

## **The latest brutal Israeli attack on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, May 2021: What needs to be known, remembered, and acted upon.**

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I was on the phone yesterday with Dr. Khamis Essi, our colleague and friend, a doctor living in Gaza City. I call him, just like other friends and colleagues once in a while to check on him and his family, given the brutal and terrible situation in the Gaza Strip. We exchange the latest information about the unfolding events there as well as here on the West Bank and East Jerusalem where new protests, demonstrations, and confrontations with the Israeli army and illegal settlers on Palestinian land are taking place. We talk about the injuries, disabilities and death – we discuss the fate of the Sheikh Jarrah families and their impending eviction and the unspeakable attack on worshippers at the al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem during the holy month of Ramadan just a few days ago.

But, first some news from Dr. Essi: He told me about how he experienced the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip. Nights are ferocious with the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip. Khamis and everyone else in Gaza have not been able to sleep. Khamis has been also tending to the injured among his close and extended family and friends. Because he lives in a relatively more secure area, Khamis and his family have been hosting around 50 people in his apartment. Just imagine!

Four nights ago, the situation became especially dangerous for him, his family and his friends. With bombing happening nearby, feelings that the building was shaking (as in a San Francisco earthquake which my family has experienced several times), and glass shattering all around, he was forced to move his loved ones down to the second floor in order to keep them safe hoping that they could sleep a little in the havoc that was unfolding around them.

But, no one slept. Not this night, not other nights. The bombing was so heavy that his daughter and a guest passed out. Dr Essi did what he does best – providing first aid all the while feeling terrified as the bombing continued relentlessly into the morning.

He told me that what they are experiencing is real horror. As I listened to him, I thought that, other than the horror of death, injury, disability, there is the psychological horror of planes pounding the Gaza Strip with their light, sound and shaking. Of course, this affects all, but especially children. I know what this means for children given our experience with our then 10-year-old child, and the children of relatives and friends during the second Palestinian Uprising (*Intifada* in Arabic) of 2000-2004, which is still imprinted on their consciousness.

Given all what is happening, I find it disturbing that many among the Western and even Arab media outlets as well as many Western governments, still focus on the symptoms of the current events without addressing the root cause of this problem.

And astonishingly, the world seems to be more disturbed by Israel's bombing and destruction of the Associated Press office building in Gaza City than the bombing and destruction of homes of Gazans, with entire families killed as multistory buildings where families live are flattened, and where civilians are fleeing their homes but with nowhere to go, with some taking shelter in un-prepared UNRWA schools.

The western media also keeps omitting important background information, and even uses particular words to obfuscate reality, let alone the historic roots of the Palestine Question. For example we read that: ' 23 dead in Gaza, 8 Israelis killed by Hamas rockets'!!

More, the Western media provides information so that the reader believes that Palestinians and Israelis are equal when Israel is the occupier and colonizers and Palestinians are the occupied and colonized and controlled by an Israeli Apartheid regime.

And this cover-up continues, although some media outlets are beginning to be more vocal about apartheid Israel, and also Israel's colonial project, including one amazing New York Time Opinion article which was recently published explaining that Palestinian refugees deserve to return home. This would have been unheard-of previously. Perhaps this is one of the ripple effects of the new Black Lives Matter movement in the US, which is awakening the world to injustices and structural and systemic discrimination and subjugation of not only Blacks in the US, but others elsewhere, including Palestinians.

Speaking truth to power, here is a summary which can help understand what is happening today:

### **Historic roots**

1. In general, many Western governments and media outlets seem to continue to present the recent events in Palestinian East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip by examining the symptoms, not the root cause of the problem. The root lies in 1948 - the establishment of Israel, the dismemberment of Palestinian society, and the forced displacement which turned two thirds of the Palestinian population into refugees with no right to return to their homeland. This is the *Nakba* as it is called in Arabic, meaning catastrophe, which happened 73 years ago and continues to this day.
2. Although I understand that this is part of the colonial mentality, I still find it astonishing that the British offered the land of Palestine to Jews from Europe suffering the horrors of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Palestinians had nothing to do with this appalling and tragic phase in history. The colonizers' slogan 'A land without people for a people without land' to justify the resettlement of Jews from Europe and the expulsion of Palestinians from their land is simply a lie. I and many other Palestinians have family trees and other documents demonstrating that we have lived in Palestine for centuries. My family tree goes back to 1636, showing that we have been here in Palestine for quite a while.

