

Israel and the Palestinians: A state founded on dispossession and ethnic cleansing—Part One

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government, backed to the hilt by all the imperialist countries and their media echo chamber, portrays the 1,400 casualties resulting from Hamas's Al Aqsa Flood incursion into Israel as a unique act of terror. According to the torrent of propaganda, this is a "ground zero" event for which there is no justification and which in turn legitimises whatever crimes Israel now commits against Gaza's two-million-plus population as a supposed act of self-defence.

In reality it is a *casus belli* to implement a long-planned campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Gaza Strip and possibly even the West Bank and a war on Iran and its allies in Lebanon and Syria. Netanyahu's allies in the imperialist centres are one hundred percent behind him, demonising any opposition to Israel's fascist policies as anti-Semitic acts that must be banned.

But can anyone be in any doubt that Israel is planning a second Nakba? Netanyahu has made this absolutely clear. He told the 1.1 million Palestinians in north Gaza to "Leave now," while the army spokesperson said they would not be allowed to return "until we say so." Where they were supposed to go, no one said. In any event, this did not stop Israel bombing them where they fled.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, launching Israel's "complete siege on Gaza" blocking all of life's essentials—electricity, food and even water—from entering the besieged enclave, spewed forth a fascist rant, "We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly."

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich told the military, "Strike Hamas brutally and [do] not take the matter of prisoners as a significant consideration."

The reality of "striking Hamas" is the mass murder of thousands of civilians, half of them children, in the carpet bombing of Gaza as a ground invasion is prepared. Such is the carnage resulting from air strikes that the United Nations Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) declared, "There are not enough body bags for the dead in Gaza." Entire neighbourhoods have been reduced to rubble.

Gaza is only the beginning. In the occupied West Bank, Israeli soldiers have set up new checkpoints to block all free movement, giving free rein to armed settlers to attack and kill Palestinians and expel them from their villages.

Within Israel, Palestinians fear they will be subject to ethnic cleansing in line with the "population transfers" long demanded by the ultra-nationalist and fascistic parties. Far-right vigilantes have moved into mixed population towns like Lod, which saw forced evictions in 1948, with the declared aim of "judaicising" them. Security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has announced the purchase of 10,000 rifles to arm these fascist squads. Kobi Shabtai, head of the police, declared there would be "zero tolerance" for protests in support of Gaza in Israel and threatened to send anti-war demonstrators to the besieged enclave.

The full implications of Israel's 2018 Nation-State Law, enshrining Jewish supremacy as the legal foundation of the state, are now clear—not just apartheid rule with Arabs as second-class citizens, but their expulsion from an exclusively Jewish state.

The establishment of the state of Israel

This is the product of the founding of Israel in 1948 through the forcible expulsion of Palestine's existing Arab population and of the three-quarters of a century of brutality and mass murder that followed.

The non-binding vote at the United Nations General Assembly in November 1947 urging partition, and a Jewish state on Palestinian land alongside a Palestinian state, was the result of the machinations of rival powers determined to maintain control over such an important geostrategic area. It played on and manipulated the enormous public sympathy for the European Jews who had suffered so terribly at the hands of Nazi Germany and now found themselves denied entry to the West.

One of the most cynical elements of Zionist and imperialist propaganda is that Israel is routinely declared to be the "only democracy" in the Middle East. But its founding, in an already existing country, where Jews, even after mass immigration, constituted just one-third of the population in 1947, could never be achieved democratically.

Israel's own historians, using the state archives, have documented the crimes carried out by the political antecedents of the gang of far-right nationalists, religious bigots, and former

generals running the country today. Netanyahu's Likud party is the political heir of the Irgun, whose leader Menachem Begin was prime minister from 1977 to 1983, and the Stern Gang, led by Yitzhak Shamir who became prime minister in 1983. These terrorist gangs waged a brutal war on the Palestinians and British officials during the period after World War I, when Britain ruled Palestine under a League of Nations Mandate. They killed several thousand Palestinians in a roughly 30-year period up to 1948, resulting in the retaliatory deaths of 1,300 Jews.

