

Socialist Resistance

The Middle East In Flames



A collection of articles on
Palestine, Israel & the Middle-East

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How should we view the conflict in Palestine?

Roland Rance address to LRC seminar Palestine: Future Peace, March 2009

The great Jewish teacher Hillel the Elder, a contemporary of Jesus, was once asked to sum up the whole of Jewish law while standing on one foot. He is said to have replied "That which is hateful to you, do not unto another: This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary". If I were to be challenged similarly to sum up the conflict in Palestine in one sentence, I would reply that it is the liberation struggle of an oppressed people against a colonial settler society which has displaced and subjugated it; the rest is commentary.

Despite countless media and propaganda simplifications, this is not a simple border dispute between two independent states. Nor is it an expression of an ever-lasting religious conflict between Judaism and Islam. In the development of this conflict, European states, including Britain, have played a central and deleterious role.

It was European states who divided the Arab world into separate states, and colonised and subjugated them; and it was European states that, through their murderous racism towards the Jews, created the conditions in which the Zionist movement grew. Britain bears a special responsibility, because of its direct rule in Palestine, its duplicity towards both Arab nationalists and Zionists, and its introduction of the repressive laws still used by Israel towards its Palestinian subjects.

The area now known as Palestine was, like all of the states in the Arab world, the product of imperialist manipulations. At the beginning of the twentieth century, an Arab nationalist movement was emerging to challenge the rule of the declining Ottoman empire. Largely secular and westernising, this movement originally sought greater autonomy and use of Arabic within the empire, rather than independent states.

During the First World War Britain, France and Tsarist Russia drew up a secret agreement to partition the Middle East into spheres of influence and direct colonies. At the same time, Britain was openly encouraging an Arab nationalist uprising against Turkey, and promising support for the establishment of a united Arab kingdom; while it was also promising the Zionist movement its support for the establishment of a "Jewish national home" in Palestine.

Zionism had arisen as a response of a minority of European Jews to the wave of antisemitic pogroms that swept across Russia following the assassination of the Tsar in 1881. In contrast to the masses of Jews who responded by joining the revolutionary movement, or seeking refuge elsewhere, the Zionists argued that antisemitism was a rational and reasonable response to what they saw as the anomalous existence of Jews in Europe. There was therefore no point in fighting it; and Jews would themselves carry it with them wherever they went. The only solution was to establish a Jewish state, and to this end they would make an alliance even with the worst

persecutors of the Jews. In the words of Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement, “the antisemites will become our most dependable friends”.

This was very much a minority response: of the 2 million Jews who fled the pogroms between 1881 and 1914, only some 50,000 went to Palestine, and half of these left within five years. Nevertheless, the British government sought to make common cause with them. This, though, did not result from any concern for Jews. Indeed, the very same Balfour who gave his name to the notorious 1917 declaration of British support for Zionist aims had in 1905 introduced in Parliament the first Aliens Act, designed to limit immigration of Jewish refugees. According to Balfour, “a state of things could easily be imagined in which it would not be to the advantage of the civilisation of the country that there should be an immense body of persons who, however patriotic, able, and industrious, however much they threw themselves into the national life, still, by their own action, remained a people apart, and not merely held a religion differing from the vast majority of their fellow countrymen, but only inter-married among themselves”, and he warned Parliament about “the undoubted evils that had fallen upon the country from an immigration which was largely Jewish”.

The Balfour Declaration, by the way, was opposed by the only Jewish member of the British government at the time, Secretary for India Edwin Montagu, who wrote a memorandum denouncing it as “the Anti-Semitism of the Present Government”. On the other hand, it was supported by Minister of Munitions Winston Churchill, who wrote: “among the Jews ... this world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality, has been steadily growing ... Zionism offers the third sphere to the political conceptions of the Jewish race, in violent contrast to international communism”.

It was clear to both sides that the cooperation between Zionism and its imperial sponsor was based on a common interest. Herzl wrote in 1895 of forming in Palestine “a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism”, while the British Military Governor of Jerusalem Sir Ronald Storrs, noted in 1917 that the Zionists would form for England “a little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism”.

The indigenous Palestinians were of no account. This was confirmed by Balfour in a 1919 memo, in which he wrote:

“In Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country, though the American Commission has been going through the form of asking what they are. The four great powers are committed to Zionism and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in the present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.”

Under British colonial rule over Palestine, the Zionist project flourished, creating a virtual state-within-a-state. The watchwords of this project were the slogans “conquest of the land” and “conquest of labour”. The Zionists proceeded to acquire land from

absentee landlords and, ignoring all custom and precedent, to evict tenant farmers rather than tithe them. From the beginning of the 20th century, Palestinians were being removed from the lands which they and their families had farmed and lived on for centuries. At the same time, a systematic campaign of boycott and self-sufficiency enabled the Zionists, when Palestinian opposition to British colonialism and Zionist dispossession erupted in the 1936 uprising and a six-month general strike, to replace the numerically much larger Palestinian community as the dominant economic force in the country.

The rise of the Nazis in the 1930s led to another huge wave of Jewish flight from Europe. Once again, they found many doors closed; Japanese-occupied Shanghai accepted more Jewish refugees than Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and South Africa combined. The Zionist movement actually lobbied in support of this denial of refuge. They were committed to establishing a Jewish state in Palestine, and rejected the possibility of a fight against antisemitism. Nazi antisemitism and genocide acted as a further justification for the Zionist project argument. Zionist leaders Chaim Weizmann, later to become Israel's first president, described European Jews as "economic and moral dust... only a branch will survive. They had to accept it", while David Ben-Gurion, later Israel's first prime minister, stated "If I knew that it would be possible to save all the children in Germany by bringing them over to England and only half of them by transporting them to Eretz Israel, then I opt for the second alternative".

It should have been clear by this time that Zionism offered no real response to European antisemitism, and that territorial concentration in Palestine could not provide a safe haven for Jews. Had the Nazis arrived there, the fate of the Jews would have been no different than of Jews across Europe; what saved them was the allied victories at Stalingrad and El Alamein, not their own resistance

Nevertheless, the war provided the essential background for the establishment of Israel. Several factors contributed to this. There was a huge feeling of guilt and shame at the failure – even refusal – to rescue Jews from genocide. This was exploited by the Zionists, despite their dishonourable role during the holocaust. At the same time, there were tens of thousands of traumatised displaced Jews, who still found doors closed, and who were often coerced to settle in Palestine. And, unusually, there was a coincidence of interest between the United States and the Soviet Union, who collaborated to end Britain's Middle East empire; and who both hoped to assume the role of sponsor of a Jewish state in the region.

Mounting violence in Palestine, with Zionists and Palestinian nationalists waging a vicious war, and both attacking the British rulers, led to proposals for a partition of Palestine, and ultimately to the United Nations decision of 29 November 1947. Although the Jews formed only 1/3 of the population, they were allocated 55% of the land; even within the proposed Jewish state, Jews formed a minority of the population.

The Palestinians, who had consistently opposed partition and demanded independence, rejected the plan. The Zionists publicly affirmed their acceptance, while in effect planning the further expansion of their state. Following the 1947-8 war, the state of Israel was established on 78% of the land of Palestine. 800,000 Palestinians were removed from their homes and land; they and their descendants are still living in the wretched refugee camps of Gaza, the West Bank and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Following the war, some 500 Palestinian villages were destroyed, and their lands and remaining buildings transferred Jewish use. All over Israel, so long as you know what to look for, you can see signs of this previous ownership. Despite this, many Israelis and their supporters deny this obvious truth. In an admonition to them, and an explanation of why they must always be ready to fight Palestinians, former chief-of-staff and the Defence Minister Moshe Dayan told a meeting of university students in 1969 that:

“We came to this country, which was already populated by Arabs, and we are establishing a Jewish state. Jewish villages were built in the place of the Arab villages. You don’t even know the names of the Arab villages, because those geography books no longer exist. Not only the books do not exist, the Arab villages are not there either — there is not one place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population.”

About 150,000 Palestinians remained within the new Jewish state. Until 1966, they lived under military rule, and they are still today far from equal citizens, although they now form about 20% of the population. Some of them are actually considered refugees, since at one stage in the war they lived in areas outside Israeli control, and thus their lands were forfeited to the state. Israel has invented the term “present absentees” to describe these people, many of whom live close to their own homes, which they are forbidden to own.

They are forbidden because state land in Israel – which forms over 90% of the land area of the state – is administered on behalf of the state by bodies such as the Jewish National Fund and the Jewish Agency. These bodies, which are subsidiaries of the World Zionist Organisation, are bound by their regulations to provide services and resources for Jews only. At the same time, under a complicated network of legislation and contracts, they are responsible for land use and allocation in the state. They are not answerable to the citizens of Israel; not even to its Jewish citizens. Rather, they are answerable to the fictive entity “the Jewish people”. Thus, more than 90% of the land in Israel is legally reserved for Jews alone. The Jewish National Fund is still a registered charity in England.

In 1967, Israel further extended its borders, absorbing all of the British mandate area of Palestine as well as the Egyptian Sinai Desert (since returned) and the Syrian Golan Heights. These areas have been under direct or indirect Israeli military rule ever since. Numerous Israeli settlements have been set up; there are now about 500,000 Israelis living in more than a hundred of these illegal settlements. For more than 2/3 of its existence, Israel has maintained this military occupation.

Despite early Soviet illusions (and it should be remembered that it was Czechoslovakia which armed Israel in 1948), Israel has remained a dependable ally of the western states since its establishment. Unlike other states, as a colonial implant in the region it has no other option. To abandon its alliance with imperialism would require Israel also to abandon its Zionist underpinnings – to allow the return of Palestinian refugees, to become a state of its inhabitants, and not the state “of the Jewish people”.

This alliance is not a product of any “Jewish” or “Israel” lobby; it is a common interest between the Israeli regime and the western powers in dominating the Arab world, and maintaining control over its resources – principally of course its oil. The Israel lobby is more a product of, rather than an influence on, US foreign policy.

The Palestinian people, as well as their land, have been partitioned into communities with different, and sometimes conflicting, immediate interests, but one pre-eminent aim and need – reunification. Without enabling this, without allowing the return of the Palestinian refugees dispersed across the Middle East, without ending the increasingly brutal Israeli military rule over the areas occupied in 1967, without abolishing the discriminatory laws which privilege Jews and removing the ability of extraterritorial bodies to control significant parts of the Israeli polity, there can be no possibility of a just and lasting settlement of the Palestine conflict.

I do not see any possibility of achieving this through a continued partition of Palestine. Only in the context of a unitary Palestine, integrated in the Arab world, and with full individual and collective rights for all ethnic and religious minorities, can we hope to resolve this conflict.

The rest is commentary.

Hamas wins out over PLO corruption

Roland Rance

Socialist Outlook : SO/09 - Spring 2006

Roland Rance looks at the growth of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement and argues that their recent victory reflects the failure of secular nationalist and socialist forces in the Arab world to provide an alternative leadership and direction to the Palestinian people.

On a visit to Beirut in 1982, I asked many of the Lebanese and Palestinian activists that I met about the effect of the 1979 Iranian revolution on their struggle. The response was invariably incomprehension: ‘Iran is a long way away’, ‘They are not Arabs’, ‘What’s it to do with us?’ A quarter of a century on, when militant Islam dominates politics from Morocco to the Philippines, such a response seems incomprehensible; but it is salutary to remind ourselves that there was nothing

inevitable about the rise of Islamic politics, and that twenty years ago for most political activists the entire issue seemed irrelevant.

The growth of militant Islamic movements reflects a failure of the secular nationalist and socialist forces in the Arab world. They have also developed through a direct collaboration with external imperialist forces, which have short-sightedly viewed Islamic militants as reliable allies in resisting Arab struggles for political freedom and for social and economic justice. Some of these alliances are well-known. In Afghanistan, for example, the West supported the mujaheddin against Soviet domination. Osama bin-Laden was himself long regarded by the US as an ally. Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, which has just won the elections to the Palestine Authority, provides another example of this process.

Palestinian Liberation Organisation

In Palestine during the 1970s, the Islamic forces were insignificant, and the secular Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) – although illegal – had total political hegemony. Indeed, it was the PLO's political strength inside Palestine, rather than any alleged external military threat it posed, which had led to Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Israel had attempted to stem the rise of Palestinian nationalism by backing traditional clan and family-based networks. These so-called Village Leagues proved an ineffective alternative to the PLO, which by the late 1970s had won control of many municipal authorities and student unions, and was beginning to attract widespread international support. Despite increasing repression, including assassination attempts on leading Palestinian activists by Israeli right-wing terrorists, the appeal of the PLO's secular nationalism was growing stronger. Indeed, during the 1989 trial of Israeli activist Michel Warshawski, for, 'providing services to a banned organisation', an anonymous Israeli intelligence agent testified in court that, 'there is not one institution in the occupied territories that is not affiliated to the PLO'.

At the same time, the expulsion of the PLO leadership from Lebanon to Tunisia weakened the control of Arafat over developments inside Palestine, and contributed to the growth of a local leadership, younger, more responsive to its own public, and more aware of the realities of Israeli as well as Palestinian society. This development culminated in the first Intifada of 1987-90, which was an authentic revolutionary struggle. Israel's military adventure in Lebanon had not produced the desired results, and they desperately sought an alternative strategy.

Israel and the Muslim Brotherhood

They found this through promoting and developing members of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Egyptian-based, conservative Islamic group which had been operating within the Village Leagues in an attempt to block the advance of the PLO's secular Arab nationalism, which they identified as their primary enemy. At first, the Islamists operated as a non-political, and explicitly non-military, welfare organisation, which received indirect political and financial support from Israel. In 1978, Israeli officials encouraged the Gaza leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ahmed Yassin, to register his social welfare organisation, Mujama', as a charity.

Israel's expectation was that the provision of relief would lower tension in the occupied territories; and that it was preferable that this should come via conservative

clerics rather than the secular nationalists of the PLO. There is also evidence that Israel tacitly encouraged reactionary moves by the Muslim Brotherhood, such as the encouragement of so-called 'honour killings' to reinforce the traditional clan rivalries in the occupied territories and to strengthen the authority of the conservative clan elders over the younger radicals.

