all along and it has nothing to do with Israeli "security."

From 19 June 2008, to 4 November 2008, calm prevailed between Israel and Gaza, as Hamas adhered strictly — as even Israel has acknowledged — to a negotiated ceasefire.

That ceasefire collapsed when Israel launched a surprise attack on Gaza killing six persons, after which Hamas and other resistance factions retaliated.

Even so, Palestinian factions were still willing to renew the ceasefire, but it was Israel that refused, choosing instead to launch a premeditated, systematic attack on the foundations of civilized life in the Gaza Strip.

Operation Cast Lead, as Israel dubbed it, was an attempt to destroy once and for all Palestinian resistance in general, and Hamas in particular, which had won the 2006 election and survived the blockade and numerous US-sponsored attempts to undermine and overthrow it in cooperation with US-backed Palestinian militias.

Like the murderous sanctions on Iraq throughout the 1990s, the blockade of Gaza was calculated to deprive civilians of basic necessities, rights and dignity in the hope that their suffering might force their leadership to surrender or collapse.

In many respects things may seem more dire than a year ago.

Barack Obama, the US president, whom many hoped would change the vicious anti-Palestinian policies of his predecessor, George W. Bush, has instead entrenched them as even the pretense of a serious peace effort has vanished.

According to media reports, the US Army Corps of Engineers is assisting Egypt in building an underground wall on its border with Gaza to block the tunnels which act as a lifeline for the besieged territory (resources and efforts that ought to go into rebuilding still hurricane-devastated New Orleans), and American weapons continue to flow to West Bank militias engaged in a US- and Israeli-sponsored civil war against Hamas and anyone else who might resist Israeli occupation and colonization.

These facts are inescapable and bleak.

However, to focus on them alone would be to miss a much more dynamic situation that suggests Israel's power and impunity are not as invulnerable as they appear from this snapshot.

A year after Israel's attack and after more than two-and-a-half years of blockade, the Palestinian people in Gaza have not surrendered. Instead they have offered the world lessons in steadfastness and dignity, even at an appalling, unimaginable cost.

It is true that the European Union leaders who came to occupied Jerusalem last January to publicly embrace Ehud Olmert, the then Israeli prime minister — while white phosphorus seared the flesh of Gazan children and bodies lay under the rubble — still cower before their respective Israel lobbies, as do American and Canadian politicians.

But the shift in public opinion is palpable as Israel's own actions transform it into a pariah whose driving forces are not the liberal democratic values with which it claims to identify, but ultra-nationalism, racism, religious fanaticism, settler-colonialism and a Jewish supremacist order maintained by frequent massacres.

The universalist cause of justice and liberation for Palestinians is gaining adherents and momentum especially among the young. I witnessed it, for example, among Malaysian students I met at a Palestine solidarity conference held by the Union of NGOs of The Islamic World in Istanbul last May, and again in November as hundreds of student organizers from across the US and Canada converged to plan their participation in the global Palestinian-led campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions modeled on the successful struggle against South African apartheid in the 1980s.

This week, thousands of people from dozens of countries are attempting to reach Gaza to

break the siege and march alongside Palestinians who have been organizing inside the territory.

Each of the individuals traveling with the Gaza Freedom March, Viva Palestina, or other delegations represents perhaps hundreds of others who could not make the journey in person, and who are marking the event with demonstrations and commemorations, visits to their elected officials and media campaigns.

Against this flowering of activism, Zionism is struggling to rejuvenate its dwindling base of support. Multi-million dollar programs aimed at recruiting and Zionizing young American Jews are struggling to compete against organizations like the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, which run not on money but principled commitment to human equality.

Increasingly, we see that Israel's hasbara (propaganda) efforts have no positive message, offer no plausible case for maintaining a status quo of unspeakable repression and violence, and rely instead on racist demonization and dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims to justify Israel's actions and even its very existence.

Faced with growing global recognition and support for the courageous nonviolent struggle against continued land theft in the West Bank, Israel is escalating its violence and kidnapping of leaders of the movement in Bilin and other villages (Mohammad Othman, Jamal Juma' and Abdallah Abu Rahmeh are among the leaders of this movement recently arrested).

In acting this way, Israel increasingly resembles a bankrupt failed state, not a regime confident about its legitimacy and longevity.

And despite the failed peace process industry's efforts to ridicule, suppress and marginalize it, there is a growing debate among Palestinians and even among Israelis about a shared future in Palestine/Israel based on equality and decolonization, rather than ethno-national segregation and forced repartition.

Last, but certainly not least, in the shadow of the Goldstone report, Israeli leaders travel around the world fearing arrest for their crimes.

For now, they can rely on the impunity that high-level international complicity and their inertial power and influence still afford them. But the question for the real international community — made up of people and movements — is whether we want to continue to see the still very incomplete system of international law and justice painstakingly built since the horrors of the Second World War and the Nazi holocaust dismantled and corrupted all for the sake of one rogue state.

What we have done in solidarity with the Palestinian people in Gaza and the rest of Palestine is not yet enough. But our movement is growing, it cannot be stopped, and we will reach our destination.

Ali Abunimah is a co-founder of [The Electronic Intifada](#). He is also the author of [One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse](#).

In late December Abunimah joined more than 1300 activists from approximately 40

countries in the Gaza Freedom March, a protest against the continuing blockade of the Gaza Strip. Egyptian authorities prevented them from reaching Gaza with their message of solidarity. For more information about the GFM, see [his blog from Cairo](#).

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