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Israel / Palestine

The massacre in Gaza - Hamas has emerged victorious, but at what cost!

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As this article is being written [August 2014], the truce and the talks for a cease-fire have broken down, as a result, once again, of a deliberate Israeli provocation (the attempted assassination of the military commander Mohammed Deif, which failed but caused the deaths of several civilians, including his wife and young daughter). It is however likely that when the article is published, an agreement will have been signed: in fact, everyone is interested in ending this round, but not before having fired the last salvo with the sole purpose of proclaiming, "We won!" On this question - who won? - I will return later on in my analysis.

A semantic remark: the media and international public opinion talk about the "Gaza war". This definition is part of the gigantic propaganda machine set up by Israel and taken over by the so-called international community and a large part of the means of mass communication. How can we talk about a war when one side is the fourth largest military power in the world, and the other a population that has been enclosed for seven years in a total blockade, and which to defend itself possesses only homemade rockets whose human and material damage is negligible?

Massacre in Gaza

If we take the last two months, if we count the number of dead (which is very unpleasant to do and to say, but which still needs to be calculated): on one side three Israeli civilians, on the other 1,800 Palestinian civilians. This is not a war, but a massacre: to bomb, from the air and with land and naval artillery, 1.8 million people packed into an area no bigger than a medium-sized French town, is necessarily to target the civilian population, an act of mass terrorism.

The means used by the Israeli state are totally disproportionate to any military objective. But what is really the purpose?

Initially, Israel accused, without any proof, Hamas of having ordered the kidnapping and murder of three young settlers in the West Bank; Hamas not only denied it, but the logic of the agreement on the Palestinian government of national unity that it had just signed was in contradiction with such an action. But if it wasn't you it was your brother...

When we say Hamas, we are saying Gaza, where Hamas is in power. For Israel, Gaza = Hamas = terrorism, so what if more than a million and a half human beings live there. For most Israelis, Gaza is not a territory or a people, but a bomb of mass destruction which must be defused at any cost. Moreover, in common parlance in Israel, when people want to say "go to the Devil" they have said for a long time now, "go to Gaza."

The settlers killed were quickly forgotten, and the discourse turned (again) to the rockets being fired at the Jewish localities which surround Gaza. These rockets have been drizzling down for years without causing any real damage ... and without disturbing the tranquility of the people in the rest of Israel who do not feel in least affected by what is called the "periphery", the equivalent of the poor suburbs in France.

And then with the ground offensive, they found the offensive tunnels (not to be confused with the tunnels through which passed the products that were necessary for the survival of the inhabitants of Gaza, until the coup d'état by the Egyptian army, allied with Israel, which immediately destroyed the tunnels). We knew that there were tunnels, but the surprise of the Israelis was quite real when they saw the size of the tunnels and the technological means that they implied. Another failure of the "best intelligence services in the world", which have never failed to be surprised, from

the Palestinian-Lebanese resistance to the invasion of 1982 to the ability of Hezbollah to resist in 2006, via the Intifada (1987-1990). You wonder what use their huge budgets are...

In fact, the ineffectiveness of the intelligence does not come from a lack of training or technology, but from political reasons: colonial arrogance prevents them from understanding, and even from seeing, the colonized. Just as the Israelis were surprised in 1982, discovering that there were tall buildings and beautiful cars in Beirut (sic), they cannot imagine that Gazans can build ingenious tunnels under their slums.

So now it was the war of the tunnels. But why flatten entire neighborhoods of Gaza and cause nearly two thousand victims among the civilian population? What is Israel looking for?

Objective Mahmud Abbas

Paradoxical as it may seem, it is not Gaza and Hamas that are being targeted, but the public enemy number one of Hamas - the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmud Abbas.

Indeed, no one wants a peace agreement with Israel more than Mahmud Abbas, at the cost of compromises which for many Palestinians already amount to surrender. The Palestinian president is supported by the "international community", which has entitled him "essential partner for peace" in Palestine/Israel. Peace, even a peace on the cheap, supposes a halt to colonization and withdrawal from (most of) the West Bank.

This is in contradiction with the strategic objective of the various governments that have been in power in Tel Aviv, at least since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, that is to say the pursuit of the colonization - and the de facto annexation - of the West Bank. It is a long-term strategy, planned and implemented systematically by Yigal Allon and Ariel Sharon from the early 1970s onwards.

For the Israeli government, a Palestinian government that is open to compromise is a threat, and an international community - that is to say, above all the United States - that has decided to make things move, is a disaster. The second part of this equation is not on the agenda, as demonstrated by the humiliating failure of the Kerry mission a few months ago.

The formation of a government of Palestinian national unity reflected a broad popular aspiration. In Israel, it was seen as a godsend: "You see", people cried in Tel Aviv, "Abbas and Mashal [the political leader of Hamas] are like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, they are all terrorists, more or less openly, not partners to make peace with. Move along, there is nothing more to see." However, Hamas had, in this agreement, made serious political compromises, agreeing to let Abu Mazen [Abbas] continue his second-rate negotiations with Israel.

The problem for Netanyahu is that the government of national unity has secured the support of the international community, including from the Obama administration, of which Netanyahu does not hide his dislike... a dislike that is, moreover, shared at the White House, without however the strategic structural link that unites the two countries being put into question. It is here that we understand the aggression against Gaza and its primary motivation: neither rockets nor tunnels - it is a question of breaking Abbas and the threat of negotiations.