Hamas and the Intifada

All this changed, however, with the first Intifada. Yassin himself claimed that, in secret meetings with Israeli officials, he was urged to seize power in Gaza and crush the PLO. But by then the decision had already been taken to establish Hamas and to collaborate with the United National Leadership of the Intifada. Had Yassin and his allies not done so, they would have been outflanked by Islamic Jihad, which had some years earlier broken from them to establish a military organisation.

Several factors favoured the growth of Hamas. Through their welfare work over many years, they had established both a network of contacts and supporters, and a reputation for effective and non-corrupt organisation. Their control of the mosques was particularly important, since Israel was reluctant to be seen directly targeting religious buildings, and they were able to transform them into centres of resistance. Crucially, when other communications were impeded, the minarets could be used to broadcast the communiqués of the United National Leadership of the Intifada and other rallying calls. In addition, a very large proportion of the known leaders of the secular parties were killed or arrested in the early stages of the Intifada, while Hamas leaders were ignored, even tolerated. Surprisingly, Hamas remained a legal organisation until December 1989, two years into the Intifada.

In the subsequent period Hamas grew as a result of its own militancy and the perceived failings of the secular nationalists, at a time of deepening Israeli repression of the Palestinians in the 1967-occupied territories. This militancy received both political and armed expression.

Oslo Accords

The 1993 Oslo agreement between Israel and the PLO, which paved the way for the return of parts of the exiled Palestinian leadership, represented, as we noted at the time, 'a significant defeat for the Palestinian masses . . . it replaces direct with indirect Israeli rule and co-opts the PLO, which has effectively agreed to police the occupation on Israel's behalf'. [1] Hamas opposed this sell-out, and still refuses to endorse it, although their participation in the latest elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council represents an acceptance of some, at least of the consequences. So, at a time when the PLO was paying the political price for this historical error, Hamas constituted a focus of militant opposition, attracting secular and even socialist activists as well as Islamists.

Arafat's regime in the Palestine Authority was marked by corruption and political repression. Many Palestinians who had welcomed the Oslo agreement as a partial victory, or were at least prepared to give Arafat the benefit of the doubt, became alienated from him and his movement. And Hamas had access to large amounts of funding, from many Arab and Islamic sources, used to alleviate the appalling conditions in the occupied territories. The distribution of this aid was widely recognised as less corrupt than that offered by the PA, and it was not restricted to

religious, or even Muslim, recipients. So Hamas developed a reputation for honest and efficient administration in the areas which it controlled.

At the same time, Hamas was carrying out numerous armed attacks against Israel. At first, they focussed on military targets and armed settlers, but – particularly following the 1994 murder by an American Jewish settler of twenty-nine Palestinian worshippers in Hebron's main mosque – they turned to the tactic of suicide bombings against civilian targets. These bombings attract wide, but by no means universal, support among Palestinians. A series of opinion polls by the respected Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre (JMCC) showed a massive jump in support – from 24 to 76 percent – at the start of the current Intifada; since then, support has shrunk to around 56 percent, while opposition has steadily grown, to around 40 percent. Hamas clearly recognises the waning appeal of such attacks, and has in effect kept to an undeclared truth for the past year.

Hamas victory

It is clear that the main reason for the dramatic victory of Hamas in the election was opposition to the Palestinian Authority's corruption. In a poll carried out by the JMCC after the election, 43 percent of Hamas voters said they had voted for the party to end corruption. And there is very little support for the establishment of an Islamic state. In its last poll on the issue, in December 2005, the JMCC found that less than 3 percent of the population supported such a state.

Although Hamas recognises these factors, and is unlikely to attempt to impose sharia law, its actual record in government is not good. Indeed, the only area in which it was defeated by Fatah in the elections was the West Bank town of Qalqilya, where Hamas won control of the municipality last May. Since then, they have banned a planned international folk festival which would have featured mixed dancing, while failing to improve material conditions or administration within the town.

In the absence of a clear strategy for mass mobilisation against Israeli occupation and the dispossession of the Palestinian people, Hamas will be forced to rely on religious rhetoric and a slightly cleaner pair of hands running affairs. This alone will be insufficient to liberate the Palestinian people, and to create the conditions for coexistence in Palestine and the Middle East.

All of this, of course, reflects a situation in which the bourgeois nationalists have demonstrated the utter failure of their strategy, while the Palestinian left, as frequently noted in *Socialist Outlook* and *Socialist Resistance*, has virtually abdicated the responsibility to provide an alternative leadership and direction, preferring to tail-end first the PLO leadership, and more recently Hamas. The victory of Hamas, and its likely failure, once again shows the desperate need for the rebuilding of the Palestinian left and the mobilisation of Palestinian workers and peasants in a mass struggle for liberation.

NOTES

[1] *Socialist Outlook*, September 1993

Socialist Resistance : SR46 - Summer 2007

Palestinians divided: End the Israeli occupation!

Editorial

Socialist Resistance : SR46 - Summer 2007

The bloody conflict that has broken out between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza and the West Bank will be music to the ears of the Israelis, the US and the EU.

They have worked might and main to isolate, blockade and undermine the Hamas government elected in 2006, and to strengthen the hand of the discredited and corrupt Fatah wing of the Palestinian movement, and its President Mahmoud Abbas.

The fighting that culminated in the Hamas victory over Fatah in Gaza - followed swiftly by brutal Fatah reprisals against Hamas support and facilities in the West Bank - has now opened the possibility for US and EU aid to flow solely to their chosen faction in the West Bank, while further tightening the noose around Hamas and the civilian population in Gaza.

For the Israeli regime this split in the ranks of its main opponents gives an opportunity to weep crocodile tears for the innocents caught up in the situation while celebrating fresh opportunities to isolate “extreme” Palestinian forces - and even cultivate a new, pliable “moderate” Palestinian leadership.

The confrontations between Palestinians in Gaza are the direct consequence of the Israeli occupation and the transformation of the Gaza Strip into a hopeless ghetto.

The only way out of the crisis is the reestablishment of the basic rights of the Palestinians, the immediate release of all the prisoners, freedom to travel and work, and the ending of the bombardments and the assassinations perpetrated continuously by the Israeli army.

A viable perspective for the Palestinian people requires the total withdrawal of the Israeli occupation forces and the evacuation of all the Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.

Socialists must also demand that the European Union, and in particular the British government, intervenes to stop the Israeli aggression, and begins again an honest co-operation with those elected to government in Palestine.

This is the only way the EU could help in practice to unblock the present tragic situation in Gaza and the West Bank.

Assault on Lebanon

Editorial

Socialist Outlook : SO/10 - Summer 2006

In response to an alleged ‘terrorist plot to bomb aircraft flying to the US’ on August 10, Heathrow was effectively closed down and other British airports disrupted: impeccable timing from the point of view of imperialism. It was a major, if temporary, diversion from Israel’s faltering and politically disastrous criminal assault on

Lebanon. Israel, the main US client state in the region, was poised to launch a renewed offensive, bringing its occupation force in Lebanon up to 30,000 troops. Meanwhile the United Nations was close to producing a resolution calling for a cease-fire. The 'terrorist plot' also reinforced the message about the 'war on terrorism', at a time when Israel was losing the political battle, thus shoring up Bush and Blair's failing Middle East policy and allowing US spokespersons to falsely link Hezbollah with al Qaeda.

With Iraq on the verge of civil war - balkanisation of Iraq was always the second option for the US if the construction of a united client state proved impossible - Israel, US Imperialism's proxy, was failing to defeat Hezbollah in Lebanon. This represents a further setback for US attempts to contain and weaken the growing Iranian influence in the region. For the British government the 'terrorist plot' had the added purpose of diverting attention from its hugely unpopular support for US policy and its surrogate Israel. Blair's refusal to call for an immediate ceasefire will feed the anger of a deeply cynical British population – tired of Blair's unquestioning support for US foreign policies.

Military technology versus people's war

The US war machine is heavily reliant on battlefield tanks, guided bombs, missiles and pilotless drones, but politically is unable to sustain heavy troop losses and cannot control Iraq. Its agent Israel cannot defeat Hezbollah for similar reasons. This has bolstered the courage of the diverse nationalist and anti-imperialist forces in the region, including Iran and Syria. Far from providing an object lesson in the inviolability of US military might, these adventures have done the opposite – proving once again that, just like in Vietnam, one of the biggest and most sophisticated military machines in the world cannot permanently defeat those fighting for their national liberation.

The anti-imperialist fight may be carried out in ways, and under a banner, socialists would not choose, but a defeat for US (and British) imperialism is nonetheless a victory for the working class internationally. While we have important differences with Hezbollah, on tactics and on bigger questions of programme and strategy, we stand shoulder to shoulder with them against the Israeli offensive and in opposition to the support given to that offensive by both the US and Britain. Hezbollah is waging a legitimate national resistance struggle that should be fully supported by socialists everywhere.

Civil war may be on the agenda in Iraq, fostered in part by the American divide and rule policy, but in Lebanon Israel's aggression has instead so far united the country behind Hezbollah. Far from dividing the Lebanon, their resistance is uniting all the sections of the population against Israel's murderous aggression. And across the Arab world the mass of the population see Hezbollah as the saviour of the people.

It now falls to Hezbollah to try and unite the anti-imperialist resistance across the sectarian divide in the region. To unite with Hamas in Palestine would be a first step: to overcome the divisions in Iraq, the second, more difficult one. Whether they are up to the task is open to question – but the scale of their achievement against the murderous assault by Israel has put them in a political position to make this a possibility.

August 10 plot in Britain

Whether the August 10 'plot' was real or not, the timing of its exposure was certainly orchestrated. This served several interests. The reminder of the possibility of terrorist outrage diverted attention from Israel's terrorism, after a very large anti-war demonstration in London just a few days earlier. With the help of a mostly compliant media it made completely spurious links between al Qaeda and Hezbollah. It was also another step in normalising the sight of armed police on the streets and in airports, and the stricter rules on hand luggage tests the British population's tolerance for 'whatever is necessary' to defeat the terrorists. And how lucky that the new terrorist legislation gives the police the right to question terror suspects for up to 28 days.

But it is not so easy for the government. There is widespread scepticism – and not just in the Muslim communities – of police operations following so-called 'intelligence', especially after the botched raid in Forest Gate, and the shooting a year ago of Jean Charles de Menezes: these on the back of Blair's 'dodgy dossier' and the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq after the invasion. As Craig Murray said in his Guardian article about the alleged terrorist plot: 'Be sceptical; be very sceptical.'

It is obvious to all that oil lies at the heart of Bush's need to control the Middle East. It is also obvious that every new move in the region by imperialism increases the possibility of terrorist attacks in the US and Britain. Not that many support these – but supporting and understanding are two different things, however much the government would like to conflate them. And many agree with Muslim spokespeople that imperialism's foreign policies are stoking up hatred and building fundamentalist responses.

New energy – not oil

At a time when people are increasingly worried about the need to control carbon emissions, the murder of innocent women, men and children (to say nothing of the terrible pollution of war, for example the huge oil slick along Lebanon's coast) to maintain control over raw materials like oil, seems an ever more barbarous project. Some of the billions of dollars wasted on war could have been better spent on researching new forms of energy. Why are they not developing new forms of transport that will not pollute the environment? Why are they not supplying solar panels to all who want them?

In Britain there is deep-seated anger that the Blair government no longer represents the people who elected it. Not only because of its neo-liberal economic policies - privatisation of the NHS, of education - which are bad enough, but especially the hitching of a failing British imperialism to the Texan oilman who seems capable of doing absolutely anything, including triggering widespread wars.

The successful August anti-war demonstration in London is testimony to the depth of disgust people feel towards the Bush/Blair bandwagon.

Israel's new war on Lebanon

Piers Mostyn

Socialist Resistance : SR37 - Summer 2006

The present war in Lebanon began with the kidnapping of two and killing of three Israeli soldiers by Hizbollah. The Israeli Defence Force responded with a massive campaign of air strikes across Lebanon. Hizbollah in turn responded by firing missiles into Israel.

On the simple basis of this chronology, IDF actions cannot be explained as “self defence” against the Hizbollah missile attacks. In any event they were grossly disproportionate, deliberately targeting densely populated civilian areas and basic infrastructure. Of the hundreds of civilians to have died over three weeks, 20 are Lebanese for every 1 Israeli.

In the first instance therefore, this is a war of criminal aggression by the Israeli state – designed to destabilise Lebanon and the region and assert the Zionist state's power by bullying weak and compliant states into submission. The real Israeli agenda was set out early on by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, to wage war against the “axis of evil that stretches from Teheran to Damascus.”

Blame for the war cannot be ascribed to Hizbollah's initial action – however risky any military engagement with the IDF may be. To state otherwise is to accept that the people of Lebanon, Palestine and elsewhere should just sit on their hands.

It was a very limited response to a long history of IDF kidnapping of Lebanese citizens, an illegal occupation of the Shab'aa Farms area of the country and repeated bombings and other aggressive cross border incursions. And as even staunch supporters of the Israeli state have pointed out the IDF onslaught made no sense militarily if the primary aim was releasing prisoners or stopping Hizbollah missiles. It is therefore logical to assume that the origins of this onslaught are independent. Experienced observers, like veteran Israeli oppositionist Uri Avnery believe it was years in the planning and only awaited a pretext. In any event, once Hizbollah called for an immediate unconditional ceasefire, the Israeli state (in refusing to agree) was entirely responsible for any continued violence.

The Hizbollah kidnapping came after two weeks of an Israeli onslaught on Gaza – that still continues at full strength – slaughtering civilians, kidnapping politicians and others and destroying basic infrastructure. This in turn followed months of sanctions against the democratically elected Hamas-led Palestinian Administration designed to smash it. The European Union and the USA both supported the blockade. Pro-western regimes across the Arab world were silent. UN relief organisations and other NGOs all declared a major humanitarian crisis. Non-EU Switzerland was the sole western state voicing protest. Hizbollah's action was undoubtedly a legitimate act of solidarity against this general trend – interpreted and welcome as such on the street in Gaza and across the Middle East.

