

## Same old inglorious Israel



Behind the headlines by Bunn Nagara

*The latest Israeli attacks on the Palestinian citizens of Gaza are no different from previous mass murders, only bloodier and even more tragic*

THE more things in Gaza seem to change for the better since they cannot conceivably get worse, the more they remain woefully the same.

After a month of merciless Israeli bombardment of civilian targets in Gaza, a sliver of territory resulting from Israel's bloody carve-up of Palestinian land, Israel and Gaza's Hamas resistance fighters declared a three-day ceasefire on Friday.

That ceasefire ends today. But what happens – or will Israel allow to happen – next?

Israeli forces began their illegal occupation of Gaza in 1967. Since then, fighting and ceasefires have broken out intermittently, with only increasing bloodshed but no fundamental change.

The Palestinian resistance has fought back, miserably, their puny efforts unable to match Israel's military might. In every encounter, Israel has killed far more Palestinian women and children than the resistance has killed Israelis.

Israel is not only the most militarily powerful country in the region, but also the only nuclear-armed country there. It also has the unstinting support of the world's sole superpower, the United States.

In contrast, the Palestinian people do not have consistent support from other Arab countries or OIC member nations. And when Palestinian groups like Hamas get some support from Lebanon or Iran, they are condemned for it.

The latest round of Israeli attacks is a case in point. In June, three Israeli youths were kidnapped and later found dead. Israel insisted, without any evidence, that Hamas was responsible.

Hundreds of Palestinians were rounded up and several of them killed. Fighting erupted, with Hamas firing rockets into Israel and Israeli forces launching air strikes in Gaza.

Still there was no evidence to link the Israeli youths to Hamas. Later in June an Israeli police spokesman admitted in a BBC interview that Hamas was not involved in their kidnapping and murder.

Nonetheless, Israel's relentless attacks on Gaza persisted and deepened. Now Israel is saying that it is attacking Gaza because of Hamas' rocket attacks.

On July 17, when Flight MH17 crashed and the world's attention switched to that tragedy, Israel exploited it to the full and invaded Gaza. Since then, Israel has attacked and killed Palestinians along with UN staff in schools, mosques and markets while denying that it ever targets civilians.

That month some rockets were reportedly found stored in a UN school in Gaza, but they promptly vanished. When asked in a BBC interview about the presence of the rockets, Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh denied any rocket launchers were ever kept in any school.

The implication in the question was that live rockets indicated the presence of lethal war weapons in a civilian setting. The implication in the answer was that rockets without their launchers were not workable weapons.

None of this deterred Israel from attacking the school, among many other civilian targets including Palestinians' private homes. Israel argued that the reported presence of the rockets was enough to attack the premises housing them.

This specious argument is exposed for the bloodlust it conceals on two fronts: even if the rockets had been there, they were without their launchers or any of the Hamas fighters presumably using them; the rockets had been moved elsewhere as soon as they were discovered.

The school as a building could not be used as explosive munitions against Israel; the rockets on their own could not have launched themselves, or simply thrown like spears into Israeli territory; the school had housed civilian teachers and children as pupils, not resistance fighters.

The Israeli military onslaught continued to be vastly disproportionate and unreasonable: after three weeks, more than 1,300 Palestinians dead and thousands injured, most of them civilians, compared to 56 Israeli soldiers and two Israeli civilians dead.

Evidently, the effect of the Palestinian resistance has been negligible. And even with rather crude and basic rockets, Hamas has been able to avoid Israeli civilian casualties far better than Israel.

Just as evidently, Israel's more sophisticated military establishment and deadlier weapons have been better at exacting civilian casualties among Palestinians in both proportion and gross numbers.

Israel need not "target (individual) civilians" to achieve a higher kill rate. It only has to target civilian buildings and civilian centres to do it, as it has done.

Yet it continues to pretend that it is trying to avoid civilian casualties. It is the kind of dishonesty that, in a previous conflict several years ago, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations lied in a BBC programme in claiming that 6,000 Hamas rockets were being fired into Israel each day.

Part of Israeli propaganda to further its cause of stealing Palestinian land has been the so-called Iron Dome, supposedly designed to protect against incoming missiles. As a purely defensive device, it gives the impression of Israel acting only to secure its people and territory. As a world first, it further promotes the idea of Israeli technical superiority.

Officially, the Iron Dome works to protect against 90% of lethal incoming projectiles. But independent pro-Israel researchers have found that its effectiveness is no more than 5%. Still, the "Iron Dome" has its advocates in the US and Singapore. It therefore works best not as a defence item, but as a marketing commodity and propaganda device.

However, this kind of pretence at victimhood has finally begun to wear thin, particularly in the murderous mayhem of recent weeks. Protests and criticisms of Israeli actions have begun to appear in the West.

Street protests have broken out against Israel's war on Gaza in Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands. In Britain, Liberal Democrat MP David Ward said if he were living in Gaza, he would also be launching rockets into Israel.

In the US, former Democratic senator and presidential aspirant Dennis Kucinich declared that Israel could get away with such outrageous behaviour only because the US is supporting it. In Hollywood, actors such as Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz openly signed a condemnation of Israeli actions.

More telling perhaps has been the response in Israel. While mainstream Western media portray Israel's attacks on Gaza as popular among ordinary Israelis, dozens of military reservists refused to be called to duty in protest against Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people.

Kucinich has articulated what many people around the world have known for only too long – that Israel can continue in its unlawful, murderous ways only because it has the unfailing support of Washington.

The US often complains that Russia is not doing enough to rein in Ukrainian separatists, or that China is not doing enough to tame North Korea. But the US itself has never done enough to ensure Israel behaves in a civilised fashion.

In recent days, Washington has been issuing sterner words on Israel's conduct in half-degrees. But its actions and policies expose its actual intent.

On Thursday the Pentagon confirmed that an Israeli military request for new ammunition had been approved and complied with. Michael Scheuer, former chief of the CIA Bin Laden Issue Station, said the US will continue to pay huge costs for supporting Israel. He said that personally he would drop Israel as an ally with immediate effect.

As the Palestinian leadership considers bringing war crimes charges against Israel, the prospect remains of a US veto on the UN Security Council.

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