



Gaza Ceasefire: now force Israel to end the siege without conditions

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A temporary ceasefire has brought some relief to the besieged and oppressed 1.7 million people crammed into the 140 square miles of the Gaza Strip, where one in five children suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and 58 per cent of young people aged between 20 and 24 are unemployed.

But, if the bombing has stopped, then Israel's offensive against the Palestinians, to continue to rob them of their homeland, has certainly not. Seventy-five thousand troops are still on the border and Israeli drones hum overhead. The struggle to raise the siege of Gaza goes on, as does the need to halt and reverse the expansion of the Zionist settler state and its attempted genocide of the Palestinian people.

The ceasefire terms brokered by Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, with the close involvement of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, involve the temporary halting of the Israeli aerial and sea bombardment and targeted killings of Palestinian leaders, in return for a cessation of rocket attacks. But that leaves unsatisfied the main demand of the Palestinians, the end of the economic blockade and military siege of Gaza.

The Israelis' counter-demand is that Egypt not only guarantees and enforces the ceasefire but also ensures that weapons, in particular the longer-range Iranian Fajr rockets, do not reach Gaza. In short, Israel demands that Egypt disarms the Gazan resistance and polices Gaza on its behalf.

It is likely neither side will concede these demands in their entirety. Either there could be a return to the Israeli attacks and Palestinian resistance or, more likely, the result could be a loosening of the economic blockade in return for Egypt tightening control over what goes through the tunnels. This depends to some extent on the scope of Morsi's deal with Obama and Clinton.

There has even been speculation about a transfer of sovereignty of Gaza (back) to Egypt. From the Israeli point of view, this would allow them to concentrate on further ethnic cleansing and creating apartheid-style Bantustans on the West Bank. But it would be a poisoned chalice for Morsi to act as the Zionists' policeman, just as Hosni Mubarak did.

Israel launched Operation Pillar of Cloud on 14 November, killing Hamas military chief Ahmad al-Jabari. This came days after an informal truce that had been reached via the mediation of Egypt and agreed by Jabari for Hamas. This was a deliberate provocation and, when Hamas replied with a few rockets, Israel unleashed its long prepared offensive.

In the course of Pillar of Cloud, some 1,500 air strikes took place on Gaza over the next eight days. Israeli sources claim that Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters responded by firing a similar number of rockets into Israel. But most fell harmlessly to both life and property. Israel is protected by a US funded missile defence system, Iron Dome, which intercepted 400 of these missiles.

Needless to say, there is no US funded defence system to prevent Israeli bombs, drone attacks, or shelling from warships off Gaza's coast from striking civilian targets. The immense inequity of the forces is clear enough from the casualties. In eight days of fighting, 161 Palestinians were killed, mainly civilians, including at least 34 children. Meanwhile, four or five Israeli civilians and one soldier died, a ratio of over 30 to 1.

Israel's war aims

As well as targeting rocket launchers, Israel once more attacked the political infrastructure of the Palestinian administration in Gaza, such as the prime minister's office and police stations. The objective of the exercise was pithily expressed by the Interior Minister, Eli Yishai, in the statement on 17 November:

?The goal of the operation is to send Gaza back to the Middle Ages. Only then will Israel be calm for forty years.?

More modern in his terminology was the Minister of Home Front Defence, Avi Dichter: ?There is no other choice, Israel must carry out a formatting action in Gaza, actually format the system and clean it out.?

Israel's threats to invade and topple Hamas always had an element of bravado in them. Whereas 80-90 per cent of Israelis, according to opinion polls, approve of attacks on Gaza from the air and the sea, only about 30 per cent would support a land invasion. Toppling Hamas, even assuming it could be done, would be a long and bloody business. They have not forgotten the bloody nose that Hizbullah gave them in Lebanon in 2006. And if they succeeded, then they would have to administer the enclave, leading to huge casualties in their own forces.

The Palestinian casualties, though severe, were considerably less than in the last full-scale assault on Gaza in 2008-09. Then, the casualty figures were 1,400 Palestinians killed to 13 Israelis. But then Pillar of Cloud lasted only 8 days, whereas Operation Cast Lead went on for 22. On that occasion, there was unprecedented and deliberate destruction of the civilian infrastructure including hospitals, schools, mosques, homes, police stations and United Nations compounds where people had taken refuge.

The reason for the shorter duration and less human and infrastructural damage is not any softening on the Israeli government's side. Rather, it is due to the historic changes in the regional and global balance of forces since then. For a start, the Gaza War of 2008-09 itself was a propaganda disaster for the Zionist state. Millions of people worldwide woke up to fact that the David and Goliath propaganda of the Zionists was a total inversion of the truth. The Palestinians were David facing the Israeli giant, armed to the teeth by the US.