Hizbollah is not a “terrorist” organisation, whatever that is. It is a mass movement with dozens of MPs and ministers in the national government. This government is a coalition that straddles all sections of Lebanese society – meaning that the party is accepted as a legitimate democratic entity by nearly all strands of that society,

whatever the disagreements over politics or religion. It is a resistance movement that owes its origins to the 1982 Israeli invasion of the country (which involved the notorious Sabra and Shatilla refugee camp massacres organised by Olmert's predecessor as PM and political mentor, Ariel Sharon) and 18 years of occupation. Its legitimacy stems from its role in resisting this occupation and finally driving Israel out – in the context of the unwillingness or inability of other forces in Lebanon or the Arab world to take action.

As socialists in favour of secularism in politics, we cannot give political support to Hizbollah given its religious character. Nonetheless, like Hamas it is strongly rooted in and serves a community that is religious. Like Hamas it is often wrongly characterised as “fundamentalist” when it has nothing in common with Taliban-style politics. It has, by its actions, shown willing to work with other forces for the unity of a multi-confessional Lebanon.

Whilst reserving the right to criticise its politics and tactics, we nonetheless call for socialists, anti-imperialists and anti-war activists to show unconditional solidarity with its resistance to Israel's murderous attack and other attempts to interfere with the right of the Lebanese people to free self-determination.

Given the Israeli state's stance in claiming to “root out Hizbollah terrorism”, it is ironic that the Prime Minister of Lebanon, which Israel sees as an ally, himself described Hizbollah as a “resistance movement” as the bombs rained down on Beirut. And in back door diplomatic negotiations by the USA and European powers, Hizbollah has entrusted the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, a member of the Shia-based Amal party to speak on their behalf. Therefore attempts “root out” Hizbollah threaten to pull down with it the political as well as economic and social infrastructure.

It seems that Israeli strategists may have been fooled by Western propaganda about last year's “Cedar Revolution” (in which mass mobilisations following the murder of Rafik Hariri and the fingering of the Syrian government for being involved led to Syria being driven out) and the Lebanese elections that followed. It may be that Olmert sought to drive a sectarian wedge into Lebanese society to get other communities to turn on Hizbollah – similar to Israel's utilisation of the Falange and Christian right forces during the 1970s civil war and the 18 year occupation.

If so, this seems to have been a massive miscalculation. There have been no mass rallies denouncing Hizbollah despite the tremendous devastation and loss of life across the country. Israel has failed to shift the question of “Hizbollah disarmament” from its previous position within the politics of Lebanon - one to be resolved internally, by agreement of all parties, if at all.

Another interpretation is that this was no Israeli miscalculation and it was a frustration at Hizbollah's integration into the country's body politic that fed a desire to smash it – this was an exercise in attempted regime change. This would explain the targeting of the Lebanese army and even one or two Christian communities – almost as though to teach them a lesson. Certainly once it was apparent that air strikes were not sufficient, the military invasion was underway the IDF took on the job for itself.

In this context the deliberate targeting of an unarmed UN outpost and Red Cross ambulances – despite the risk of increasing international isolation – may have been

calculated as necessary to remove any independent observers from the scene before the real slaughter. A not dissimilar tactic to the deliberate targeting of hospitals and doctors during ferocious US assaults on Fallujah and other cities in Iraq – in order to minimise independent reports of atrocities.

These considerations may also explain the reluctance of Israel and its backers to embrace the idea of a new international force in southern Lebanon – fearing that it may be an inadequate tool for the desired forcible destruction of Hizbollah.

Which is not to say that any international intervention into Lebanon – whether under the guise of the UN, NATO or other umbrella – should be supported. On the contrary it should be opposed. History, in Lebanon and elsewhere, has shown that such an intervention, whatever its terms would inevitably be for the purpose of imposing an agenda dominated by the major imperialist powers – the same forces that control the security council and have set the pace in the so-called “peace process” in Israel/Palestine.

Whatever the Israeli state’s calculation, the apparent political and military failure was underlined by a sudden U-turn in announcing a temporary ceasefire, only 48 hours after dismissing the possibility, in response to global outrage at the murderous attack on the village of Qana leaving over 60 civilians dead. This despite Hizbollah having, that day, launched its highest daily number of missiles, almost three weeks after the start of war.

If clarity were needed, Lebanon’s Prime Minister Fouad Siniora told Condoleezza Rice she was not welcome to return to Beirut until the US changed its stance – an unheard of statement from the leader of a small, impoverished pro-western government. As though to rub in the apparent collapse of Israeli/US/British military objectives, Siniora went on to thank Hizbollah for its “sacrifices” in defence of Lebanon’s sovereignty. The subsequent climbdown over a ceasefire is a humiliation for the mammoth Washington-financed and organised war machine – made worse by a context of five years of failed war aims in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The USA and Britain have been steadfast in providing unconditional and uncritical support for Israel. This support for the deliberate mass murder of civilians has been transparently obvious to the whole world despite the paper-thin attempt to hide it behind the diplomatic nicety of “opposing an immediate ceasefire” or “the necessity of laying out the basis for a lasting peace”.

US/British perspectives have been so indistinguishable to Olmert’s that they have used almost exactly the same words. On the 18th July Blair explained the war aims in terms of “an arc of extremism right across that region, that wants to disrupt the process towards democracy and freedom, whether it’s in Iraq or in Lebanon or down in the Palestinian territory, that arc of extremism is being supported by countries like Iran and Syria”.

The next day he said, “We need to recognise the fundamental nature of the struggle in the region which has far reaching consequences far beyond our own region and even in countries like our own. All over the Middle East there are those who want to modernise their nations who believe as we do in democracy and liberty and tolerance. But ranged against them are extremists who believe the opposite who believe in fundamentalist states and war not against Israeli actions, but against its

existence. In virtually every country of the region including on the streets of Baghdad such a struggle is being played out”. Who can doubt that the Israeli state, as it always has done, is acting as regional proxy for imperialism?

Imperialist war aims are to continue by other means what has been so disastrously impossible in other parts of the Middle East. The debacle in Iraq and Afghanistan and anxiety over the risks of any military attack on Iran have destabilised the Bush/Blair goal of re-organising the region around an imperialist military-economic game plan. The new “domino theory” of “democratic revolutions” installing a series of compliant pro-western governments on the model of Jordan and Egypt, across the region has been thrown off course in Iraq. Elections in Palestine, Egypt and even Lebanon have given democratic legitimacy to precisely those forces the war was designed to eradicate.

The increasing focus for this imperialist anxiety is Iranian influence in Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere. The Lebanon onslaught thus appears to be conceived as a new route to fulfilling these aims – hitting what had been perceived as a soft spot – a “small” guerrilla organisation in a mixed country historically aligned to the West.

But things haven’t gone to plan. There have been protests across the middle East. Pro-Western dictatorial regimes like Saudi Arabia, that have sat on their hands or given a tacit nod to this aggression, are openly concerned about destabilisation.

Israeli public support for the war has largely remained rock solid. There have been no mass protests. But the small protests have a capacity to grow, as the lies about the purpose and conduct of the war become obvious and the military, human, financial and diplomatic costs become apparent. Support for those small forces of opposition within Israeli society is a crucial element to solidarity within the imperialist states.

Another key task in Britain is to target British complicity. Public opinion has quickly understood the true picture, opposing the government’s craven stance by a clear majority. Unlike the Iraq war there is no fig leaf of overthrowing a brutal dictator or removing WMDs. Here emperor Blair, from the start, had no clothes. His usual moral claim of “humanitarian interventionism” was immediately revealed as it’s opposite – moral bankruptcy and collusion with war crimes. Already he is paying a price with deep splits at the highest level of his government among the most senior and loyal cabinet ministers – one of whom, Straw, has broken the basic principle of British parliamentary politics – collective cabinet responsibility.

Of course Straw and others deserve absolutely no credit for this stance, having enthusiastically fought for and implemented five years worth of war mongering across the Middle East and a “war on terror” against the muslim community at home. Similarly when supine Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett woke from her slumbers long enough to protest at US planes sending bombs to Israel stopping over in Prestwich, Glasgow. These splits and vacillations simply go to show quite how weak Blair is and how much pressure the government is under. He should go now.

During the furore over the recent raid in Forest Gate, East London and the anniversary of the murder of Jean Charles de Menezes, Blair’s line was consistently that these steps will continue to be necessary to “protect” British citizens against terrorism. Not only will the current British state stance outrage the Muslim

community, but it once again demonstrates that the imperialist state is the cause and driving force behind instability and danger.

We face a highly volatile situation. If Israel and the imperialists succeed in their aims of smashing Hizbollah and re-organising Lebanon this would be a strategic victory in the strategy across the region following which there will be further aggression against Iran and any other less than compliant state.

However if this war does not succeed and, as current events possibly indicate – it radicalises opposition to Zionism and imperialism across Lebanese society and a host of other Arab states against Israel and its backers - it could become a small but significant step towards shifting the balance of political forces against imperialism.

Solidarity action continues to be urgently and visibly needed.

Demonstrate 5th August London.

- ▶ ***Stop the murderous onslaught on Gaza and Lebanon!***
- ▶ ***End British complicity!***
- ▶ ***No more arms sales and support to Israel!***
- ▶ ***Israel out of Lebanon!***
- ▶ ***Free self-determination for the Lebanese people!***
- ▶ ***Free Palestine!***
- ▶ ***Israel out of Gaza!***
- ▶ ***Stop the blockade of Palestine!***

Israel cannot win this war

Roland Rance

Socialist Outlook : SO/10 - Summer 2006

Israel has attempted to justify its attack on Lebanon, like its earlier murderous assault in 1982, as a response to crossborder provocations by irregular forces based in southern Lebanon. But even journalists in the mainstream media no longer accept this argument, and recognise that now, as in 1982, these incidents merely provided the pretext for a long-planned operation with far-reaching aims.

Gerald Steinberg, professor of political science at Bar-Ilan University, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that, 'Of all of Israel's wars since 1948, this was the one for which Israel was most prepared', and that the planning had begun in May 2000, immediately after Hezbollah drove the Israeli army out of South Lebanon following its twenty-two year occupation. For several months, Israel has been conducting military exercises simulating the attack, and conducting a propaganda campaign designed to delegitimise Hezbollah.

There are several reasons for this war. Israel certainly wants to punish Hezbollah for the crime of defending Lebanon, and driving out the Israeli army. Beyond this, it aims to prevent Hezbollah from ever posing a credible military threat to Israel, and to weaken and humiliate Hezbollah's sponsors, Syria and Iran.

The break-up of Lebanon?

Israel's ambitions stretch far beyond its borders. For all its talk of establishing a strong and stable government in Beirut, what Israel actually seeks is the cantonisation of Lebanon, and beyond that of the entire Arab world. Shortly before the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the World Zionist Organisation published a revealing article in its theoretical journal, Kivunim. Entitled 'A Strategy for Israel in the Nineteen Eighties', it was written by a former Israel Foreign Office analyst, Oded Yinon., who noted,

Lebanon's total dissolution into five provinces serves as a precedent for the entire Arab world including Egypt, Syria, Iraq and the Arabian peninsula and is already following that track. The dissolution of Syria and Iraq later on into ethnically or religiously unique areas such as in Lebanon, is Israel's primary target on the Eastern front in the long run, while the dissolution of the military power of those states serves as the primary short term target. Syria will fall apart, in accordance with its ethnic and religious structure, into several states such as in present day Lebanon, so that there will be a Shi'ite Alawi state along its coast, a Sunni state in the Aleppo area, another Sunni state in Damascus hostile to its northern neighbour, and the Druze who will set up a state, maybe even in our Golan, and certainly in the Hauran and in northern Jordan. This state of affairs will be the guarantee for peace and security in the area in the long run, and that aim is already within our reach today.

Some years later, the Israeli neo-conservative think tank the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies made a series of recommendations, clearly inspired by Yinon's earlier work, to incoming Israeli PM, Benjamin Netanyahu. This document, 'A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm', also called for widespread Israeli intervention in the Arab world,

Israel can shape its strategic environment, in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq — an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right — as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions. . . Since Iraq's future could affect the strategic balance in the Middle East profoundly, it would be understandable that Israel has an interest in supporting the Hashemites in their efforts to redefine Iraq.

Three of the authors of this pamphlet – Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and David Wurmser – later went on to hold senior positions in the Bush administration, and have provided much of the theoretical and ideological background to the so-called 'War on Terror'.

These close links between Israeli and US neo-cons do not show, as some conspiracy theorists claim, that the 'Israel lobby' actually runs US foreign and defence policy, against the interests of the US. Rather, they show the extent to which the Israeli and US political establishments share a global outlook, and the way in which Israel presents itself as a mercenary in the interests of US imperialism.

Water

In addition to the overall desire to dismantle the existing Arab states, and thus make it easier for imperialism to dominate the people and exploit their resources, Israel has a particular interest in the resources of southern Lebanon, particularly the water.

Israel already overexploits its own water, and that of the occupied West Bank and Golan Heights, and has long had its eyes on the rivers of Lebanon. Even before the start of the British mandate in Palestine, the Zionist delegation to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference insisted that any Jewish state in Palestine would need full control of both the river Jordan, and the Litani river in Lebanon, and their sources. However, French pressure to extend its own mandate in Lebanon led to the imposition of a border many miles south of the Zionist dream. The Litani, which feeds into the Mediterranean, was excluded from the British mandate, as were most of the Jordan headwaters.

But Israel has never relinquished its aspirations, and has viewed exploitation by Lebanon, Syria and Jordan of their own water resources as a cause for war. Ariel Sharon notes in his autobiography that,

People generally regard June 5 1967 as the day the Six Day war began. That is the official date. But, in reality, it started two-and-a-half years earlier, on the day Israel decided to act against the diversion of the Jordan. While the border disputes between Syria and ourselves were of great significance, the matter of water diversion was a stark issue of life and death.

In a situation where Palestinian families have no regular water supplies, and 80 percent of West Bank water is pumped to Israel to permit the continuation of an unsustainable cotton industry and massively wasteful water sprinklers, the search for new and guaranteed water supplies is essential to Israel's lifestyle.

Following Israel's evacuation of southern Lebanon, there were several attempts to reach an agreement over the sharing of Lebanon's water; but these came to nothing. Last year, Israel's leading daily Ha'Aretz reported that Sharon told the cabinet that, *Israel cannot agree to allow Lebanon to divert essential water sources . . . If the Lebanese proceed with plans to pump water from the Wazzani Springs (a source of the Hatzbani River that flows across the border into Israel), this would be the type of thing that Israel could not abide.*

The Lebanese government nevertheless continued to develop plans to use its water, and opened a pumping station several months ago. Many analysts argue that, from this point, a war was inevitable regardless of Hezbollah actions or US intentions. And the Israeli intelligence website Debka now notes that, 'the most important gain from the crisis is Israel's recovery of control over its main sources of water, the Wazani springs'.