3. Looking back, I also find it amazing that the United Nations, shortly after its foundation, decided to partition Palestine. It partitioned a land just like that - a land that it did not own in order to give over half of it to what is now called Israel. This led to the dismemberment of the Palestinian society, with dispossession and dispersion of two thirds of Palestinians who became refugees in neighboring countries, in the West Bank, in the Gaza Strip and all over the world. This is the root of the problem which is often denied or covered up and sidelined.
4. This was then compounded when the West Bank, including Palestinian East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, fell under Israeli military rule and colonization as a result of the 1967 Arab Israeli War 54 years ago, called the *Naksa* in Arabic (set back).
5. On the West Bank, this colonization meant and continues to mean illegal land grab, Israeli army and illegal settler political violence, fragmentation of land, enclavization, and control of the economy, control of people's movements as well as the movements of goods. It means control of land, water, air, with Israeli checkpoint all over, and the prohibition of societal development. It means the building of Israeli settlements on West Bank land, which is illegal according to the Geneva conventions.
6. The Oslo accords of 1993 further cemented control of Israel on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It led to 60% of West Bank land being completely controlled by Israel, leaving some 18% under the Palestinian Authority's control, and the rest with joint Palestinian Authority and Israeli jurisdiction.
7. In the Gaza Strip a gradual and increasingly choking siege took place since the 1990s. The situation intensified by 2006 as a result of the democratic election of Hamas – it was then that the West and Israel refused to acknowledge this democratically elected government and forced a split between Fateh on the West Bank and Hamas in the Strip. Their intervention led to the separation of the two pieces of land and their people as we know it today.
8. Over the years, Israel worked to Judaize Palestinian East Jerusalem. Their methods includes systematic annexation, land grab, and forced evictions of Palestinian families. Their policies leave the Palestinian population as residents without political or other rights.
9. We are now facing the impending annexation of the Jordan Valley, around 30% of West Bank land and the Palestinian breadbasket, and ongoing attacks by the Israeli army and settlers on Palestinians at various times, wanting the land without its people. Indeed, Palestinians are a people in danger.

### **Immediate causes of the current attacks by Israel**

It is against this backdrop that the most recent events leading to the Israeli army's war on the Gaza Strip and the attacks on protestors in East Jerusalem and various parts of the West Bank , and now among Palestinian Israeli citizens, need to be understood. Here is an overview of what happened:

1. Events began with the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Palestinian East Jerusalem where Palestinians were already struggling for years against their eviction from their homes, to

be taken by Israeli Jewish settlers. While this is illegal according to the Geneva Convention, it forms an important part of the Israeli government's policy of Judaizing Jerusalem. Protests during the past month over the eviction of Palestinians from their homes led to Israeli police violence against unarmed Palestinian civilians.



2. Protests spread not only in East Jerusalem, but also in West Bank cities and town, and also among Palestinian Israeli citizens inside Israel.
3. At the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Israel blocked Palestinian gatherings around East Jerusalem's Old City and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Palestinian worshippers protested and demanded that Israel remove this policy from the al-Aqsa mosque, one of the three holiest sites of Islam where masses of Palestinians pray during Ramadan.
4. Instead of ending the blockade, Israeli forces raided the al-Aqsa mosque on May 10th while people were praying. Hundreds of Palestinians were injured by rubber bullets and tear gas, some lost their eyes, and more than 50 were taken to hospitals for treatment.





### Effects on Palestinians

A new generation of young Palestinians in East Jerusalem emerged. They are so courageous, exhibiting spectacular understanding and attitudes. Look at some of them smiling as they got arrested because they were protesting, even as they were being kicked, dragged etc. A real act of resistance with a 'strong national backbone,' as they uphold their dignity and freedom - vital aspects of their consciousness.



photo: Ameer Abed Rabbo



The Israeli brutality in East Jerusalem infuriated Hamas which has already been captive to the choking siege with very difficult overall conditions and dilapidated systems, including an about to collapse health system.



And so, in response to this brutality, Hamas began to fire, in the main, home- made rockets into Israel on May 10th.

Israel, which has one of the strongest militaries in the world, responded with impunity and excessive use of force, with some 150 fighter jets striking the Gaza Strip, also with helicopters, supposedly directed at military targets and Hamas leaders.

In fact, precision strikes against military targets are impossible to achieve in the Gaza Strip – a stretch of land which is considered the most densely populated on earth. Such strikes inevitably lead to the deaths of civilians who are merely seen as collateral damage.

