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Palestine solidarity

Gazafying Dissent

- IV Online magazine - 2014 - IV475 - August 2014 -

Publication date: Sunday 3 August 2014

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Israel does not want you to talk about the children it kills in Gaza. And neither does your government.

Western politicians and media have a long history of ignoring the horrific conditions under which Palestinians live under Israeli Occupation while paying universal homage to Israel as the “only democracy in the Middle East.”

This mythology has now exploded. As Paul Mason has pointed out, since Israel began its July 8th attack on Gaza, there has been a “massive change in the balance of power between social media and the old hierarchical media channels we used to rely on to understand wars.”

For the first time, the world has access to real-time images, voices and narratives of the people of Gaza themselves. Deepa Kumar correctly surmised that this has led to a “crumbling” of Israel’s propaganda war, and even Israel stalwarts like the New York Times have been forced to report the catastrophic effects on Palestinians produced by Israel’s massacre.

Even on the military front, questions are being asked about the assumed invincibility of Israel’s might. Hamas has proven again that it is not a pushover and is prepared to withstand Israel’s far advanced weaponry and manpower.

Thus, despite the killing and destruction Israel has inflicted in Gaza, the Israeli state is not emerging as the victorious “white knight” of democracy whose image for many was once invincible.

The question arises, then: what is a state to do in the face of a widening gap between its previous status as an icon of “democratic exceptionalism”, and its new role as global bully? What, in short, to do when facing a real crisis of “legitimation”?

Fortunately, Israel has friends in high places.

As the death toll rises in Gaza, and anger mounts around the world, Israel and its allies have adopted a new tactic.

They have largely abandoned attempts to recover Israel’s democratic legitimacy. They have resorted instead to the outright criminalization of all dissent. And even to kill for it.

“In the West Bank, Israel shot dead more than ten protesters against the massacre in neighboring Gaza. At a July 12 anti-war rally in Israel, police stood by as fascist thugs attacked non-violent protesters. Palestinian Member of the Israeli Knesset, Haneen Zoabi, pictured above, has been banned from all parliamentary activity, except for voting, for six months. Netanyahu has called for all pro-Palestine protests to be banned across Europe.

“France has criminalized pro-Palestinian protests. 1,500 French riot police were deployed against a pro-Palestine protest in Paris on July 26th.

“In Calcutta, India, Special Branch forces (India’s equivalent of the FBI) demanded the cell phone number of Kunal Chattopadhyay, a professor, at a public meeting in support of BDS. In New Delhi, pro-Palestine protestors at the

Israeli Embassy were viciously attacked by local police.

“In London, Ontario, Canada, protesters wanting to talk to the Tory MP Susan Truppe, were removed by police.

“In Manchester, England, a pro-Palestine protester was hurled to the ground by metropolitan police during an apparent arrest.

– In Los Angeles, prominent Palestinian journalist, activist and the founding editor of Electronic Intifada, Ali Abunimah, was brutally assaulted by the LAPD for filming a pro-Israeli protest.

“In New York, long-time Israel critic Norman Finkelstein was arrested for peaceful disobedience by NYPD, perpetrators of the notorious Stop and Frisk racial profiling program and spying programs against Muslims.

“In Chicago, the authors were part of a protest during which Chicago police put snipers on rooftops. Kirsten, a member of Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace, was injured by police at an action on July 17th. She told us she “was not participating in... civil disobedience” but was “live-tweeting and photographing the arrest of my partner, when an officer pushed me from the curb, causing me to roll and badly injure my ankle.”

Also in Chicago, pro-Palestinian activists Rima Kapitan and Faten Dabis were at a counter-protest at the Israeli Consulate in Chicago on July 22nd. Here is Ms. Dabis’s account of the incident:

During the protest, we crossed the street and distributed fliers against the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip....while we were across the street, I participated in a chant with the counter-protesters. Upon hearing me, Sergeant Shoshi (badge #1460), admonished me loudly, telling me to go across the street. In response, Ms. Kapitan asked him what I was doing wrong. He said I was chanting, and she replied that I was...exercising my First Amendment right. Sergeant Shoshi then grabbed Ms. Kapitan’s arm, leading her to the side of the building, telling her that she could be fined for distributing fliers illegally.

“In Indianapolis, Sireen Zayed, a Palestinian student, was denied entry and escorted out of the Jewish Community Center by security when she peacefully tried to enter to hear a presentation by the Israeli Midwest Ambassador. JCC representatives said Zayed was on “private property” and security forces told her “your kind is not wanted here.”

“The International Cricket Council has banned Moeen Ali, the English cricketer, from wearing his “Free Gaza” wrist band during the test match with India;

It is clear that Israel, and the governments that back it, have a two-pronged strategy:

(a) In Palestine, Palestinians have to abandon all attempts at self-defense and accept gratefully the murderous occupation of their land and the illegal siege of Gaza. This is Israel’s idea of “truce”.

(b) For the rest of us, we have to lay down our placards, silence our voices and close our eyes as Israel kills children in their sleep. If not, elected democratic governments are prepared to send in the police to attack us or silence us.

Even if we leave aside Israel, which has never been a democratic society for anyone of non-Jewish descent, why has the butchering of democratic expression in other parts of the world become so commonplace?

Because Israel's crisis of legitimacy is not a crisis for Israel alone, but for the entire edifice of Empire, whose architects live in places like Washington, London and Paris.

There is much at stake for our world leaders if the global protests for Palestine continue to grow. What if they spark a third Intifada in Palestine? What if they spark a new Arab Spring "after all, if you start to withstand truncheons for opposing Benjamin Netanyahu, why not Abdel el-Sisi or Bashar al-Assad? What if the cry of "Free Free Palestine" is echoed in New Delhi as "Free Free Kashmir"? or the voices demanding to pull down the Apartheid Wall in Palestine are joined by the voices wanting to pull down the border fence between US and Mexico? What if gaining confidence by the protests against Boeing and Caterpillar's role in funding Israel, workers at these companies start demanding their rightful wages and pension?

Palestine today lies at the heart of humanity's universal sense of justice. This is why leaders across the world want to stamp out all talk of Palestine.

And this is precisely why we cannot put down our Free Palestine placards. Instead, we should start taking them everywhere "in to our communities, workplaces and schools.

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July 31, 2014