Israel held at bay by Hezbollah

But, even though this war was planned for years, and a pretext was actively sought for several months, it is not proceeding according to Israel's plans. Despite Israel's much-vaunted military prowess, it has been held at bay by Hezbollah for five weeks now, and there is no sign of progress. Having started by adamantly opposing any international force in the region, Israel is now begging for foreign armies to come to its aid in smashing Hezbollah. Having seen Israel's failure, however, most states are reluctant to assist.

Israel now claims to have killed 400 of an alleged 1200 Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah disputes these figures; but it is a remarkable admission by Israel, which apparently accepts that a few hundred armed irregulars

have successfully resisted the world's fourth most powerful army, and inflicted major casualties. Every day, Israel claims to have weakened Hezbollah's ability to fire rockets into Israel – and every day, Hezbollah responds with an even greater barrage. So far, about forty Israeli civilians have been killed in such attacks. This is only a fraction of the far greater suffering that Israel has caused in Lebanon, but still unprecedentedly high for Israel. A large proportion of the casualties are Palestinian citizens of Israel. This reflects both geographic distribution – Palestinians are still a majority in parts of northern Israel – and poverty – Palestinian communities and homes tend not to have shelters, and are less strongly built than the homes of Israeli Jews.

Hezbollah has already smashed the myth of Israeli military invulnerability, while Israel itself has managed to destroy its important propaganda argument that a military defeat would mean the end of the Jewish state, and a second holocaust. Meanwhile, Israel has achieved the remarkable feat of uniting all the communities and factions in Lebanon in opposition to the attack, and of further strengthening Hezbollah's reputation. This is a war that Israel cannot win, and in which its proclaimed aim changes from day to day.

This lack of a clear military victory is causing political ructions within the Israeli establishment. The military commander of the northern front has been replaced. It has been suggested that, as a tank officer, he was less suited to this war than his infantry replacement; but he was sacked a few days after complaining that his hands were being tied by the civilian politicians. Many in Israel's military establishment, accustomed to running the country, are complaining that, for the first time in decades, neither the prime minister nor the defence minister is a retired general; in response, Olmert and Peretz are striving to prove that they can be as aggressive as any general.

Israeli military analysts are reportedly pushing for the war to be expanded, to include an attack on Iran. According to the rightwing Israel Insider website,

Iran's military capabilities are no match for Israel's. Bottom line, all Iran could do is to launch missiles at and hit Israel's cities, and try and carry out terror attacks. If there is one thing history has shown, it is that such methods do not win wars. Israel would undoubtedly suffer both civilian casualties and economic damage, but these would not be that much more than what we are already experiencing. . . The end result would be some additional economic damage, and probably around 500 civilian casualties. It may sound cold blooded, but Israel can afford such casualties.

Such an attack would be likely to lead to a global war, with incalculable results, but this apparently does not deter Israeli strategists. As far as they are concerned, the failure so far is not the result of military incompetence, but of political weakness and even betrayal.

The failure of this war has thoroughly discredited the current political leadership, and Israel Insider goes on to quote military sources as reporting that,

Israel finds itself getting bogged down by a manifestly inferior enemy, due to the limitations placed on the IDF by the political leadership...Some senior officers have been mentioning the C-word in private conversations. They have been saying that a

coup d'etat might be the only way to prevent an outcome in Lebanon that could embolden the Arab world.

A military seizure of power in Israel would not be a traditional coup, but rather the imposition of a military leader as a 'civilian' PM. This would not be totally without precedent in Israel; Ha'Aretz reported in 2004 that, on the eve of the 1967 war, Sharon proposed that the army lock up the cabinet and start fighting without their approval; his friend, Chief of Staff Rabin, apparently was willing to go along with this, and the subsequent military pressure on the government forced the appointment of Dayan as Defence Minister days before the war. For the rest of his life, Prime Minister Eshkol referred to this as an officers' coup.

Where is Peace Now?

Despite the war crimes being committed by Israel in Lebanon, and despite (or perhaps even because of) the huge international condemnation, the Israeli 'peace-camp' has been very slow to oppose the war. Although radical activists, from the Communist Party leftwards, have been on the streets protesting from the start, they have not been joined by the tens and hundreds of thousands which Peace Now can mobilise. Indeed, many selfproclaimed 'peaceniks' have supported the war. Author Amos Oz told the Los Angeles Times, 'The Israeli peace movement should support Israel's attempt at self-defense, pure and simple'; his colleague AB Yehoshua said to Ha'Aretz, 'At last we've got a just war, so we shouldn't gnaw at it too much till it becomes unjust'. Together with other Israeli liberals, these authors are now calling for a ceasefire on the grounds that, 'the feasible and reasonable goals of the military action have been already achieved'. There is little chance of building a mass-movement against the war on this basis.

Gaza Strip

While the focus of world attention has been on Lebanon, Israel has meanwhile intensified its attack on Palestinians in the occupied territories. The whole of the Gaza Strip has been under siege since the war started, and the UN estimates that, in July alone, 175 Palestinians were killed in Gaza and 620 injured - a huge toll, even by Israel's bloody standards.

Meanwhile, the British government has distinguished itself by its whole-hearted support of Israel's war aims (whatever they are). Blair's opposition to a ceasefire until Israel agrees has contributed directly to the deaths of hundreds of Lebanese civilians. And the government has permitted the use of British airports by US planes carrying military supplies to Israel. These include the uranium-tipped 'bunker busters' – tactical nuclear weapons intended to be used in built-up areas, which would cause massive loss of life.

Israel's military and political leadership is guilty of war crimes in Lebanon. So too are Blair and his cabinet, who have supported and assisted these atrocities.

UN Resolution

At the time of writing the UN has finally adopted a ceasefire resolution, although this appears to give most of what Israel wants. It calls on Hezbollah to stop all attacks, but on Israel to stop all 'offensive' action. Since Israel insists that all of its actions have been defensive, this is a meaningless demand. It calls for the release of Israeli soldiers, but not the kidnapped and abducted Lebanese in Israel. It does not call for

immediate Israeli withdrawal, but permits them to remain until 'the end of hostilities'. This seems to mean that if Hezbollah attacks Israeli forces, they are permitted to remain; and since Hezbollah will, of course, continue to attack for as long as Israel remains, the whole resolution appears worthless

The Middle East in flames- Gilbert Achcar, interviewed by Andrew Kennedy Socialist Outlook : SO/10 - Summer 2006

It seems clear that Israel was just waiting for a pretext to launch its action, and Hezbollah provided it. Is that your view?

Israel's goal is indeed clearer than Hezbollah's was when they mounted the July 12 operation. It seems that the operation had been prepared by Hezbollah for several months, as Hassan Nasrallah said, and they regarded it chiefly as a way of obtaining the release of Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails through an exchange. It was not meant originally as a reaction to the events in Gaza – though it was perceived by the Arab public opinion as a gesture of solidarity with the Palestinian population. At any rate, Hezbollah was certainly not expecting an Israeli reaction on this scale.

Israel's goal is very clear and was stated from the beginning. The July 12 operation was seized upon as a pretext to launch an offensive that had also very obviously been in preparation for a long time. The goal, of course, was to obtain Hezbollah's destruction: what the Israeli army was not able to achieve during its occupation of Lebanon, it now wanted to obtain by forcing the Lebanese to do it and pushing the country to the brink of civil war.

The Israeli government rejected the idea of an international contingent at first, insisting that only the Lebanese Army should go south, thus indicating that it wanted the Lebanese to disarm Hezbollah. The Israeli strategy was on the one hand to deal Hezbollah direct blows and on the other hand to take the whole Lebanese population hostage in order to obtain what it wanted from the Lebanese government. In light of Israel's military failure to deal Hezbollah a major blow and its political failure so far to split the Lebanese population, they have settled for a revised objective whereby European Nato forces would be deployed in south Lebanon – with or without a UN fig leaf.

Who are the main actors here? Is this a proxy war by the US? How far does this tie in with Israel's own interests and aims?

The coincidence of the objectives of the governments of Israel and the US has never historically been so transparent as it has been since 2001, when George W. Bush came to power in the US followed by Sharon in Israel. The degree of openness of their collusion is unprecedented. Never has the US so blatantly and openly endorsed an Israeli aggression. The Israeli army is doing the military work while the US is doing the diplomatic work, blocking ceasefire resolutions and buying Israel the time needed to fulfil its military objectives, while supplying it with the needed weaponry. The US conditions for a ceasefire are identical to those defined by the Israelis and concerted with them. As Washington puts it, this is part of the Bush administration's

'war on terror': Israel's aggression fits with the US-led imperialist war drive launched since 9/11 in this part of the world where two thirds of world oil resources lie beneath the ground.

On the other side of the fence, what the US-Israel alliance is fighting through Hezbollah is Iran or the Iran-led alliance in the area, including Shiite forces in Iraq, the Syrian regime and the appeal of this alliance to Sunni fundamentalists like Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which supported Hezbollah in the recent crisis. So there are two conflicts intertwined in the present war – the direct one consisting of Israel's aggression against Hezbollah and Lebanon, and the indirect one consisting of the US campaign against Iran. The UN Security Council has just adopted a US-sponsored resolution on the issue of Iran's nuclear program – quite impudently, given that the same Council has not yet called for the cessation of Israel's mass slaughter in Lebanon.

What role does France play in all this?

The French position has evolved. In 2004 Jacques Chirac offered the US a common front at the UN against Syrian forces in Lebanon. Their basic interests converged, contrary to what was the case with regard to Iraq. In this case, the French are mainly interested in Saudi money. Just a few days ago, they signed a deal for a big sale of weapons to the Saudi kingdom. Chirac's friendship with Hariri, father and son, fits Hariri clan is closely linked to the Saudis. So when Hariri, and the Saudis behind him, went into dispute with Syria, France offered Washington its help in sponsoring UN resolution 1559, which called for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon as well as the disarming of non-government armed groups in the country, meaning Hezbollah and the Palestinian refugee camps. Since 2004 France has thus worked in close alliance with the US on the issue of Lebanon.

But the latest offensive has caused cracks in the alliance. The Saudis denounced Hezbollah at first, but as the Israeli aggression became more obviously brutal and murderous and impacted on Arab public opinion, the Saudis, the Egyptians, the Jordanians, all Washington's Arab clients have had to shift their stance and tell Washington: Your Israeli friends are going to spoil the whole thing, we are reaching a boiling point which is quite dangerous, it is time to stop. The crisis is getting increasingly perilous for the whole stability of pro- US regimes – for example in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood is capitalising on the situation.

Chirac has taken the middle ground since then – pleasing the Saudis more than Bush in calling for an immediate ceasefire and an international troop presence based on a political agreement.

In your July 15 interview with Liberazione you said that Israeli military action could radicalise the Lebanese population more against Israel than against Hezbollah. Is that happening?

It is happening indeed and beyond my expectations. The very brutality of the Israeli aggression is actually counterproductive for Israeli goals – and is unifying Lebanon in resisting the Israeli offensive. Israel's onslaught has been so murderous, so indiscriminate, that the great majority of the Lebanese have drawn the same conclusions: firstly, that the Israeli offensive was prepared long ago so that the whole discussion of the July 12 operation is somewhat irrelevant, as it was clearly

used as a pretext; secondly, that Israel is not targeting Hezbollah alone and not even the Shiites only, but the whole population. The whole country is being held hostage. The whole economy is destroyed. True, the offensive has mostly killed Lebanese Shiites – probably over 1000 already if one includes those still under the rubble – but in terms of lives affected, impoverished, and ruined, a huge number of Lebanese are affected, and Israel is clearly perceived as the enemy of the Lebanese people as a whole. At a more general regional level, the hatred for Israel and the US is reaching new peaks. All this will undoubtedly fuel the growth of terrorist organisations of the Al Qaeda type. I'm afraid that what we have seen up to now – 9/11, 7/7 and Madrid – is but a foretaste of horrors to come that will affect the civilian populations in the West.

Has the Lebanese left been able to play much of a role in giving political shape to this national wave of anger and defiance? Or are they marginalized?

The Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) is a shadow of its former self, of what it used to be in the 70s and 80s. It was one of the most important Communist Parties in the Arab world, relative to the size of the country, and one of the major actors in the civil war of 1975-1990. The LCP was the first to launch attacks against the Israeli occupation in 1982, after the invasion settled down, in the name of the 'national resistance'. Only later were the 'Islamic resistance' and Hezbollah launched. Hezbollah dealt with the LCP as a rival since the latter's main social base was among Shiites and in southern Lebanon, that is among Hezbollah's target constituency. Hezbollah built itself partially through fighting the LCP over this constituency and managed to prevail. In that, it was greatly helped by Iranian backing and by the fact that it played on the dominant ideological trend in the region that was in favour of Islamic fundamentalism since the 1970s, whereas the LCP lacked political boldness and was deeply affected by the unfolding crisis of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s the LCP itself went into deep crisis, splitting and fragmenting. What remains is not completely invisible, but it is no longer in a position to play an important role – unfortunately, as it is the major left-wing grouping in the country. Hence, Lebanon is no exception to the general rule in the area: the historical failure of nationalist forces and the failure of the left have created a vacuum that has been filled by Islamic fundamentalists.

Some on the British left would probably like to entertain the idea that Hezbollah is capable of evolving leftwards. Is that a fantasy?

Basically, yes. Even a plebeian group like Muqtada al Sadr's organisation in Iraq is more socially threatening to the bourgeoisie than Hezbollah. The latter, of course, is radical in its opposition to Israel, as is usual with Islamic fundamentalist forces linked to Iran, but in Lebanese politics Hezbollah is integrated fully into the system. It has two ministers in the government that is dominated by Hariri-led US clients and it allies itself with quite reactionary figures. True, it organises social services, but only as churches or charities do – they represent no social threat whatsoever to the bourgeois social order. There is not even a potential for that, given Hezbollah's ideology, its structure, its close links to Iran and to Syria. Iran, Hezbollah's model of society and state, is utterly bourgeois in its social structure. Whatever populist ranting Ahmadinejad (the Iranian president) may have given vent to, last year, in his electoral battle for the presidency against the capitalist Rafsanjani, these do not translate into any kind of concrete social measures. In that respect, Chavez's

Venezuela is a far more progressive state: Iran is not a Muslim equivalent of Venezuela. Such equivalents existed in the Middle East in the 60s, but it is out of their defeat that Islamic fundamentalism was able to grow.