The reactionary character of the settler state was further displayed by its imposition of a cruel siege on the population of Gaza and its murderous attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, in May 2010, which killed nine activists. This led to the spectacular rupture of Israel's long-standing alliance with Turkey.

Then the Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan, Syrian and other revolutions of 2011 saw the re-emergence of ?the Arab Street?, that is, the popular masses, in a big way. Western commentators had wrongly believed the Arab people were no longer a factor in restricting the actions of their puppet regimes in the region.

However, despite the fact that, in many of the countries of the Arab Spring, broadly pro-western or Islamic conservative regimes took over, it is clear that these cannot ignore the response of their politically awakened and youthful masses as their immediate forbears did.

This is particularly so given the extremely aggressive right wing coalition headed by Binyamin Netanyahu, which plainly has no intention of reaching a ?two state solution? with the Palestinians. Indeed, within the cabinet the brazen genocidist Avigdor Lieberman is pressing for overthrowing the Palestinian leadership if it succeeds in winning recognition as a non-member state at the United Nations General Assembly on 29 November.

And the process of depriving the Palestinians of their homeland is speeding up. The number of Jewish Israeli settlers in the West Bank grew by 4.5 per cent, more than 15,000, in the year to July 2012, reaching a total that exceeds 350,000, almost doubling in the past 12 years. There are, in addition, now some 300,000 Jewish Israelis living across the pre-1967 border in East Jerusalem.

As Israel ever more brutally denies the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and to their own state, it unwittingly raises the question of its own right to exist in the minds of progressive people around the world. It arrogantly demands of all Palestinians that they recognise Israel's ?right to exist?. Its US and EU imperialist masters do

likewise. Yet where did this recognition get the hapless Yasser Arafat? It led to his imprisonment in his own compound and a highly suspicious death in a Paris hospital.

And where did yielding to US and European blackmail and recognising the state of Israel get the pathetic Mahmoud Abbas? Israel threatens to dethrone him for daring to seek UN recognition!

Israel's right to exist?

A state that is systematically ethnically cleansing the Palestinian people from their homeland quite simply has no democratic right to exist. It is slowly but systematically trying to destroy them by concentrating them in an ever-smaller proportion of their rightful territory, by breaking up continuous stretches of land with armed settlements, military zones and roads. It is relentlessly seizing all the best land and water resources, destroying those of the remaining Palestinian population.

Israel's very existence is predicated on the obstruction of the Palestinians' right to a state, of their refugees' right to return to their homeland, while any Jew in the world has the 'right to return' on the basis of a religious myth and falsified history.

The Israeli Jewish population consists overwhelmingly of settlers, or the descendants of those who settled in Israel after 1917 (the Balfour Declaration) or the 1948 setting up of the state of Israel. On neither decision were the Palestinian people even consulted, despite being the overwhelming majority of the indigenous people.

Even today, despite all the settlements, if the Palestinians were released from their refugee camps and their places of exile they would once more be a majority in their own land. The Zionist project was always a reactionary one and this has been borne out by the history of the last 60 years.

Insofar as they were able to express their will, at every stage, Palestinians resisted being turned into a minority in their own land or 'disappeared' as a people. On the contrary they have never ceased to struggle. The Holocaust, committed in Europe, cannot be a justification for Zionism. Nor should the accusation that anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism be allowed to blackmail people into supporting this state's right to exist and expand.

The Arab Spring and the growth of independent trade unions opens the real possibility for the masses across the Arab world to throw their support behind the Palestinians and against Zionism and its US and European backers. In so doing, they will help liberate the entire region from imperialist exploitation and domination.

To do this effectively they need to break free of their own capitalist classes' parties, whether secular, nationalist, or Islamist. Only a working class led resistance struggling for power in the whole region, especially in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Turkey, will be able to decisively turn around the situation. This means the building of revolutionary working class parties. The freedom of Palestine will be a central plank of their programme of social and national liberation.

The workers' movement, students, all progressive forces, need to declare in unequivocal terms for:

- ? Support for the armed struggle of the Palestinian resistance, no matter who leads it
- ? An unconditional end to the blockade and siege of Gaza
- ? The opening of the frontiers with Egypt
- ? Withdrawal of Israeli Occupation Forces and settlers from the West Bank and Jerusalem
- ? For workers' and students' boycott of Israel
- ? The recognition of the Palestinian people and their right to a state 'From the River to the Sea'
- ? For a single bi-national state for Arab and Hebrew speakers
- ? For a Socialist Palestine as part of a Socialist United States of the Middle East.