The attack on Gaza and its failure

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It ought to have been an easy operation: more than 60,000 reservists were mobilized, along with powerful artillery, hundreds of tanks and especially air power. The initial objective was not clear. Stop the rocket fire? Bring down the Hamas government? The Israeli cabinet could not agree. What is certain is that initially there was no question of a ground operation.

After several weeks of unprecedented bombing and massive destruction, the army was forced to take stock: it was a failure because Hamas continue firing its rockets and was managing to reach Greater Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and even the suburbs of Haifa, in the North.

In Tel Aviv, it was then decided to enter Gaza City, which turned out to be, as might be expected, a trap: More than 50 soldiers were killed in the ground operation, and Hamas defended itself effectively, keeping most of its offensive and defensive positions. Rocket fire continued unabated.

Commissions of inquiry will certainly be set up after the cease-fire to try to explain the fiasco, especially of the intelligence services, which were completely unable to predict either the scope and sophistication of the tunnels, or especially the ability of Hamas and the population to resist.

The price paid by the population is huge, but Israel lost the war. The agreement that will sooner or later be signed will be for Hamas - and the Gazans - better than the previous situation, especially by some easing of the blockade.

To this must be added a further deterioration of Israel's image around the world, not just in the eyes of the activists and sympathizers of the Palestinian cause: even the US administration, which has, however, not skimped on the rapid strengthening of the military capacities of its strategic ally, is angry with Netanyahu's policies, which it says it has difficulty in understanding, and from the humanitarian point of view, in accepting without reacting. Fortunately for Netanyahu, there are still Hollande and Valls...

Negotiations have begun under the auspices of Egypt, which is far from being an "honest broker", a neutral mediator. They have been suspended by Israel, but it is obvious that they will soon be taken up again and will establish a status quo that will last as long as it lasts: which is entirely, or almost entirely, dependent on the will of the Israeli leadership to exact a revenge that it hopes will be more successful.

United Front in Israel

As we wrote at the beginning of this article, Gaza scares the Israelis and all justifications, even the most senseless, for attacking its people are accepted. The rare voices of commentators who try to inject a bit of reality into their analyses are drowned out by the consensual choir. This is what explains the absence of mass opposition to the aggression and the massacre to which it led.

Although there were, from the first days, anti-war rallies in Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, as well as in Arab localities, they remained modest (a few hundred) and were organized by what in France is called the "far left", in other words they were marginal.

It seemed for a moment that the public was beginning to wake up: on July 26 several thousand people assembled on Kings of Israel Square - where Rabin was assassinated in 1995 - in the largest anti-war demonstration to date. But was it really a demonstration against the war? Had the majority of the protesters come to express their disgust for the massacre and their solidarity with Gaza? I do not think so: with the exception of about a thousand activists, what

motivated these citizens of Tel Aviv was Israel, and its rapid transformation into a fascist society: the petty bourgeoisie of Tel Aviv, educated and wealthy, is in the process of losing its country to a populist far-right and increasingly violent fascist groups.

It is the old Israel, and more particularly Tel Aviv, prosperous and open to the (Western) world, that the protesters came to defend, and much less the martyrs of Gaza. This Israel is melting under their eyes, which may explain the demoralized discourse of some young people, talking about leaving the country of which they can literally no longer stand the stench. All the more so as the "left intellectuals" have not been noted for their critical position, with the notable exception of Professor Zeev Sternhel and, of course, the great humanist, the *Haaretz* columnist, Gideon Levi.

In my blog I wrote recently that Gaza will rise from its ashes, but will Israel be able to rediscover a minimum of humanity? Nothing is less certain and everything seems to indicate that a new stage has been reached in the suicidal march of the State of Israel and its society.

Indispensable international solidarity

All over the world, actions protesting against the crime of Gaza and expressing solidarity with its people have been numerous and massive. To the legitimate rage there has been added a strong demand to end the impunity enjoyed by the Jewish state.

The French government has, one more time since the victory of François Hollande, distinguished itself by its wretched behaviour against these protests, which are not only legitimate but natural, by twice prohibiting demonstrations in Paris. Fortunately, the French people has more moral and political feeling than those whom it elected, and was able to challenge these iniquitous bans. Valls and company then pulled out the weapon of last resort, by equating support for the Palestinian victims with anti-Semitism. This sordid manipulation has become threadbare, but it continues to impress the most moderate people, especially in the media. This identification with Israel on the part of the Socialist government (but not all its parliamentarians) and the policy of double standards can only play into the hands of anti-Semites and their stupid discourse about the "Jewish lobby pulling the strings"; it can also contribute to excessive reactions in the solidarity movement, especially among the less politicized protesters, who are sometimes blinded by their rage.

The thousands of deaths in Gaza, this huge massacre of innocent civilians, have marked people's spirits, deeply and no doubt lastingly. What is needed now is to capitalize on this outrage by building an ongoing movement at the national and international level, a movement that is not only based on natural indignation, but can arm itself with a long-term strategy against the Israeli colonial state and its policies.

This is where the BDS (Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions) campaign takes on its full importance: Israel must be outlawed in the public space, rejected by the international community, and as long as this is not the case, put in the dock by civil societies and institutions, movements, political parties, trade unions and even businesses. It can be done, it is being done, and there is no doubt that the Gaza massacre will significantly contribute to the strengthening of this global movement.

As part of the BDS campaign, it is urgent to demand that governments and international bodies indict those Israeli political and military leaders who are responsible for Gaza, before local and international courts: there is no statute of limitation for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Together we must shout out loud and clear: No impunity for the killers of Gaza!