Ben Gurion had the idea that Israel's frontiers should be natural – the Litani river in the North and the river Jordan in the East. Is this what links the attacks on Lebanon and the Palestinians?

The Greater Israel schemes are obsolete and have been so for a very long time. Hezbollah's rockets are a further proof of the fact that 'natural boundaries' do not mean much. Even after it invaded Lebanon in 1982, Israel could not keep the newly occupied territory under its direct control for long. These are mountainous areas suitable for guerrilla struggle, and the Lebanese population has undergone military training through several years of civil war. Hence the huge caution of Israeli troops in penetrating south Lebanon after July 12. The Israeli Defence Force took just three villages in the first two weeks and at relatively high cost; it met fierce resistance. It decided to resort to flattening the little town of Bint Jubail after proving unable to control it. The Israelis keep saying they do not want to occupy south Lebanon again – for good reason.

In Palestine, when the cost of keeping direct control over the Palestinian populated territories became too high after the first Intifada of 1987-88, Israel ended up relinquishing that direct control. But it plans to maintain the bulk of its colonial settlements in the West Bank as well as its direct control over the borders between the Palestinian-populated areas and neighbouring countries, whether Gaza's border with Egypt or the stretch of land along the Jordan river isolating the West Bank from Jordan.

Is Israel more vulnerable now?

This question relates to a point long made by Jewish critics of Zionism. Far from becoming the sanctuary for the Jews of the world that the Zionists promised, Israel is more and more turning into a deadly trap for its Jewish inhabitants. The old warning by anti-Zionist Jews is getting more and more relevant because of the evolution in destructive techniques and weaponry. Israel is exposing its own population to huge risks. Israel's ruthless, barbaric way of dealing with the Palestinians and the Lebanese feeds hatred against it in the whole area. This will certainly result in many people wanting to inflict on the Israelis the most painful damage possible, compared to which Hezbollah's Katyusha rockets might look quite benign. It takes some 50 Hezbollah rockets to kill one Israeli on average in the ongoing confrontation. But what if devices could be made to inflict mass destruction on Israel? That is what Israel is inciting against itself. Zawahiri, Bin Laden's second-in-command, made a statement calling for strikes against Israel as if he wanted to outbid Hezbollah. Israel is presently inflicting a terrible nightmare on the Lebanese, it has been inflicting a permanent nightmare on the Palestinians, but it is also preparing an appalling nightmare for its own people.

What are the prospects for building a new Arab socialist left? What can socialists and anti-imperialists do?

In the Arab world nowadays the space for building a socialist left is quite marginal, the left is ideologically isolated. Nonetheless there should be a permanent effort at

rebuilding a socialist left and that cannot be done by tail-ending Islamic fundamentalism. Left-wing activists should not let the fundamentalists occupy alone the terrain of the fight against imperialism and the Zionist state, as some sections of them tend to do, but it is clear that the left won't become a match for the religious forces in this respect anytime soon. In many other fields, however, the fundamentalists are no competitors – when they are not foes: in the fight for workers' and peasants' rights and interests, the rights of the unemployed, women's rights, the fight against sexual oppression, for secularism, liberty of conscience and freedom from the rule of religion in social life, etc. These are issues around which the left in the Arab world should intensely campaign – but it should do so without expecting to achieve a breakthrough in the near future, lest it get rapidly demoralized.

The building of a new socialist left in the Arab region can be helped by the international left. Even though Latin America is quite far away, the left turn there is inspiring. But the main influence on the development of a socialist force in the Middle East will come from Europe, where there is a significant socialist left. The antiwar movement in Western countries has been very important in educating the Arab public that this is not a clash of civilisations or of religions, but an imperialist war drive serving capitalist interests and opposed as such by social movements in the West. The progress of the social movement in Europe can only have beneficial effects in the Middle East. For that, it is also crucial for the European socialist left to stand at the forefront of the struggle against Islamophobia, thus undermining the Islamic fundamentalist propaganda that is nurtured by this very same Islamophobia.

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How Israel rewards troops who slaughter innocents

Roland Rance

Socialist Resistance : SR40 - December 2006

October was a month of half-centenaries. The 1956 Hungarian uprising and the Suez War, in which Britain and France secretly colluded with Israel to attack Egypt, in order to wrest control of the Suez Canal from the Egyptians received wall to wall coverage. Another major event of October 1956, however, has been ignored in the British media – the slaughter by Israeli forces of 49 Arab citizens of Israel (including 23 children) in what has become known as the Kufr Qasim massacre.

Kufr Qasim is a Palestinian village which fell under Israeli rule during the 1948-9 war. It is about twenty miles from Tel-Aviv, and close to the “Green Line” – the de facto border between Israel and Jordan from 1949 to 1967. Like all the Arab localities in the state of Israel, it was under military government from 1949 to 1966.

When Israel attacked Egypt on 29 October 1956, the government tightened the curfew over Arab villages in Israel, with instructions that people had to be indoors by 5 pm. Although this decision was taken in the morning, the mukhtar of Kufr Qasim was not informed of this until 4.30, and his protest that many villagers were away and would not return till later was ignored.

As people returned home from work, they were systematically shot in cold blood by Frontier Guard forces in the village. By 6 pm, 47 had been killed, and two died later. Eventually, an order was given to cease the slaughter.

Although the government tried to hush up the massacre, and sealed off the village for weeks, news leaked out. Through the efforts of Communist Knesset member Tewfiq Toubi and the campaigning journalist Uri Avnery, the story was published, leading to public uproar. Such was the anger, that the government was forced to put several soldiers on trial; but, in order to sweeten the pill, their salaries were increased by 50 per cent, and they were given special prison leave in order to visit the prime minister.

In the course of the trial, one accused, Major Melinki, testified that he had asked his superior Brigadier Shadmi what to do with people trapped outside the village when the curfew descended. Shadmi replied "That's just too bad. I don't want any sentimentality". Others argued in their defence that they were "merely obeying orders" – though, as the court noted, in other villages these same orders were consciously ignored.

At the end of the trial, Melinki was sentenced to 17 years imprisonment; Lieutenant Dahan, who lead the death squads, and Sergeant Ofer, who shot most of the victims, to 15 years; and six privates to eight years. These sentences were condemned as extremely lenient for such deliberate mass murder; but the government viewed them as draconian.

Following a rapid appeal, Melinki's sentence was reduced to 14 years, Dahan's to ten, and Ofer's to nine. The chief of staff then personally reduced Melinki's sentence to ten years, Dahan's and Ofer's to eight years, and the others to four years.

Then the president granted a partial pardon, reducing Melinki's and Dahan's sentences to five years. Finally, the Parole Committee ordered the remission of one-third of each sentence. Within three and a half years, which they had spent in a sanatorium rather than a prison, the last of the killers was freed.

But the state's gratitude did not stop there. Following their release, Melinki was appointed head of security for the Israel's nuclear weapons factory in Dimona. Dahan – convicted of the murder of 43 civilians – was appointed head of Arab affairs for the town of Ramle. He subsequently became an Israeli representative in Paris.

Meanwhile, Brigadier Shadmi, who had given the initial orders, seemed to enjoy immunity – even though Judge Halevi, in his summing-up, placed most of the responsibility on him, and spoke of a "manifestly illegal order" over which flew "like a black flag, a warning saying: 'Prohibited!'"

Shadmi seems to have threatened to implicate political leaders if he were put on trial. Eventually, however, the government was forced to try him too. The result was a conviction for exceeding his authority, and a fine of a farthing.

During the trial, many of the accused referred to the political context of the killings, and their belief that this was part of an official plan to expel Palestinian citizens.

Although the government strenuously denied this, the subsequent release of official papers, and a 1991 investigation by the newspaper Hadashot, established the existence of a contingency plan, codenamed Hafarferet (Mole), which proposed to embroil Jordan in a war, and in the course of this to annex the West Bank and expel the Palestinian population from Israel.

This plan was drawn up for army Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan, at the time involved, alongside his patron Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and his close ally Director General of the Defence Ministry Shimon Peres, in a struggle for control of the Israel Labour Party. This struggle led to a number of security scandals, including a disastrous covert operation in Egypt (the “Lavon affair”).

Although eventually not implemented, unit commanders had been briefed about this plan, and the Kufr Qasim killers clearly thought that they were implementing government policy.

In the north of Israel, some 5000 Palestinian villagers were indeed expelled to Syria, by forces under the direct command of Yitzhak Rabin.

The lesson of this massacre, not lost on today’s Israeli forces, is that although massacres and atrocities are “officially” forbidden, those who carry them out are indeed carrying out an approved policy.

If the scandal becomes too great, they may be symbolically punished – but they will also be rewarded.

Indeed, it is appropriate that on 30 October 2006 – just one day after the fiftieth anniversary of the Kufr Qasim massacre – the Knesset approved the appointment of Avigdor Lieberman as Israel’s Minister of Strategic Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister.

Lieberman, an immigrant from Moldova, is the foremost advocate in Israeli politics of what is euphemistically called “transfer” – the forcible expulsion of all Arabs from the state. His appointment makes him responsible for Israel’s relations with Iran, a country which he has publicly advocated bombing. So extreme are his views that former PM Sharon sacked him from the cabinet, stating “We regard Israeli Arabs as part of the State of Israel”.

Lieberman has called for the execution of Arab Knesset members who meet members of the elected Palestinian Hamas government. He proposed bombing the Aswan dam and flooding Egypt in response to Egyptian support for the Palestinian Authority, and he has argued in cabinet that Israel should act in Gaza “like Russia operates in Chechnya”.

He calls for the establishment of a strong presidential system in Israel, posing himself as the strong man to save Israel.

Writing in Ha’Aretz, Israeli journalist Akiva Eldar argues that “The prevalent comparison between Avigdor Lieberman and Joerg Haider does an injustice to the Austrian nationalist”, while Hebrew University professor Zeev Sternhell, a historian of fascism, has described him as “perhaps the most dangerous politician in the history of the state of Israel”.

In the last elections, Lieberman's party made huge gains, receiving 11 of the 120 seats in the Knesset, and opinion polls suggest that he would now win 20, and head the second-largest party.

His views are an accurate reflection of Israel's current politics, and Gideon Levy is surely right to state in Ha'Aretz that "Lieberman, the declared racist, is preferable to the self-righteous and hypocritical ones who may speak of peace but wage war".

It was Israel's Labour Party that prepared, enabled and attempted to cover up the 1956 Kufr Qasim massacre, just as it was a Peace Now-supporting Labour Defence Minister who ran the murderous 2006 war against Lebanon, and who now agrees to sit in cabinet with Lieberman.

Such is the nature of the party, and its "Labour Zionist" politics. They will play no part in preventing the resistible rise of Avigdor Lieberman.

Gaza faces new standoff over water rights

Alice Gray

Socialist Resistance : SR42 - February 2007

The political rhetoric and frequent violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often serve to mask underlying environmental issues which, if not resolved, may pose an even greater threat to the well-being of the Palestinian population than the guns and bombs of the military occupation.

Environmental degradation threatens to undermine the viability of any future Palestinian state and create conditions that will make life in many parts of the Palestinian Territories impossible. Many environmental problems are accelerated and exacerbated by occupation practices, which prevent effective environmental management. This problem is particularly acute in Gaza in relation to the water resources and the ongoing military conflict.

The roots of Gaza's water problem lie in the over-population of the area, due to a high influx of refugees in 1948, when approximately 200,000 people fled to Gaza from the Jaffa and Beersheva areas of what is now Israel, following Israel's War of Independence. The original population of the Gaza Strip at that time was 80,000 people, thus this represented an increase of some 250%. Today, over three quarters of the estimated Gazan population of 1.4 million are registered refugees. [1]

The Gaza Strip is a very small area of land with a total area of only 360 square kilometers (roughly 150 square miles — ed.). It is underlain by a shallow aquifer, which is contiguous with the Israeli Coastal Aquifer to the north. Gaza is the "downstream user" of the Coastal Aquifer system, and hence water abstraction in Gaza does not affect Israeli water supplies.

The Gaza Aquifer has a natural recharge rate of approximately 65 million cubic meters (MCM) of water per year from rainfall and lateral inflow of water from Israel and Egypt. This aquifer is essentially the only source of fresh water in the Gaza Strip.

By 1967, when Israel occupied Gaza, the sustainable yield of the aquifer was being fully utilized. Since then, as the population has grown, so too has the demand for fresh water. No serious attempt was made at exercising any water management strategy in the Gaza Strip during the Israeli administration, with the number of registered wells increasing from 1200 in 1967 to 2100 in 1993.

Abstraction from the aquifer was approximately 110 MCM per year by 1993, resulting in falling water levels and degrading water quality due to seawater infiltration, caused by the over-pumping that had been taking place. Likewise, there was little investment in maintaining or improving the deteriorating water infrastructures of Palestinian municipalities during this period, despite taxes being paid by Palestinians to the Israeli government.

In 1994, the Gaza-Jericho agreement placed water resources in the Gaza Strip under the control of the newly formed Palestinian Authority (PA) and, in 1995, the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) was formed. It was given the mandate for managing water in the Palestinian Territories.

At this time, it was widely recognized that there was a serious environmental problem with the Gaza Aquifer, with experts predicting that if nothing was done, the entire aquifer would become unusable by the year 2000. In addition, the water infrastructure was in a very poor state, with 50% of water being lost through leaking pipes.

Therefore the PWA, with the help of international donors (principally the United States Agency for International Development — USAID), set out to develop a management strategy for the Gaza Aquifer and engaged the engineering firm Metcalf & Eddy to carry out an environmental survey and draw up a management plan. The Integrated Coastal Aquifer Management Plan (CAMP) was drawn up in 2000, with an implementation period of 20 years.