The massacre at Deir Yassin in April 1948, where more than 200 men, women and children were slaughtered, is one of the best-known examples. Historian Benny Morris explains in his groundbreaking book *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-49* that this was one of the most important factors in "precipitating the flight of Arab villagers from Palestine." Between November 1947 and the end of the British Mandate in May 1948, more than 375,000 Palestinians became refugees, driven out by a combination of force, atrocities and a campaign of terror including killings.

The war that broke in May 1948 between Israel and its Arab neighbours after David Ben Gurion, Israel's premier, declared the establishment of the state of Israel led to the deaths of some 13,000 Palestinians, twice the number of Israelis killed, as well as an estimated 3-7,000 soldiers from Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. Israel denied uprooted Palestinians the right to return to their homes, forcing most to eke out a wretched existence in refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Largely denied citizenship in the Arab states, except in Jordan, they and their descendants became registered refugees. Many now live elsewhere in the Middle East, while others have moved to the West.

Ben Gurion himself encouraged the Haganah—the forerunner of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and largely under the control of the Histadrut/Mapai Party, later to become the Labour Party—to expel the Palestinians from their homes. There are at least 31 confirmed massacres—including the horrific massacre in October 1948 by a Haganah battalion made up of former Irgun and Lehi forces—of between 100 and 120 Palestinians in the village of al-Dawayima, near the southern city of Hebron. A soldier who witnessed the events, part of the IDF's Operation Yoav (October 15–22, 1948), explained, "There was no battle and no resistance. The first conquerors killed 80 to 100 Arab men, women and children. The children were killed by smashing their skulls with sticks. There wasn't a house without people killed in it."

No one was charged with the massacre. According to the United Nations Refugee Relief Project, the Gaza Strip's refugee population rose from 100,000 to 230,000, due to the ethnic cleansing of the southern region.

By the end of the war, only about 200,000 out of 1,157,000 Palestinians recorded in a 1947 British census remained in the parts of Palestine that became Israel. The takeover of Palestinian-owned land was even more dramatic. In 1946, Jews had owned less than 12 percent of the land in what became Israel; this rose to 77 percent after the 1948-49 war when the Israeli government enacted the Abandoned Property Ordinance to take control of the property of Palestinians who were expelled or fled.

Founded on terrorism and ethnic cleansing, Israel could only sustain its twin policies of expulsion and dispossession through constant repression and warfare. Ben Gurion's Labour imposed military rule until 1966 on those Palestinians who remained in Israel and became citizens. This was only months before imposing military rule on the newly occupied West Bank Palestinians that has continued ever since.

The IDF repeatedly fought one-sided battles with Palestinians who sought to return to their former homes or visit their families after 1949, with Ariel Sharon's Qibya massacre in 1956 that killed 69 Palestinians one of the most notorious. Between 1949 and 1967, the Fedayeen war between Israel on the one hand and Egyptian armed forces and Palestinian militants on the other killed between 2,800 and 5,000 Palestinians, around four times the number of Israelis killed.

In June 1967, Israel used President Gamal Abdul Nasser's expulsion of UN forces from the Gaza Strip, which Egypt controlled, and Sharm el Sheikh, where they were guarding the Straits of Tiran, and the closing of the Straits to Israeli shipping to launch a pre-emptive but long-planned strike against Egypt. An estimated 20,000 Arab soldiers lost their lives, compared to less than 1,000 Israeli deaths.

During the five-day war, Israel seized Syria's Golan Heights, the Jordanian-controlled West Bank and East Jerusalem, which it annexed, and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, as well as the Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip. It forced another 250,000-325,000 of the 900,000 Palestinians in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank to flee to Jordan and 100,000 Syrians to flee to Syria.

The 1967 war was to lead to another war in October 1973, when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise military attack—ultimately unsuccessful—on Israel aimed at securing the return of the Israeli-occupied lands. Their defeat was to result in Egypt's signing a peace agreement with Israel and the abandonment by all the Arab bourgeois regimes of any support for the Palestinians.

The 1967 defeat of the Arab armies created the conditions for Yasser Arafat and his Fatah organisation, with its commitment to achieving a Palestinian state through armed struggle, to take the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). This began a vastly unequal military struggle between Israel, armed to the teeth and supported politically and diplomatically by US imperialism, and the Palestinians, now isolated and abandoned by the Arab regimes.

To be continued



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