

The slaughter in Gaza and the crisis of Israel on its 70th anniversary

Bill Van Auken
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The continuing massacre on the heavily militarized border dividing the Gaza Strip from Israel is a calculated and deliberate war crime carried out by the Israeli government with the backing of Washington.

The death toll among unarmed Palestinians participating in the “Great March of Return,” which began on March 30, rose to at least 40 Monday with the deaths of two demonstrators who had earlier suffered grievous gunshot wounds.

One of them, Tahrir Mahmoud Wahba, was 18 years old and deaf. He had clung to life for 10 days after being shot in the head by an Israeli sniper during the mass protest of April 13. Another youth, Abdullah Muhammad al-Shamali, 20, died late Sunday night from wounds he suffered during last Friday’s demonstration.

The latest deaths follow the fatal shooting last Friday of four Gazan demonstrators, including 14-year-old Mohammed Ibrahim Ayoub.

In addition to the dead, some 5,000 Palestinians have been wounded in the protests from live ammunition, rubber bullets and gas attacks. Of these, 1,600 have been struck down by live ammunition, many of them suffering wounds that will leave them impaired for life.

Vastly disproportionate and highly lethal violence has been unleashed against the tens of thousands of Gazans who have gathered each Friday along the Israeli border fence not because of any imminent security threat their protest poses to Israel. Rather, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have been given shoot-to-kill orders in an effort to suppress the existential challenge posed to the Zionist state by the demand the demonstrations are raising: the right—recognized under international law and affirmed by United Nations resolutions—of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to return to the homes and villages from which they were violently expelled seven decades ago.

What is most striking about the Gaza demonstrations is the utter indifference shown by Western governments and

their stenographers in the corporate media to the scenes of unarmed demonstrators marching again and again into gunfire to demand their rights and to protest against the appalling conditions in the Gaza Strip, justifiably described as the largest open-air prison on the planet.

One can well imagine the response to similar scenes were they taking place in Russia, China, Syria, Iran, North Korea or Venezuela. Nikki Haley would be using her seat on the UN Security Council to issue blistering denunciations of “atrocities,” threats of military force and hypocritical invocations of “human rights.” The killings would dominate the front pages of every newspaper and lead the broadcast news.

In the case of Gaza, however, the reaction is one of complicity, indifference and silence. At a US State Department press briefing last Friday on the release of the agency’s new global human rights reports, officials repeatedly refused to take any questions on the slaughter in Gaza. The report released relating to Israel dropped all references to “occupied territories”—a term used by successive American governments since 1967—signaling Washington’s acceptance of Israel’s colonial oppression and ultimate annexation of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights.

While the US media has endlessly repeated the discredited lies about a chemical weapons attack in Syria, airing again and again a video—exposed as a staged hoax—of people being hosed down in a clinic, none of them has bothered to send a reporter to the clinics in Gaza, overflowing with wounded and confronting shortages of even the most basic medical supplies due to the blockade by Israel—and Egypt—of the occupied territory.

The most significant coverage in the American media has been given to the statement by Oscar-winning actress Natalie Portman declaring her refusal to attend an awards ceremony in Israel. She published a statement over the

weekend saying that “Israel was created exactly 70 years ago as a haven for refugees from the Holocaust. But the mistreatment of those suffering from today’s atrocities is simply not in line with my Jewish values.”

Portman, who holds dual US-Israeli citizenship, is not an opponent of Zionism, which in some ways makes her reaction to the slaughter in Gaza all the more significant. The response of leading Israeli political figures has been vicious, charging her with being a dupe of Hamas and engaging in conduct bordering on anti-Semitism.

One Knesset member of the Kulanu party, part of Benjamin Netanyahu’s right-wing government, offered a more sober assessment. “Natalie Portman’s cancellation should be a warning sign,” tweeted lawmaker Rachel Azaria. “She’s totally one of us, identifies with her Jewishness and Israeliness. She’s expressing the voices of many in US Jewry, and particularly those of the younger generation. This is a community that was always a significant anchor for the State of Israel and the price of losing it is likely to be too high.”

It is indeed a warning sign. Despite the media blackout and US government support, masses of people around the world, including millions of Jews in the US and other countries, are disgusted and dismayed by the scenes unfolding on Gaza’s border.

These killings are not an aberration, but flow from the malignant contradictions underlying the state of Israel and the intensifying crisis gripping its society and government. A regime compelled to carry out such crimes is inherently unstable.

With the 70th anniversary of Israel’s founding only weeks away, the Zionist myth that the carving out of a Jewish state in Palestine—by driving three quarters of a million Palestinians from their homes—would secure peace and security for the Jewish people after the horrors of the Holocaust is unraveling.

The killings on the Gaza border are the horrific expression of the impossibility of resolving the Palestinian question within the framework of the existing capitalist nation-state system. Both the right-wing Netanyahu government and US imperialism have effectively jettisoned the so-called “two-state solution”—always a political fiction, but now a patent impossibility given the uninterrupted growth of Israeli settlements and security zones in the occupied West Bank.

The “March of Return” is itself a manifestation of the disillusionment of the Palestinian people with the conception that their rights and aspirations can be realized through the creation of some divided mini-state led by the

corrupt Palestinian bourgeoisie. Every political faction, from the collaborationist Palestinian Authority of Abbas to the bourgeois Islamist Hamas, has been discredited.

The Israeli state, mired in corruption and beset by deep social contradictions, is driven to carry out ever greater repression and prepare ever more dangerous wars, first and foremost against Iran, posing the threat of a regional and even global conflagration.

Israeli society ranks second only to the US as the most unequal among the Organization for Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Its poverty rate is almost double the OECD average, with fully one third of the country’s children living in poverty. At the opposite end of the social spectrum is a small layer of tycoons who have reaped fortunes from the country’s export markets while controlling all of the major political parties.

As in Iran, Tunisia and elsewhere in the region, as well as internationally, these conditions are creating the conditions for a resurgence of class struggle within Israel. Last December saw factory occupations and protests against mass layoffs by workers at Teva, the world’s largest generic drug manufacturer, accompanied by a half-day general strike by both private and public-sector workers.

In Israel, as in every other country, it is class, rather than race, religion or ethnicity, that is the fundamental driving force. The way out of the bloodletting, repression, reaction and war that are the stock-in-trade of the Israeli state on its 70th anniversary lies in the development of a unified struggle of Arab and Jewish workers against capitalism, for the building of a socialist society and the eradication of the irrational national borders that divide the region.



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