The death toll is rising every day. At least 212 Gaza Strip Palestinians have been killed by Israeli bombings and shelling, and among them at least 61 children and 36 women and about 4000 injured as of the early morning May 18, 2021. In the meantime 10 Israelis were killed by Hamas rockets, among them 2 children and an Israeli soldier. This carnage continues up till the time of writing this, May 18, 3 am.

With the May 2021 Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, death and destruction ensued.



Civilians are fleeing homes as they have been only recently warned to evacuate, and not at the beginning of the carnage. Yet, there is no safe place to go and no chance of not getting hit in the densely populated Gaza Strip.



With nowhere to go, some are finding shelter in United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) schools, which are not prepared to host civilians. Yet, UN flagged schools have in the past been hit by Israeli gunfire, so not safe either. As of May 15, 2021, over 22,000 Gaza civilians sought shelter in UNRWA schools.





The horror of bombardments from the air, sea and land affects all people in the Gaza Strip. Take the Hattab family living in al-Shati' refugee camp: 10 of their members, 8 children and two women, were killed in the recent airstrikes.



Children are not spared but get injured daily.



Children also get killed. Below you can see the only survivor of the Israeli air strike which struck the Hattab family. Mind you, many Gazans volunteer to raise the tiny boy and to take care of him as their own!!





The loss of loved ones defeats words.



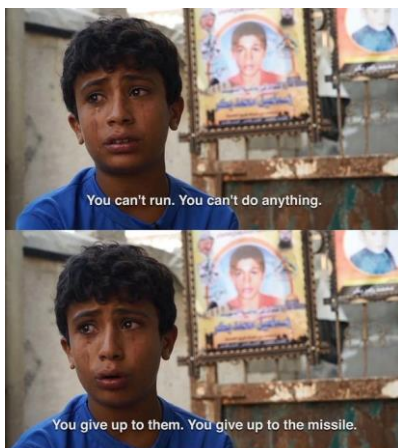
To top it, there is this psychological horror unfolding in the midst of destruction, death, and loss of loved ones. The sounds of bombing, the earth and buildings shaking then falling down and glass shattering make it all completely unbearable.



Children are terrified.



They can't run, they can't do anything.



And, this is how children try to sleep with the psychological horror imprinted on their consciousness. They will not forget.



This picture below makes you... I do not know, cry or smile, or both. These children look so happy because they saved their fish from the bombing!!!





And this is how children celebrated Eid al-Fitr on Thursday May 13. This particular picture is heart wrenching. The girl is dressed in new clothes as is the tradition on the day of the Eid (the end of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr), and is clutching her new doll. This is a powerful testament to Gazans' determination to live, no matter what.



This onslaught on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip of course instigated more protests in East Jerusalem, and West Bank cities and towns. The Israeli army and settlers are responding violently and exposing Palestinians to tear gas and wounding them with live and rubber bullets. Many get wounded and have to be hospitalized.

Please know: rubber bullets contain metal and have the capacity to blind people, cause concussions and other devastating injuries, and can kill. Several Palestinian have been blinded this way so far, many got injured, and also killed.

To date, 25 West Bankers have been killed by the Israeli army, 2800 injured, and of those injured 188 were injured with live ammunition as they protested the attacks on the Gaza Strip, the al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Israeli colonial pursuit of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.



Protests near Nablus at the Huwara checkpoint, West Bank.



East Jerusalem, West Bank.



Bethlehem, West Bank.



| Inside Israel among Palestinians with Israeli citizenship.



And protests all over the world among people who know the truth. This solidarity is heartwarming, and helps us endure and resist (my alternative to resilience, which means going back to where we were. Instead, we Palestinians do not go back to where we were, but resist and respond to injustice and subjugation instead)

In Jordan:



Lebanon:



Iraq:



Turkey:





Pakistan:



Morocco:



Sudan:





The UK:



France:



Spain:



New York:



San Francisco:



South Africa:



Such solidarity gives us hope. It is a real change from previous years, as more and more people around the world are beginning to realize what is really happening in Palestine, thanks to social media, some of the official media, and various types of initiatives from international solidarity groups, human rights groups, and other persons, locally, regionally and internationally.

Yet, all this has instigated tensions among Palestinian Israeli citizens in different locales, with demonstrations by Palestinian Israeli citizens calling for stopping the attack, but also protesting their own subjugation as Palestinian Arabs who are second class citizens in the Jewish state.

In Ramleh:



Affouleh:





In this process, civil unrest inside Israel ensued. Israeli Jews are seen lynching Palestinian Arabs with Israeli citizenships, and with Jewish lynch mobs going about their way with Israeli police protection. Israeli Jews are heard chanting 'death to Arabs'. These events led the Israeli government to send reinforcements to control the political violence which is apparently happening this strongly for the first time since many years.

