

One year since the war on Gaza

Jean Shaoul
28 August 2015

In the year since the August 24, 2014 ceasefire ending Israel's war against Gaza, Palestinians have endured an almost unparalleled decline in living standards. Dubbed Operation Protective Edge, the war followed an Israeli economic blockade of the tiny enclave that has lasted more than eight years. It was an entirely one-sided conflict that killed more civilians than combatants.

Israel targeted the very foundations of Palestinian society. Its systematic degradation and ruination of Palestinian infrastructure, not just in Operation Protective Edge, but in all of its previous operations against Gaza and the West Bank, is a deliberate policy. The Israeli regime will never be swayed from this path by a negotiated settlement, which, in any event, it has no intention of discussing, let alone securing. While the war was called off, its mission remains unfinished business.

According to United Nations figures, the Israeli bombardment killed 2,251 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians, and injured 11,231. Sixty-seven Israeli soldiers, along with six civilians, were killed, and 1,600 soldiers were injured.

Of the Palestinians who lost their lives, 521 were children and 283 were women. The civilian death toll was far higher than the number of Hamas fighters killed, estimated at 400. The Islamist group, which controls Gaza, was the ostensible target of the war.

The UN's Human Rights Council (UNHRC) concluded that the mass killing and destruction were deliberate, not accidental. They were the calculated outcome of decisions taken at the highest level of the Israeli government. The UNHRC also noted that the devastation of Gaza was not an aberration, but a continuation of war crimes and atrocities committed in previous wars on Gaza (2006, 2008-2009, 2012) and Lebanon (2006).

Gaza has the highest rate of unemployment in the

world, with 41.5 percent of its people without work. Youth unemployment, at 60 percent, is the highest in the region.

The territory's manufacturing sector has shrunk by 60 percent. The war destroyed one third of agricultural land. In 2005, when Israel "disengaged" from Gaza, 9,319 trucks were going from the region to Israel, the occupied West Bank and overseas, compared to just 228 last year.

The result has been poverty and misery on a massive scale, with 80 percent of the population reliant on donor aid and 39 percent eking out an existence below the official poverty line. (See "The devastation of Gaza")

The Cairo Conference on Palestine last October pledged \$5.4 billion in aid over three years to the Palestinians. This, however, was a fraud.

Most of the pledges came from Washington's regional allies, anxious to shore up their credibility at home. But only \$3.5 billion was for Gaza, and one quarter of that had been committed before the war or had already been disbursed. The rest was to cover the expenses of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank.

This left just \$2.5 billion in new money for the reconstruction of Gaza, of which a mere 13.5 percent has been delivered. The donors' excuse is that they are waiting for the Palestinian Authority, which is hostile to Hamas, to take control of Gaza. The Cairo conference is one more demonstration of the futility of relying on support from the bourgeois regimes in the region and the complicity of Egypt and the PA in the suppression of the Palestinians.

Israel's barbaric attack on Gaza was justified by lies. The Likud-led coalition government of Benjamin Netanyahu utilised the disappearance of three Israeli youths in the West Bank to whip up a frenzied campaign accusing Hamas of kidnapping and later

killing the boys. It did so without a shred of evidence and with full knowledge that the boys were already dead.

Millions of people around the world saw the war for what it was—a crime of historic proportions against a cruelly abused population. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to call for an end to the Israeli bombardment. The onslaught on a defenceless population served to deepen the hostility toward Zionism throughout the Middle East and around the world and discredit it among Jewish workers in Israel. The war also discredited Israel’s main backers, the United States and the European imperialist powers.

The seven-week military attack, which had been green-lighted by the Obama administration, was finally called off, in large part because the mass protests threatened to cut across Washington’s plans for a renewed war in the Middle East, ostensibly against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, to secure American control over the resource-rich region.

Netanyahu is entirely unrepentant, threatening the Palestinians with new wars. “We will not sit idly by,” he recently said. “We’ll continue to act with strength and decisiveness against all those who try to harm us and our citizens, and we’ll do so in accordance with international law.”

The war also placed a heavy burden on the Israeli working class. According to Israeli sources, the cost of the military operation was \$2.29 billion, with a further \$510 million going to the evacuation of Israeli families living close to the Gaza Strip. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) requested an additional \$1.79 billion for 2014 and \$2.82 billion for 2015, bringing the total for 2015 to \$17.95 billion, compared to \$14.87 billion in 2013. It meant a budget deficit of at least 6 percent.

Even this is unlikely to be the final amount for 2014 and 2015, since, according to the state auditor, in every year since 2000 the IDF has spent around 10 percent more than budgeted. The Ministry of Public Security, whose task is to police the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, includes the border police, two thirds of whose staff are IDF career officers and young conscripts serving under IDF command in the Occupied Territories. It also includes the prison service, which oversees the incarceration of thousands of Palestinians. The ministry’s budget has doubled in real terms since 2000, reaching \$3.33 billion in 2014.

It was the failure to agree a new budget that led to Netanyahu’s decision last autumn to call for an early election. That election left his coalition government with a majority of just one in the incoming parliament. The government has recouped the cost of the war by increasing tax collections and reducing expenditures, affecting the poorest families the most.

The war testifies to the political dead end of the entire Zionist project, which promised that a capitalist state based on religious exclusivism and the expulsion and subjugation of the Palestinian people already living there could provide a safe haven for the Jewish people after the horrors of the Holocaust. It has instead created a state that stands guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity and has pitted Jews against Arab Israelis and the Arab masses throughout the Middle East.

Netanyahu’s regime represents a ruling class that, like its counterparts elsewhere, has no answer to the crisis it confronts except increased authoritarianism, brutality and war. For the Israeli ruling elite, endless wars against the Palestinians and Israel’s neighbours, and invocations of the supposed threat of nuclear attack from Iran, are a means of deflecting the country’s immense internal social tensions outward and pre-empting a growth of the class struggle at home.

The answer to war, rising social inequality and increasing authoritarianism must be found through the unification of Jewish, Palestinian and Arab workers across national and sectarian barriers in the fight against imperialism, Zionism and the Arab bourgeoisie, and for a socialist federation of the Middle East as part of the struggle to put an end to capitalism on a world scale.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact