

# **Israel's Barbarism Against Gaza's Civilians - "Palestine's real problem is, and has always, been the occupation"**

Saturday 16 August 2014, by [BIDWAI Praful](#) (Date first published: 16 August 2014).

**We first posted online this article as it appeared as "Opinion" in *The News*, Saturday, August 16, 2014 (see below). Since then, we received the original, longer version of this article. Here it is.**

## Contents

- [Israel's Barbarism Against \(...\)](#)
  - [Israel's barbarism in Gaza](#)
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## **Israel's Barbarism Against Gaza's Civilians: Winning the battle, losing the war?**

More than a month after Israel launched a murderous onslaught on the Gaza Strip, with over 2,000 casualties, there's still no clarity about when "Operation Protective Edge" might end—despite the recent extension of a ceasefire. Israel has destroyed 10,000 homes, turned a quarter of Gaza's population into refugees, and repeatedly targeted civilian installations, including schools, hospitals and United Nations-designated shelters—in flagrant violation of international law.

The present crisis was triggered by the June 12 kidnapping and murder of three Israeli students from a West Bank settler community. When their bodies were found, a group of Israeli Jews abducted a 16-year-old Palestinian outside his East Jerusalem home and burned him alive. Protests erupted among Palestinians, especially in Jerusalem. Israel blamed Hamas for the murders without a shred of evidence, and launched its biggest anti-Hamas campaign since the Second Intifadah (2000-2005).

It was a coincidence that the kidnapping happened 10 days after a new government was formed in Gaza following a "reconciliation" agreement between the radical Hamas, which had won the 2006 election in Gaza, and the moderate, heavily compromised, Al-Fatah which runs the Palestinian Authority. Although the agreement overwhelmingly favoured Fatah, Israel strongly opposed it because it united the Palestinians and detracted from Israel's goal of isolating and disarming Hamas.

Fatah shamefully collaborated with Israel's brutal crackdown on Hamas. Protests erupted against Fatah throughout Israel and the West Bank. In solidarity, non-Hamas militants in Gaza launched attacks on Israel with primitive rockets. Hamas backed these while calling for a Third Intifadah.

Israel arrested more than 550 Palestinians and killed six, signalling that it would never accept the Hamas-Fatah agreement. Faced with the provocation, Hamas resumed firing rockets—for the first time after the November 2012 ceasefire.

Israel responded with the devastating “Operation Protective Edge”—the third onslaught in five years by the world’s fourth largest military power against one of its most impoverished and overcrowded territories, and home to 1.8 million severely deprived people. Israel consciously targeted civilian installations, including Al Raffah hospital, the only rehabilitation clinic in the Gaza Strip, which housed 17 paralysed patients, almost all comatose and dependent on ventilators.

On July 29, Israel shelled a girls’ school designated by the UN as a shelter for 3,300 Palestinians, killing 16, and wounding hundreds. The UN had given the Israeli Defence Forces the school’s coordinates 17 times. The UN official in-charge stated: “Children killed in their sleep; this is an affront to all of us, a source of universal shame. Today, the world stands disgraced.”

Israel is clearly in breach of the Geneva Conventions pertaining to armed conflict and conduct of war. Israel is guilty of war crimes on three counts. It inflicted collective punishment on Gaza by killing over 1,900 civilians, although there was no evidence that the killers of the three students were based in the Strip. Second, its response was grossly disproportionate and indiscriminate. And third, it deliberately targeted non-combatant civilians, which is simply impermissible, even in self-defence.

A host of legal experts have debunked Israel’s “self-defence” argument, including John Dugard, former UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories and emeritus professor of international law at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands: “Given the fact that Gaza is an occupied territory, it means that Israel’s present assault is simply a way of enforcing the continuation of the occupation...and the response of the Palestinian militants should be seen as the response of an occupied people that wishes to resist the occupation,” which is permissible in international law.

However, so vitiated is the dominant public opinion in Israel, which claims it wants “peace”, that over 85 percent of Jewish Israelis oppose a ceasefire, according to polls. Direct calls to genocide now come not from some fringe elements, but from the highest levels.

Take, for instance, Ayelet Shaked, an MP from a Far-Right party that’s part of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s governing coalition, who recently posted a Facebook entry calling for deliberately killing Palestinians, including women, children, and old people: “The entire Palestinian people is the enemy...In wars, the enemy is usually an entire people, including its elderly and its women, its cities and its villages, its property and its infrastructure”. Even the mothers of Palestinians killed should follow their dead sons to Hell: “They should go, as should the physical homes in which they raised the snakes. Otherwise, more little snakes will be raised there.”

This is of a piece with what Gilad Sharon, former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s son, wrote at the time of the 2012 Gaza attack: “The desire to prevent harm to innocent civilians in Gaza will ultimately lead to harming the truly innocent: the residents of southern Israel. The residents of Gaza are not innocent, they elected Hamas. The Gazans aren’t hostages; they chose this freely, and must live with the consequences...”

He further said: “We need to flatten entire neighbourhoods in Gaza. Flatten all of Gaza. The Americans didn’t stop with Hiroshima—the Japanese weren’t surrendering fast enough, so they hit Nagasaki, too.” Incredibly crude and perverse as this is in sanctifying mass-scale savagery against civilians from atomic bombing, it represents an important current of Right-wing sentiment in Israel.

Clearly, Israel did not want peace. Or else, it would not have systematically violated the letter and spirit of the 2012 ceasefire, which required it to end the blockade of Gaza, which has turned it into “the world’s largest open-air prison”. By contrast, Hamas abided by the ceasefire terms, and even set up a new police force tasked with arresting Palestinians who tried to launch rockets.

After the July 2013 military coup in Egypt led by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the situation gravely worsened for Hamas, which was banned. Almost all of the hundreds of tunnels that had brought goods from Egypt to Gaza were closed. Gaza has since suffered untold misery, with severe food shortages, power cuts lasting up to 18 hours a day, and no salaries to pay for its 40,000 civil servants.

An analyst wrote in the *London Review of Books*: “Those in need of treatment in Egyptian hospitals paid bribes as high as \$3,000 to cross the border when it was occasionally opened for a day... Garbage piled in the streets because the government couldn’t afford fuel for refuse lorries. In December sanitation plants shut down and sewage flowed through the streets... more than 90 percent of Gaza’s aquifer was now contaminated.”

Hamas, isolated and desperate, and with travel bans imposed on its leaders, made the “reconciliation” deal in April with Fatah, which Israel is now undermining with brute military force. Hamas is fighting with its back to the wall. It too has violated international law, but its violations cannot be equated with those by Israel, an occupying power, with the responsibility to protect civilians. Palestine’s real problem is, and has always, been the occupation—the longest and cruellest occupation in history—and the root-cause of all crises in the region, including the present one.

Meanwhile, coddled by the US, whose West Asia-North Africa policy has been captured by America’s powerful Zionist lobby, Israel shows no intention of ending the occupation. Today, by torpedoing a two-state solution, Israel risks creating yet more discontent and perpetuating the cycle of violence, aggravating its own citizens’ insecurity. It may win the battle, but lose the larger war.

Yet, unless there is a concerted international effort through a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, similar to the Anti-Apartheid Movement of the 1970s, which isolates Israel and raises the political and economic cost of the occupation, it won’t end.

India can play a vital role in a BDS campaign, as well as through creative diplomacy which mounts pressure on Israel and the US in international forums. But it has failed to play this role—despite paying lip service to the cause of Palestinian nationhood. Successive Indian governments have made their Israel policy a hostage to arms deals with Tel Aviv, which has become India’s second biggest supplier of weaponry.

Even as Gaza is being pulverised, India is about to finalise the purchase of Barak-1 anti-ship missiles from an Israeli company that was blacklisted in 2006 for its involvement in bribery. Nothing could be more myopic.

This must change. But it won’t unless public opinion itself undergoes a transformation. This means overcoming the enormous apathy that exists among the Indian middle class towards the Palestinian cause, combating the temptation or the lazy option of siding with the winner, and re-founding our thinking on a solid base of political morality, compassion, legality and justice.

Going by the Modi government’s deplorable conduct on the Gaza issue—on which it stalled a debate for days, and adopted an ambivalent position equating Israel’s aggression with “violence by non-state actors”, before voting for a wishy-washy UN Human Rights Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire—this will be an uphill task. But that’s no reason to give up!

**Praful Bidwai**

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## **Israel's barbarism in Gaza**

### ***"India can play a vital role in a BDS campaign, but has failed to play this"***

More than a month after Israel launched a murderous onslaught on the Gaza Strip, with over 2,000 casualties, there's still no clarity about when 'Operation Protective Edge' might end. Israel has destroyed 10,000 homes, turned a quarter of Gaza's population into refugees, and repeatedly targeted civilian installations – in flagrant violation of international law.

The present crisis was triggered by the June 12 kidnapping and murder of three Israeli students from a West Bank settler community. When their bodies were found, a group of Israeli Jews abducted a 16-year-old Palestinian outside East Jerusalem and burned him alive. Israel blamed Hamas for the murders without a shred of evidence, and launched its biggest anti-Hamas campaign since the Second Intifada (2000-2005).

By coincidence, the kidnapping happened 10 days after a new government was formed in Gaza following a 'reconciliation' agreement between Hamas, which had won the 2006 election in Gaza, and the heavily compromised Al-Fatah. Although the agreement overwhelmingly favoured Fatah, Israel strongly opposed it because it united the Palestinians and detracted from Israel's goal of isolating and disarming Hamas.

Fatah shamefully collaborated with Israel's crackdown on Hamas, with 550 arrests and six killings. Anti-Fatah protests erupted throughout the West Bank. In solidarity, non-Hamas militants in Gaza attacked Israel with primitive rockets. Hamas backed these attacks and itself resumed firing rockets – for the first time after the November 2012 ceasefire.

Then came the third onslaught in five years by the world's fourth largest military power against one of its most impoverished territories, with 1.8 million people. Israel targeted Al Raffah hospital, Gaza's only rehabilitation clinic, which housed 17 paralysed patients, almost all comatose.

Israel shelled a girls' school designated by the UN as a shelter for 3,300 Palestinians, killing 16, and wounding hundreds. The UN had given Israel the school's coordinates 17 times. The UN official-in-charge stated: "Children killed in their sleep; this is an affront to all of us, a source of universal shame. Today, the world stands disgraced."

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Legal experts have debunked Israel's 'self-defence' argument, including John Dugard, former UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories: "Given the fact that Gaza is an occupied territory... Israel's present assault is simply a way of enforcing the continuation of the occupation... the response of the Palestinian militants should be seen as the response of an occupied people that wishes to resist the occupation," which is permissible in law.

But so vitiated is the dominant public opinion in Israel, which claims it wants 'peace', that over 85 percent of Jewish Israelis oppose a ceasefire. Direct calls to genocide now come not from fringe

elements, but from the highest levels.

Take Ayelet Shaked, an MP from a Far-Right party that's part of Prime Minister Netanyahu's coalition, who recently posted a Facebook entry calling for killing all Palestinians: "The entire Palestinian people is the enemy...In wars, the enemy is usually an entire people, including its elderly and its women, its cities and its villages, its property and its infrastructure".

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Meanwhile, coddled by the US, whose West Asia-North Africa policy has been captured by America's powerful Zionist lobby, Israel shows no intention of ending the occupation. By torpedoing a two-state solution, Israel risks creating more discontent and perpetuating the cycle of violence, aggravating its own citizens' insecurity. It may win the battle, but lose the larger war.

Unless there's a concerted international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, similar to the Anti-Apartheid Movement of the 1970s, which raises the political and economic cost of the occupation, it won't end.

India can play a vital role in a BDS campaign, as well as through creative diplomacy which mounts pressure on Israel and the US. But it has failed to play this - despite paying lip-service to Palestinian nationhood. Successive Indian governments have made their Israel policy a hostage to arms deals with Tel Aviv, now India's second biggest weapons supplier.

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Going by the Modi government's sorry conduct on the Gaza issue – on which it stalled a debate, and adopted an ambivalent position equating Israel's aggression with “violence by non-state actors”, before voting for a wishy-washy UN Human Rights Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire – this will be an uphill task. But that's no reason to give up!

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