The main components of the CAMP included reducing the amount of water pumped from the aquifer for agricultural irrigation, while simultaneously improving supply of drinking water to the population by providing additional water from sources other than the aquifer. These included the import of water from Israel, construction of seawater desalination plants and improving wastewater treatment to allow it to be used for irrigation and managed aquifer recharge.

It was envisaged that, in the longer term, following a political settlement with Israel, and resolution of the Palestinians' water rights in the West Bank, a pipeline could be constructed between the West Bank and Gaza to ensure adequate supplies for the growing population. If implemented on schedule, it was expected that the CAMP would bring the Gaza Aquifer back into a positive water balance by 2007, whereas "failure to implement the CAMP in accordance with the schedule will result in continuing decline in the quantity and quality of the aquifer water."

The Impact of Conflict

Unfortunately, completion of the CAMP (May, 2000) narrowly preceded the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada in September 2000. Despite initial attempts to implement the plan, and small progress in some areas, little has been achieved since then.

The number of agricultural wells, many of them unregistered, has increased to approximately 4000; the supply of water from Israel has declined by approximately

half from 1998 to 2004 in breach of the Oslo Accords; construction of the planned regional desalination plant halted in 2003 when one of the workers was killed; and Gaza's wastewater treatment facilities are still vastly inadequate, with 80 % of sewage being discharged untreated into the environment (UNEP, 2003).

In addition, missile strikes and ground incursions have repeatedly damaged and destroyed pipelines, and maintenance personnel have been arrested, shot at, or even killed whilst trying to carry out repairs.

Inadequate sewage treatment infrastructure and damage to wastewater and drinking water pipelines has allowed sewage water to contaminate drinking water supplies, leading to sharp increases in water borne diseases in many areas.

Failure to control over-pumping has led to sea-water intrusion into the aquifer to the extent that, in 2003, only 10 % of the wells produced water of World Health Organization (WHO) drinking water standards. Most recently, this year's Israeli invasion of Gaza (Operation Summer Rain, June 2006) caused untold damage to water infrastructure, with destruction of the Gaza Electric Station affecting the operation of the majority of wells, pumping stations and sewage treatment facilities.

In short, Gaza teeters on the brink of a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe and urgent action is required to prevent widespread suffering. To compound matters, USAID have recently pulled out of the Palestinian water sector, abandoning ongoing projects and closing their contactors' offices, in an international aid embargo aimed at undermining the Hamas government.

As with so many international sanctions and embargoes (like Iraq for example), the result of this move is the communal punishment of every man, woman and child in the country targeted. It is a clumsy, inept and immoral means of pressuring the government to fall into line; and primarily hurts the most vulnerable members of the society.

The options for improving the water situation in Gaza remain effectively unchanged since 2000. Namely, additional supplies must be made available: through desalination, wastewater treatment and reuse, import from Israel, or import from the West Bank. Currently, the unstable conditions in the Gaza Strip make large scale engineering projects impossible to implement.

The less technically difficult options of water import from Israel or the West Bank are loaded with political implications and complexities. Both require the cooperation of Israel to ensure their implementation as additional pipelines would need to be constructed, and in the first case, the Israeli water company, Mekorot, would have to supply the water; whereas in the second, a pipeline would have to be constructed across Israeli territory. Furthermore, an agreement would have to be reached on Palestinian water rights in the West Bank.

The water situation in the West Bank is almost the exact inverse of Gaza, in that there are relatively abundant water resources in the Mountain Aquifer system and Jordan River, but there is very little access to or sovereignty over them. This is due to the fact that Palestinians have been denied any access to the Jordan River waters since 1967, and 80% of the Mountain Aquifer water is utilized by Israel, which is downstream of the West Bank in terms of water usage. Thus control over water resources was very tight during the Israeli administration (1967 — 1995), with only

23 licenses being granted for new wells, and the number of working wells, in fact, decreasing from 413 in 1967, to 300 by 1983.

Many communities in the West Bank currently suffer from severe water shortages, and 13% of the West Bank population is not connected to any form of water network. The Oslo Agreements of the 1990s deferred definition of Palestinian water rights in the West Bank to “final status negotiations,” which have yet to take place.

Crisis of Dependency

Thus resolution of Palestine’s water problems is utterly dependent on cooperation from Israel; and inaction will lead to a serious environmental disaster in Gaza and to continued suffering for many water starved communities in the West Bank. Water shortage also undermines the agricultural sector and prevents it from developing, with consequences for the food security and economic well-being of the Palestinian population.

When considering the likelihood of cooperation being forthcoming from Israel, it is worth reviewing several statements that have been made by Israel’s leaders in recent years. Yitzhak Rabin, former Labor Party Prime Minister, during his tenure as Israeli Minister of Defense, in the 1980s, stated that “Israel will create in the course of the next 10 or 20 years, conditions which would attract natural and voluntary migration of the refugees from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to Jordan.”

It may be that Rabin had changed his mind by the time he made the historic move of shaking hands with Yasser Arafat and legitimizing the Palestinian Authority. It is possible, although various features of the Oslo Accords, such as the minimal transfer of sovereignty over environmental resources would suggest otherwise. It is possible. No one can tell what Israel and Palestine would have looked like today if Rabin had not been assassinated by a far right Jewish extremist.

However, if Rabin no longer believed in transfer of the West Bank and Gazan populations, Ariel Sharon, architect of the Gaza Disengagement Plan certainly did. Many years ago he explained that “You don’t simply bundle people onto trucks and drive them away. I prefer to advocate a positive policy, to create, in effect, a condition that in a positive way will induce people to leave.”

Olmert, Sharon’s heir, has also recently avowed his commitment to the ideal of ‘Eretz Israel’ saying that “Only a person in whose soul Eretz Yisrael burns knows the pain of letting go of our ancestral heritage,” and explaining: “I believed, and to this day still believe, in our people’s eternal and historic right to this entire land.”

What can be perceived here is that many of Israel’s leaders, while appearing to make concessions to the Palestinians, have in fact retained an ideological commitment to ‘Eretz Israel from the river to the sea,’ and have concentrated their policy towards creating ‘facts on the ground’ that will make life for the Palestinians impossible, hence creating the ‘positive conditions’ required to induce people to leave.

Creating Mini-Gazas

A close examination of the Gazan water crisis illustrates this point very well. If nothing is done, there will be no usable water resources in Gaza and it will become impossible to live there. Nothing can be done without Israeli cooperation.

Thus, whilst Israel may not have intentionally set out to create the Gaza water crisis, it fits in rather well with Zionist expansionist aspirations to perpetuate the situation and prevent meaningful action being taken to resolve it. If one examines the process that is taking place in the West Bank, whereby a series of Bantustans are being created through land confiscation, settlement expansion and the building of the "Separation Barrier," with the population becoming ever more urbanized, and access to resources such as water and land becoming ever more restricted, it is possible to see that what in effect is happening is the creation of a number of "mini Gazas."

To illustrate this point: the building of the Wall in the north of the West Bank led to the destruction of 25 wells and the isolation of 50 more, isolating many localities from their only source of water and destroying the irrigated farming industry. One estimate anticipates that when completed, the Wall will isolate Palestinians from 65% of their water resources (CAABU, 2003), although so much uncertainty surrounds its final route that no solid predictions can be made.

Thus a number of highly urbanized communities will be created, with poor economic and social conditions and inadequate resources to sustain themselves. This is the manifestation of Sharon's "positive policy," which essentially amounts to ethnic cleansing by other means, causing widespread suffering, illness and death.

It is clear that the viability of the Palestinian state and the livelihoods of the Palestinian people are being systematically undermined. The situation is not yet so far gone that it is irreversible. However, given the advantages to Israel of allowing the current state of affairs to persist, and the urgency of immediate action to avert catastrophe in Gaza, it is clear that international intervention is required to protect the human rights of the Palestinian people and prevent humanitarian and environmental disaster.

NOTES

[1] See UNRWA (2006) The Gaza Refugees.

Crisis in Palestine

Piers Mostyn

Socialist Outlook : SO/13 - Autumn 2007

The rise of Hamas over the past two decades is rooted in disillusion with the corruption and compromise of the Fatah leadership of the Palestinian movement. This has grown since the Oslo 'peace process' of the 1990s, with the beefing up of settlements, the separation wall, military incursions and mass detentions. Piers Mostyn looks at recent events in Palestine.

In January 2006 Hamas won elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Increasing its share of the vote from 20% to 43%, Hamas took 60% of the seats. The election was pronounced fair by international monitors. But the US, motivated by strategic concerns arising from the Iraqi quagmire and a renewed targeting of 'Iranian influence', refused to accept the outcome. In a co-ordinated Israeli-US-EU response, an international blockade was imposed on the Occupied Territories of

Palestine. There was a refusal to recognise the new Hamas-led government and Israel withheld hundreds of millions of pounds of Palestinian tax revenues.

From the start Hamas called for a broad unity government. But under pressure from Bush, who threatened Abbas with political isolation, Fatah wouldn't agree. Hamas also indicated that it was willing to de facto recognise Israel's existence and offered a ten year truce if it moved back to pre-1967 borders. But in June Israel engaged in a five-month military assault on Gaza killing hundreds, injuring thousands and wrecking transport, medical, water and power facilities. A humanitarian crisis ensued with aid agencies warning that the majority of Gaza's 1.4 million inhabitants were at serious risk of malnutrition and disease.

Through all this Britain remained a loyal exponent of the ongoing blockade. And the government turned a blind eye to the Israeli bombardment along with the quiet nod to its murderous war on Lebanon.

The Israeli assault had barely finished when a different threat to the newly elected Palestinian Administration blew up. Palestinian 'security forces' under Fatah control – in particular Mohammed Dahlan's Gaza-based 'Preventative Security Forces' - had refused to co-operate with the PA interior ministry once Fatah lost power after the election. In November the US State Department organised tens of millions of dollars of military aid to Dahlan. And in December Blair visited Abbas in Ramallah with a follow up promise of £13 million to beef up his 'security forces'. Both continued to treat Fatah as if it had won the election rather than lost it – funding, arming and directly encouraging agents within it to reverse the outcome by force. They got what they wanted when factional divisions erupted into violence, leaving over a hundred dead.

Saudi-sponsored agreement

In February 2007 a Saudi-sponsored agreement in Mecca, for a unity government between Hamas and Fatah, stopped the fighting. Bush opposed this because it left Hamas in power. According to US government documents that then began circulating, at subsequent meetings with US and Israeli government officials, Abbas was told to scrap the deal. The US planned a further \$1.27 billion military aid programme that would add seven battalions to the 15,000 Abbas already had under his control. Once again Dahlan was the main vehicle for organising it. [1]

As Michel Warshawski has pointed out, the US appeared to have an 'Algerian solution' in mind. [2] In 1991 the FIS, an Islamic party, won elections in Algeria and were about to form a government. Backed by France and other Western powers, the Algerian military seized power and followed this by years of fomenting a brutal civil war. Over 150,000 died.

Finding out about the plot to bring down the unity government, in June Hamas took successful pre-emptive military action against Dahlan's militia. Although fairly bloody, this was a short-lived affair because Hamas had mass support and Dahlan was widely discredited. Blair, Bush and Olmert orchestrated an international outcry against the Hamas 'coup'. The western media took up the theme of a Palestinian 'civil war'. But this was a coup plot against the elected Palestinian Administration - organised, armed and financed by the imperialist states - that had been derailed.

Less publicly-visible was the role of the reactionary western-aligned Arab states. Egypt delivered the arms to Dahlan (with Israeli assistance, as it controls the borders). And Jordan and Egypt were quick to lend support to Abbas in a summit with him and Israel at Sharm El-Sheik on the 25th June. At first this may seem difficult to reconcile with Saudi involvement in the Mecca agreement. But a likely scenario is what Alastair Crooke, a former Palestine-based M16 officer and now advisor to EU foreign policy boss Javier Solana, has described as a planned 'soft coup d'etat' in which Abbas would have dismissed the Hamas government in August. [3]

Hamas has since renewed calls to resume dialogue and for a new unity government. Abu Obieda, leader of its Izzidine Qassam Brigades, has said, 'The Fatah men we fought are not my enemy ... the decisions they had to follow came from outside Gaza: from Ramallah, from the Israelis, from America ... I am not proud to have defeated and killed the men of Fatah. This is a shame on all Palestinians because we love each other'. [4]

Nonetheless there have been credible reports of Hamas repression in Gaza. For example, Fatah MP Ashraf Jum'a was detained leading to a protest demonstration which was attacked by the Hamas 'Executive Force' resulting in at least one detainee being allegedly tortured. [5]

It is yet to be seen whether Hamas is able to nourish democratic pluralism, even if it wants to. Prior to these events Gaza was already one of the densest and poorest communities on earth. Israel has now sealed all borders. Sixty-eight thousand have lost work as a result, contributing to 85% private sector unemployment: 825,000 refugees are completely dependent on UN emergency aid. [6]

The West Bank

Meanwhile in the West Bank Abbas declared a 'state of emergency', replacing Hamas PM Ismail Haniyeh and his national unity government with former IMF and World Bank official Salam Fayyad and an 'emergency cabinet' of western backed technocrats. Mirroring Washington's tactics in foisting unpopular stooges on the Iraqi population, Fayyad's party secured only 2% in the 2006 election.

Abbas's actions are unconstitutional. He can sack the Prime Minister but any new government has to be confirmed by the PLC. In an emergency Abbas can rule by decree but the PLC has to approve all these decrees. He cannot suspend the PLC and has no power to call early elections. The basic law has no provision whatsoever for an 'emergency government'. [7] In an attempt to circumvent a thirty day limitation on any 'state of emergency' Fayyad 'resigned' on 13th July only to be immediately sworn back. But this too was unconstitutional as any extension requires approval from two-thirds of the PLC. Meanwhile, Fatah has boycotted two scheduled PLC meetings and Hamas has refused to attend a session called by Abbas.

In this light, reported comments by Abbas aide Nabil Amr, that it was likely that the Fayyad government's term would be extended indefinitely despite 'legal reservations', need to be taken seriously. [8]

In short, the Abbas government appears to be an illegal dictatorship arising from an attempted coup financed and organised from Washington. Ali Abunimah, co-founder of the Electronic Intifada, describes it as a, 'quiescent' government like the

collaborationist Vichy regime in France during the second world war. [9] Anis al Qasem, one of the Palestinian lawyers who drafted the Basic Law of Palestine has accused Abbas of, 'destroying the foundation on which the Basic Law is laid'. [10]

All this is in the context of over half of Hamas MPs (as many as 50, over a third of the PLC) being detained by Israel forces without charge. In addition Fatah has been imprisoning Hamas activists, leaders and MPs in the West Bank and ransacking their offices. The pretext is to prevent a Hamas 'take-over'. But Abbas also summoned 800 preachers and Imams from across the West Bank to a meeting, to warn them against 'incitement' – perhaps indicating that his main fear isn't so much 'terrorism' as mass political opposition. [11]

The US, Britain and Israel have rushed to prop up the 'emergency government'. Bush announced \$190m of new aid, in addition to \$86m requested from congress to provide security for Abbas. And he announced an autumn 'peace conference' which, it was said, would address all the outstanding issues in the conflict. But within a day Israel made clear it would not discuss the core issues of borders, refugees and Jerusalem and White House spin doctors started downplaying expectations.

Blair – Washington's enforcer

Tony Blair - fresh from a resignation fuelled by plummeting public support over his role in bringing carnage to the Middle East - has been forced on the people of the region as an 'envoy' of the UN/US/EU/Russia Quartet by Bush. He claims to be striving to, 'build government institutions and the rule of law, promote the economy and halt violence between Fatah and Hamas'. But the British government has been working for the polar opposite of all these and Blair is extremely unpopular among Palestinians. He will be Washington's enforcer, replete with guns and money, buying time and giving the illusion of progress.

Meanwhile Israel, in a bid to shore up Abbas's crumbling credibility, has lifted the blockade on the West Bank and agreed to release the stolen tax revenues. But so far only one sixth of the money (\$120m) owed has been transferred. The rest will take six months in a test of Abbas's compliance. The cash will halt and the boycott restart the moment Abbas renews contact with Hamas. Hamas has accurately described this as, 'financial bribery (and) political blackmail'.

Israel rounds up Hamas supporters

Israel has also been rounding up an average of 15-20 Hamas supporters a day, often in apparent collusion with Fatah forces who target the same individuals. [12] And dozens have been killed in regular Israeli raids on Gaza. Israel has additionally released 255 Fatah prisoners and granted an 'amnesty' to 180 members of the Fatah-affiliated Al Aqsa brigades. But here there are also strings – they have to hand in their arms and renounce resistance to Israel. Smaller militant organisations, including the left wing PFLP have denounced this. In any event 10,000 detainees are still held without charge with a new daily tally.

Hardly surprisingly there are reports of serious rifts within Fatah. An opposition group including Al-Aqsa Brigades leaders and the prisoner Marwan Al-Barghouti secured the 'resignation' of Dahlan and another Fatah security chief and others in late July. But it is far from clear that they have any broader agenda. [13] More credibly, the PFLP and the Palestinian National Initiative have launched the Joint

Initiative for National Salvation. It denounces both sides for excesses and calls for dialogue, the setting up of an interim decision making body within the PLO, that should include, 'all Palestinian political forces without exceptions', the dissolution of both the 'emergency government' and the de facto Gaza government and the formation of a transitional administration based on reconciliation and consensus between all parties. [14]

Some elements of this are positive. But the approach is abstract, failing to provide a critique of the powerplay driving these developments, wrongly stating that, 'the military takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas has thrown the Palestinian situation into danger and has diverted energy and attention away from the national struggle.'

Hamas calls for unity

Hamas has made exemplary statements in favour of unity. But it would be premature to hail its 'victory' in Gaza, given the very negative accompanying developments. A secularist, non-communal leadership - which Hamas, as the self-defined 'Islamic resistance', cannot deliver – is a prerequisite to unity, let alone any progress towards the necessary strategic goal of a unitary democratic and secular state.

But equally those who argue that 'secularism' alone is sufficient will be woefully led astray. The Abbas-appointed cabinet, deeply ensconced in Bush's trouser pocket, is as secular as they come. Recent events threaten to play right into Zionism's gameplan of a politically cantonised and geographically sliced up Palestine. But ultimately Israel's refusal to grant significant concessions is likely to prove Abbas's undoing and could yet lead to a new realignment.

Solidarity with Gaza and West Bank

The central organising role of the imperialist states, in particular Britain and the USA, must be exposed. Opposition to the blockade of Gaza and any idea of intervention are required. International aid must have all strings and conditions removed. The right of the Palestinian people to democratic self-determination has to be defended. This means solidarity with the Palestinians of both West Bank and Gaza through direct links and aid, along with support for the small forces of opposition within the Israeli state itself. In August a ship full of activists, aid workers and journalists plan to bust the blockade by sailing to Gaza – initiatives like this need all our support. [15]

NOTES

[1] Jonathan Steele, *The Guardian*, 22/6/07

[2] See <http://www.alternativenews.org/> 18/6/07

[3] *London Review of Books*, 5/7/07

[4] *The Observer*, 24/6/07

[5] See <http://www.pchrgaza.org/> 24/7/07

[6] *The Guardian*, 19/7/07, <http://www.btselem.org/> 26/7/07

[7] Virginia Tilley, *Electronic Intifada*, 24/6/07

[8] Khaled Amayreh, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 11/7/07

[9] *Electronic Intifada*, 21/7/07

[10] Kim Bullimore, *Green Left Weekly*, 20/7/07

[11] Khaled Amayreh *ibid*

[12] Khaled Amayreh ibid

[13] *The Guardian*, 27/7/07, Khaled Amayreh, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 5/7/07

[14] See <http://www.almubadara.org/> 10/7/07

[15] See <http://www.freegaza.org/> for more details.

The story behind Gaza

John McAnulty

Socialist Resistance SR 53 2009

There's a very strong reason for Israel's blitzkrieg on Gaza. In fact in between the torrent of lies they spell out elements of their reasoning. The Zionists believe that if they obliterate Hamas and demoralise the continuing resistance of the Palestinian workers, they can establish peace in the region. Mind you, it's a 'peace' that most people would flee from retching. The peace would look just like the current state of war, only the Palestinians would agree to no longer resist. They would agree to support the indefinite rule of the colonial settler state that dominates their lives. They would agree to live in large open prisons, constantly at the mercy of the Israeli military. They would agree that the Palestinian refugees, forced from their homes by ethnic cleansing, could never return to the land of their birth. The Israeli foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, has even suggested that it could solve the 'Arab question' in Israel, with Israeli Arabs shipped to the camps to join the rest of the underpeople, the victims of Zionist aggression. All the government factions cheerfully admit that their 'peace' in Gaza and the west bank would only be a stage. They plan to go on to revisit the Lebanon with the bloody carnage they brought before and to take military action against Iran.

Given that these bloodthirsty lunatics hold nuclear weapons, the consequences for us all of an Israeli victory would be fearful.

Why are they so confident that they can impose such a scheme? The answer is they have the open support of the vast majority of Arab regimes and the capitulationist regime of Palestinian President Abbas. Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia have already signed up – Egypt has the back door to Gaza sealed with banks of machine guns while Israel massacres from the front. Both have collaborated to starve the population of Gaza.

What ties them together is quite simple. All are client regimes of the United States of America. The US wants Israel to be the regional gendarmerie, suppressing revolution and protecting their oil interests. The Arab regimes are detested by Arab workers, rule through coercion and torture, and rely on the US for survival.

Any protest that limits itself to Israel is too narrow. This is the US's killing ground. Israel received \$300 billion in economic aid this year and a greater amount in military aid. The current massacre was preceded by the delivery of a totally new 'bunker buster' bomb to the Israelis – even before it was deployed to the US forces! Both

Bush and Obama are fanatical supporters of the Israeli strategy. The US government openly justifies the slaughter, and their allies in the other major capitalist powers manoeuvre to buy the Israelis time and defuse opposition. Gordon Brown even called a situation where 100 Palestinians are killed for each Israeli 'tit for tat' and the call goes out for both sides to ceasefire, ignoring the Israeli aggression that set it off and trying to pin the blame for war on the victims. The latest plan from the Western powers is to bring in foreign troops to occupy Gaza without risk to Israeli troops and ensure the Palestinians are disarmed and unable to stage any resistance in future!

As with imperialist goons down the years, the Israelis hope to use overwhelming military force to achieve political victory. In the process they are forced to risk political resources. A solidarity movement in Ireland can do nothing about the military situation. We can do our best to inflict political damage on the imperialist side.

Our demand must be that Israel be made to pay for the genocide – boycott should not simply be the pinpricks of individual moral outrage but be taken collectively by the institutions that claim to represent us. The boycott of Israeli goods must be a demand we make of the Irish state and of the trade unions, civic institutions and political parties – calls must be matched by active campaigning to enforce the boycott. The government should halt goods at the ports, break existing contracts and oppose European collaboration with Israel. The ambassador should be immediately expelled. It's not so long ago that the great and the good were tut-tutting an academic boycott of Israel – contrast that to the absolute silence which greeted the destruction of the Islamic university in Gaza!

We should have nothing to do with calls for a return to the peace process or for a two-state solution or blather about the good offices of the UN, a tool of American foreign policy. This is the peace process – the open prisons are the 'second state'. The solution to the carnage is a secular state called Palestine where all have equal rights, ruled by a working class able to expel the imperialist warmongers.

Peace in Palestine is a long way off. Even if Hamas survives there is no possibility of an Islamicist movement uniting Palestinian workers or even being able to deal politically with the open treachery of the Arab ruling classes. The only reason that Hamas are in the leadership of resistance is that the Palestinian left capitulated utterly and bought into alliances with the Arab bourgeoisie and sponsorship by the US.

A successful resistance that builds peace in the Middle East will be a working class movement with global solidarity.

John McAnulty is a supporter of Socialist Democracy (Ireland)

The Nakba sixty years on – no cause for celebration

Piers Mostyn

Socialist Resistance SR 51 2008

On the 14th of May 1948, the state of Israel was proclaimed. Its foundational myths are that the Zionist colonisers were Davids fighting a Goliath, compelled by the Holocaust to carve out a haven of safety, with no desire to force out the indigenous Palestinians who departed voluntarily.

But that falsity has been exposed. The opening up of official records under the 30 year rule led to a thorough re-examination by Israel's "revisionist" historians - like Ilan Pappé and Benny Morris - who revealed that 1948 was in fact a brutal act of mass ethnic cleansing.

The Palestinians call 1948 the Nakba (catastrophe). Its roots stretching back to the end of the 19th century, it involved driving the Palestinian people off their land, to make way for a colonial settler state acting as a regional agent for imperialism. That war continues today.

The first Zionist migrants arrived in Palestine in 1882 and the first Zionist Congress was held 15 years later. But Zionism before World War I was a very small movement, marginal even among Jewish refugees fleeing the wave of anti-Semitism sweeping across Eastern Europe; the vast majority settling in the West where they helped energise the rising tide of the left.

Aware of their weak position, Zionist leaders sought sponsorship from the imperial powers, initially the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Czar and the German Kaiser. Britain became the preferred option when it filled the vacuum left by the break up of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. After World War II the USA took the mantle.

Two key events triggering the Nakba were the formation of a special committee by the United Nations (UNSCOP) in February 1947 to formulate recommendations on future status and a British announcement in September 1947 that Britain's "Mandate" to run Palestine since 1923 would end on the 15th of May 1948.

The majority of UNSCOP recommended partition into two states. It conceded that this contradicted the principle of self determination; a cornerstone of international relations and widely held as applicable to Palestine following the disintegration of Ottoman rule. At the time Jews comprised one third of the population, owning 7% of the land. Despite this UNSCOP proposed that the Jewish state occupy 58% of the British mandate territory with the Palestinian two thirds majority, owning 90% of the land, getting the rest.

Not surprisingly the Palestinians rejected partition as totally unacceptable. The UNSCOP minority, favouring one federal state, warned of the long term dangers.

The main movers behind partition at the UN were the USA and USSR. Their cynical support for Zionism was motivated by cold war jockeying for position and a desire to hegemonise the oil rich region. Despite abstaining, Britain soon became a stalwart supporter. The support of the social democratic and Stalinist leaderships significantly undermined the prospects for building international solidarity with the Palestinians in the decades that followed.

Zionist militias, active for nearly two decades, had been preparing. Within a fortnight of UNSCOP's recommendations being adopted by the UN in November 1947 the first expulsions of Palestinians began. By March 1948 the Zionist military campaign had begun in earnest.

In the first phase urban Palestine was targeted. Militias occupied Jaffa, Haifa and nine other mixed Arab-Jewish towns, expelling the Palestinian population. The second phase, beginning in May 1948, focussed more on rural areas. Aerial bombardment and heavy shelling of civilian areas combined with the destruction of hundreds of villages by the Zionists led to further deaths and ethnic cleansing.

Most notorious among the atrocities was the April 1948 massacre of 120 inhabitants of Deir Yassin by the Stern Gang. Such events served notice on Palestinian villagers thinking of resistance, many of whom fled in terror at the advance of the militias.

Ilan Pappé recounts events in Tantura, an old Palestinian village, "On the night of 22 May, the village was attacked from four sides . . . The captives were moved to the beach. There, the men were separated from the women and children, who were expelled to nearby Fureidis (Some families were reunited eighteen months later). Two hundred men between the ages of 13 and 30 were massacred by the Alexandroni and other Jewish forces. . . . There were similar incidents in many other locations, the details of which still await the research of future scholars." (A Modern History of Palestine)

More than 531 Palestinian villages (out of 1000) were destroyed, depopulated and taken over. Some three quarters of a million Palestinians became refugees - 90% of those who had been living on what was designated as the Jewish state.

In December 1948 the new Israeli government retrospectively legalised land seizures and forbade victims from claiming any compensation. And the "Law of the Lands of Israel" stated that lands acquired by Zionist purchase would be leased in perpetuity on the condition that such lands would only be given to Jews. On this basis Israel's remaining Arab citizens and their descendants were denied access to 95% of its land. Zionist war success was such that by its end Israel had blatantly flouted even the UN partition plan by seizing 78% of Palestinian territory. What had been a Jewish minority of one third had driven out the majority and occupied over three quarters of the territory.

Nonetheless in May 1949 the UN General Assembly approved Israel's membership of the UN, resolving that "Israel is a peace-loving state which accepts the obligations contained in the Charter and is able and willing to carry out those obligations".

Since then, a state backed settlement expansion programme on top of the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has left Palestinians with a miserable 8% of the former Palestinian territories. This territory is supposed to comprise the Palestinian side of the "two-state solution" currently hawked by Israel and the West.

Sixty years on, almost 75% of the Palestinian people are displaced - three quarters in forced exile and one quarter in the West Bank and Gaza. The 4.2 million dispersed across the Middle East and other parts of the world are the world's largest and longest standing unresolved refugee case.

The Arab minority within Israel is subject to a regime of legal, political, social, economic and cultural state racism. And hundreds of thousands of Bedouins have been expelled from the Negev and other parts of the country adding to the displaced refugee population.

What's left of the Palestinian population has been crushed into poverty stricken Bantustans surrounded by the Israeli army, laced with roads reserved for Zionist settlers, peppered with hundreds of settlements that take the water and best land and carved up by the "apartheid wall".

The drive to contain resistance has involved killing tens of thousands with many more being detained, often without charge. In 2006, the Palestinians elected a Hamas government that sought to resist this set up - its MPs and ministers were jailed. The main Hamas stronghold, in Gaza, has been subject to two years of military assaults and economic blockade, leaving its 1.4 million inhabitants on the verge of famine.

Far from confronting these strategies, the USA and Britain have used them as a model for the occupation of Iraq. And Britain's political establishment has celebrated the sixtieth anniversary. But this is nothing new.

In the McMahon-Hussein correspondence in 1915-6, a senior British diplomat promised British support for Arab independence in exchange for support for the allied war effort to bring down the Ottoman regime.

The USA, under Woodrow Wilson, announced a doctrine of self determination for the post World War I order. This was endorsed by the Anglo-French Declaration of 1918 whose goals included "the complete and final liberation of the peoples who have for so long been oppressed by the Turks and the setting up of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from free exercise of the initiative and choice of the indigenous populations".

In 1919 the Covenant of the League of Nations enshrined the doctrine of self determination. The establishment of the "mandate" system under which Britain ruled Palestine was then presented merely as a temporary stepping stone to independent statehood in the 1920 Treaty of Sevres between the Allied Powers and Turkey.

But these commitments were duplicitous. In 1916 the Sykes-Picot Agreement, secretly signed between Britain and France, had divided the Ottoman Empire between the two states, with Palestine reserved for British control. And in 1917 Britain endorsed the Balfour Declaration - a letter from the Foreign Secretary to the British Zionist Federation granting recognition of and support for a Jewish "national home" in Palestine.

The British encouraged Zionist colonisation and suppressed a series of Palestinian uprisings, including the "Great Revolt" of 1936-9 in co-operation with Zionist militias. The first phase of the Nakba occurred whilst Britain had responsibility for security and its officials looked on.

So what is the balance sheet of the Israeli state sixty years on? An out-runner for neoliberal capitalism, Israel has the biggest gap between rich and poor in the industrialised world. 1.25 million people, 40% of them working, are below the poverty line.

It has created an environmental disaster story, particularly in the Occupied Palestinian Territories - with water levels plummeting, toxic waste abounding, fields and olive trees destroyed.

And rampant racism against the so-called "Oriental" Jews - the backbone of the Israeli working class - has exposed the fallacy behind claims of a "home for the Jewish people".

Israel's much vaunted image of military prowess has been undermined. The spectacular failure of the Lebanon invasion in 2006 has been followed by the current resurgence of Hezbollah and the failure to crush Hamas.

Seemingly endless wars and invasions have sparked mass internal opposition. Whilst this is mainly tied to support for the Zionist state, it has brought to the surface

decades of division over the nature of the project and how it relates to those it oppresses and expropriates.

Thousands of young people have become "Refusniks" - conscripts refusing to take part in the oppression of the Palestinians. Over 280 have been court-martialled and jailed for up to 35 days.

One consequence has been a substantial emigration of Jews. As of mid 2004 760,000 Israeli Jews were living abroad. An increase of 40% since 2000.

A primary factor in this crisis has been the unrelenting opposition of the Palestinian people. A resistance largely based on grass roots activism and in spite of a bloated, corrupt leadership; betrayal by the reactionary Arab states and disunity fomented by the imperialist states.

In the circumstances, it is unlikely Israel would be contemplating a 60th anniversary but for its complete dependence on the imperialism whose regional interests it serves. Since the 1950s 18% of Israel's GDP has derived from individuals, organisations and states abroad (chiefly the USA). Official figures valuing US aid since 1973 at \$100 billion (a third of its foreign aid budget) are reckoned to be as little as a sixteenth of the true figure.

This financial, military and political underpinning and the historic responsibility of the USA, Britain and the EU in their support for Israel needs to be exposed and opposed. On its foundations is built the "legality" of the 1948 state - through their domination of UN and other international institutions. A far more difficult task than that of opposing apartheid, 1948 teaches us that the ruling ideology of the imperialist age and its state backers have to be confronted, not simply its reactionary outposts.

The end of Zionism?

Roland Rance

Socialist Outlook : SO/01 - Autumn 2003

In a recent article in Israel's leading daily, Ha'Aretz, two veteran activists independently reach the same conclusion: that there is no longer any possibility of a two-state resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. They argue that the only acceptable solution is the return of Palestine refugees, the abrogation of Israel's Law of Return, and the establishment of a bi-national state in the whole of Palestine. [1]

Haim Hanegbi, one of the founders in the 1960s of Matzpen, the anti-Zionist, Israeli Socialist Organisation, had wholeheartedly supported the Oslo agreement, to such an extent that he even joined the Israel Labour Party. Now, he says:

Everyone with eyes to see and ears to hear has to understand that only a bi-national partnership can save us. . . Israel as a Jewish state can no longer exist here. . . If Israel remains a colonialist state in its character, it will not survive . . . The attempt to achieve Jewish sovereignty that is fenced in and insular has to be abandoned. [2]

Meron Benvenisti, a founder of the liberal, anti-occupation, Meretz party, was for many years deputy mayor of Jerusalem - something that would be inconceivable today, with the huge growth in Jewish fundamentalism in the city. He argues that,

In fact, even today, we are living a bi-national reality, and it is a permanent given.. The basic story here is not one of two national movements that are confronting each

other; the basic story is that of natives and settlers. . . this country will not tolerate a border in its midst. . . What we have to do is to try to reach a situation of personal and collective equality within the framework of one overall regime throughout the country. [3]

Although they come from different corners of the political spectrum, Hanegbi and Benvenisti have some common political and social background. Crucially, both are in their seventies, and grew up in Jerusalem as a multicultural and undivided city before the partition of Palestine. They are both more concerned with the nature of the society in which they live than in its borders, and the article is a convincing rejoinder to the mainstream Israeli politicians in the recent Guardian debate on two states, in which both participants ignore even the theoretical possibility of a bi-national approach. [4]

The positions advanced by Hanegbi and Benvenisti will not be new to readers of Socialist Outlook. They point out the expansion of Israeli settlements, the obscenity of the apartheid wall, the centrality of the Palestinian right to return, the ecological and economic unity of the region, and the obvious truth that Israel has no intention of enabling the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. Indeed, these insights are not even uncommon in Israel, and have for decades informed the positions of the small (but growing) number of radical activists. What is new, and significant, is the fact that these arguments, long treated as eccentric and beyond the pale, are becoming recognised as legitimate and serious contributions to the public debate in Israel. While not yet mainstream, they can no longer be disregarded.

It is not hard to see why, as the Oslo agreement collapses amid the barbarism of Israel's onslaught against the Palestinian people. The shortcomings of this agreement were apparent from the start: the Palestinians were to give up any hope of return of the refugees, or even meaningful compensation, in return for a very limited autonomy in a de-militarised and divided fraction of Palestine. They would have no rule in even part of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements would not be removed, and Israel would not end its massive exploitation of Palestinian water. Even under the most favourable of circumstances, Oslo could not have brought an end to the conflict.

In any case, successive Israeli governments have made it clear that they have no intention of honouring the letter or spirit of Oslo. Even Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated by a settler after he signed the agreement, repeatedly reneged on commitments and failed to honour promises. His successors (with the exception of Shimon Peres, who was briefly Prime Minister following Rabin's murder) all opposed the agreement at the time, and have done their best to ensure its failure. Since the Oslo agreement, Israeli settlements have doubled in number and population, while their size has increased massively. Palestinians in the 1967-occupied territories have been under almost constant curfew, their economy has collapsed, and child malnutrition has soared.

Ehud Barak's so-called 'generous offer' at Camp David was nothing of the kind; as Gush Shalom, of the Israeli Peace Bloc, notes, this offer 'left the Palestinians able only to tortuously navigate throughout 17.6% of their historic homeland . . . it is a humiliating demand for surrender'. And this contempt continues. Israel's response to the latest 'road map proposals' from the US was to issue a list of fourteen

'reservations', spelling out that there would be no return of refugees, no Palestinian autonomy in Jerusalem, no Palestinian army, and that there would be 'Israeli control over the entry and exit of all persons and cargo, as well as of its air space and electromagnetic spectrum'.

The Right of Return

Although it is clear that Israeli intransigence fatally undermined the Oslo agreement, it would be a mistake to suppose that the agreement would have resolved the conflict, even if Israel's leaders had genuinely acted to do so. In the first place, the agreement failed to address the concerns of most Palestinians. For some - those living under Israeli military rule in the West Bank and Gaza - it would have offered some immediate improvement, with the removal of Israeli forces from everyday control over a large part of the territory. Even for these Palestinians, the improvement would have been limited, since they would have few resources and an impoverished population, with no access to sources of income, employment or markets beyond their borders. Additionally, 1.5 million residents of the occupied territories - about half the total population - are refugees expelled from their homes, towns and villages in Israel, who would not be allowed to return, but would be expected to accept their exile and settle permanently where they now live.

Implementation of the Oslo agreement would have been particularly problematic for Palestinians living in Jerusalem, illegally annexed by Israel following its conquest in 1967. Most of them have refused Israeli citizenship and maintained their Palestinian identity cards. There was great fear that they would be compelled to choose between taking Israeli citizenship, or moving to the Palestinian 'state'.

There are a further 2.5 million registered refugees in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, plus hundreds of thousands of Palestinian exiles elsewhere, who would not be allowed to return to their homes. Many of these - particularly those in Lebanon, subject to growing discrimination - fear being uprooted once more, and forced into the already overcrowded and under-resourced West Bank.

Palestinian citizens of Israel, too, 20% of the population, living under institutionalised discrimination, had reason to be concerned that the establishment of limited Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories would further threaten their situation. There are increasing calls in Israel, even from cabinet ministers, for the forcible expulsion of all Palestinians; some suggest an 'exchange of population' with the settlers, and the establishment of an Arab-free, Jewish state.

Two States No Answer

Although many liberals and utopian optimists will attempt to develop another Oslo-style, two-state approach to the Palestine conflict, we must recognise that this cannot succeed. There can be no solution based on redrawing the borders in the Middle East, because this conflict is not about borders. As Benvenisti recognises, Palestine is a classic colonial situation, in which the Zionist movement, with the backing of western imperialism, has replaced the indigenous Arab population with Jewish settlers. This is as true in the areas within the pre-1967 borders of the state of Israel, as in the territories occupied in 1967. In fact, the period of partition, from 1948 to 1967, was an anomaly in the history of Palestine; its history, like its geography and ecology, can only be understood as a whole.

The Zionist movement, in its colonisation of Palestine, did not merely uproot the Palestinians from their land, which it divided and partitioned; it divided and partitioned the Palestinian people themselves. Their fragmented and sometimes conflicting interests are a direct result of the different situations and regimes which they have experienced as a result of Zionist colonisation. It is this division, even more than the irredentist desire to return to homes and villages (many of which no longer exist) that drives the Palestinian demand for realisation of their right to return. Families divided for over 50 years want to meet and live together; Palestinians want the simple right to live and travel anywhere they choose in Palestine.

The Israeli government clearly recognises this, even if some liberal Zionists do not. A recent law in Israel denies Israeli citizenship, and the right to reside in Israel, to any Palestinian who marries an Israeli citizen. This racist Act, which has been denounced by the United Nations, is designed both to force Palestinian citizens to leave Israel if they want to marry other Palestinians, and to remove any hope of reunification in Palestine itself

As Benvenisti and Hanegbi both realise, there can no longer be any realistic prospect of a repartition of Palestine. The growth of Israeli settlements, the construction of the Apartheid Wall, and the growth and increasing assertiveness of the Palestinian minority in the state of Israel, demonstrate Benvenisti's assertion that Israelis and Palestinians are already living in a bi-national reality, albeit in a situation of coloniser and colonised.

While socialists and anti-imperialists must continue to demand the immediate, total and unconditional withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the territories occupied in 1967, we should not delude ourselves or others that this in itself is the solution of the conflict. It is no more than a necessary condition in which a solution can be reached. Such a solution must include implementation of practical measures to enable Palestinians to realise their right to return; dismantlement of the discriminatory Zionist structure of the state of Israel, and abolition of all racist legislation; and massive international aid to assist in the rebuilding of the shattered Palestinian economy, society and infrastructure. Such a future state would be secular, giving equal rights for all religious, ethnic and linguistic minority communities.

Neither a one-state nor a two-state approach is sufficient in itself. Regimes are more important than borders. The abolition of Zionist institutions is the issue. The real choice, which becomes ever clearer, is between colonialism and liberation, between socialism and barbarism.

NOTES

[1] <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=326324>

[2] *ibid.*

[3] *ibid.*

[4] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1015138,00.html>

The great Jewish teacher Hillel the Elder, a contemporary of Jesus, was once asked to sum up the whole of Jewish law while standing on one foot. He is said to have replied: "That which is hateful to you, do not unto another: This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary".

If I were to be challenged similarly to sum up the conflict in Palestine in one sentence, I would reply that it is the liberation struggle of an oppressed people against a colonial settler society which has displaced and subjugated it; the rest is commentary.

Roland Rance, 2009

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Socialist Resistance supporters are active members of The Respect Party and supporters of the Viva Palestina aid organisation and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

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Destruction in Gaza



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