Lid:



### The future?

So now Israel has to contend with its communal violence, instigated by Sheikh Jarrah, al-Aqsa and the Gaza attacks, but with a background of serious systematic and systemic discrimination against Palestinian citizen of Israel, second class citizens because they are not Jewish, yet Israel declares itself to be a Jewish state. That is, Israel is not for all its citizens.

While all tragic, it does seem that these events have united all Palestinians, in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, inside Israel, and abroad.

We will see how things will unfold. It will likely quiet down, as has been the case during the past few years. Some call this a third *Intifada*, albeit with different characteristics from the previous Uprisings, without sustained protests, but with spurts arising and declining whenever the Israeli onslaught escalates.

And the questions are:

What was the ultimate instigator of the latest brutal onslaught?

Why is the world not acknowledging the root cause of the problem: The creation of the State of Israel at the expense of Palestinians who had nothing to do with European anti-Semitism; with millions of Palestinian refugees waiting for their right to return home; with Israeli military occupation and colonization of the West Bank and Gaza Strip including East Jerusalem, wanting the land without its people; with life under an apartheid regime and a choking siege on the Gaza Strip?

What kind of power relations, interests, and balances are underlying many Western leaders and media discourses on Palestine?



And what is it that needs to be changed so that such brutal political violence, death, injury, disability and exposure to psychological terror can end.

And the answers are clear:

Ultimately, the injustice which befell Palestinians needs to be acknowledged and addressed; Justice, freedom, sovereignty and self-determination will have to be ensured; Israeli occupation and colonization of the West Bank, including Palestinian East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, must end; And Palestinian refugees must return home.

In the meanwhile, as so many have reiterated: We are here, and we are not going away.

In the words of the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish:<sup>1</sup>

I am from there and I have memories. Like any other Man I was born. I have a mother  
A house with several windows, friends and brothers  
I have a prison cell's cold window  
A wave snatched by seagulls, my own view, an extra blade of grass  
A moon at word's end, a life-supply of birds, and an olive tree that cannot die  
I walked and crossed the land before the crossing of swords made a banquet-table of a body  
I come from there, and I return the sky to its mother when it cries for her  
And cry for a cloud on its return to recognize me  
I have learned all words befitting of blood's court to break the rule  
I have learned all the words to take the lexicon apart for one noun's sake  
The compound I must make:  
Homeland.

Mahmoud Darwish

أَنَا مِنْ هُنَاكَ. وَلِي ذِكْرِيَات. وَلِدْتُ كَمَا تُولَدُ النَّاسُ. لِي وَالِدَاهَا  
وَبَيْتٌ كَثِيرُ النَّوَافِذِ. لِي إِخْوَةٌ. أَصْدِقَاءُ. وَسِجْنٌ بِنَافِذَةٍ بَارِدَةٍ.  
وَلِي مَوْجَةٌ خَطَفَتْهَا النَّوَارِسُ. لِي مَشْهَدِي الْخَاصُّ. لِي عُشْبَةٌ زَائِدَةٌ  
وَلِي قَمَرٌ فِي أَقْصَايِ الْكَلَامِ، وَرِزْقُ الطُّيُورِ، وَزَيْنُونَةٌ خَالِدَةٌ  
مَرَرْتُ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ قَبْلَ مُرُورِ السُّيُوفِ عَلَى جَسَدٍ حَوَّلُوهُ إِلَى مَائِدَةٍ.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Arabic by A.Z. Foreman. Published in A Map of Absence: An Anthology of Palestinian Writing on the Nakba by Atef Alshaer, 15 May 2019,

،أَنَا مِنْ هُنَاكَ. أُعِيدُ السَّمَاءَ إِلَى أُمِّهَا حِينَ تَبْكِي السَّمَاءَ عَلَى أُمِّهَا  
وَأَبْكِي لِتَعْرِفَنِي غَيْمَةً عَائِدَةً.

تَعَلَّمْتُ كُلَّ كَلَامٍ يَلِيقُ بِمَحْكَمَةِ الدِّمِ كَيْ أُكْسِرَ الْقَاعِدَةَ.

تَعَلَّمْتُ كُلَّ الْكَلَامِ ، وَفَكَكْتُهُ كَيْ أُرَكِّبَ مُفْرَدَةً وَاحِدَةً

هِيَ: الْوَطَنُ....

محمود درويش