

Carnage in Palestine – Israel’s killing spree continues unabated

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In November 2015, I wrote in the Daily Times Lahore that Israel’s continued expansion of settlements in occupied territories, the building of security wall in the middle of Palestinian area, frequent closure of the border crossing, withholding revenues of the Palestinian authority, assassination of Hamas leaders gradually but firmly ostracized a Palestinian state next to Israel’s border. Since the Two-state solution was dead I posed the question what would be the next political prescription for the troubled Middle East?

The Two-state formula was first flouted by the King of Saudi Arabia in 2002. He proposed that Israel should withdraw from the territory occupied in 1967 and a Palestinian state would be established on the territory encompassing the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. In return, Arab countries would accord recognition to Israel and establish diplomatic and economic relations with the Jewish state. George Bush, the then president of the United States lent support to it. Israel seemed favorable to the proposal.

The Oslo Accord and the subsequent peace deals arbitrated through President Bill Clinton had a blue print of a Palestinian state on the occupied territory. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was therefore favorably disposed to the Saudi proposal, but suspected Israel would sabotage the plan. The massive expansion of settlement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem made Arafat skeptical of Israel’s good faith. Subsequent events only confirmed PLO leader’s skepticism.

The present crisis in Gaza is not new. It has happened in recent past and there is no reason to presume that this would be the last. The fundamental reason of periodic violence in Gaza and in other parts of the occupied territories is the very denial of the existence of Palestinians. In the words of late Israeli leader Golda Meir “there was no such thing as a Palestinian and that the Palestinians did not exist.” She later admitted this was the silliest damn thing she ever said. Nonetheless, her statement represented Zionism’s official view on the matter: a view that was accepted and repeated parrot-like by Israel’s supporters everywhere.

The Israeli leaderships since the very beginning wanted a country only for the Jews implying the laws, customs, rituals, habitations, education indeed everything that matters in a society would be tailored to the Jews; other communities would have to live with it something very similar to present day India under the BJP. This is why the Arabs who constitutes 20 percent of Israel’s population have been downgraded as second class citizens. In the case of the Palestinians – they are not welcome, they would be expelled. If this is not possible they would be annihilated. This is the objective of the military operations in Gaza and in other parts of the occupied territory.

This is the underlying reason for refusing the cease-fire resolution at the Security Council. The United States opposed the Security Council meeting last week. It has opposed three resolutions since the Security Council met. Now it favors cease-fire at the time acceptable to Israel. Israel wants more time enabling its army to kill more Palestinians, destroy more homes and infrastructure before halting the airstrikes. In other words, Palestinians must be

brought under subjugation so that they would atrophy the capacity to protest. President Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu know well that this was tried many times in the past but after each bloody conflict Hamas has emerged stronger than before.

We have seen each time there was an armed confrontation in Palestine, the American president and the Secretary of States immediately condone the brutal military actions of Israeli Security Forces and says, "Israel has the right to defend itself." We know Israel is a helpless country because it has no friends other than the United States. It has been made helpless and isolated by unconditional support extended by the United States. The American leaderships never mentioned that Palestinians have the right to live. Their lives matter and they should not be killed like sitting ducks.

Biden Administration officials have been calling Israeli leader Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas to cease violence, but they would not talk to the Hamas leaders because Hamas is a terrorist organization. The crux of the matter is Abbas was elected president in 2006 for five years term but he has extended his term by many years. He doesn't represent the Palestinians any longer. He has been made ineffective by Washington by weighing heavily in favor of Tele Aviv. Trump administration exceeded all limits of semblance of neutrality by according recognition to Jerusalem as Israel's capital and accepting Israel's sovereignty over the West Bank. These actions were in aberration of all agreements accepted by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Trump put the last nail on the two-state solution.

Hamas has been declared as a terrorist organization. It's not clear on what criterion Hamas received this characterization. It is fighting for the cause of the Palestinians. The allegation that Hamas has been targeting the civilians is not corroborated by facts on the ground. In this weeklong armed conflict, Israel has killed over 219 civilians and majority of them were women and children. Hamas has fired hundreds of rockets but killed no more than 12 Israeli civilians. In the previous conflicts the civilian casualties impacted by IDF far exceeded that of the Hamas. By judging the number of civilian casualty who should be branded as terrorist - Hamas or Israeli government?

While the carnage goes on and hundreds are being killed and wounded, and thousands became displaced and dispossessed, the Biden administration has approved the sale of \$735 million precision-guided weapons to Israel purported to exacerbate this horrific violence. This is in addition to \$3.8 billion military and economic assistance poured into Israel per annum. When Mahmud Abbas protested Trumps recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and refused to meet the US official, Trump defunded the UNRWA which was providing humanitarian assistance to the vulnerable population in Palestine. The American administration for decades has been providing huge military and economic assistance to Israel and extended unconditional diplomatic support in favor of Israel in international forums. Consequently, Israel has transformed into a ruthless country with no respect for peace and justice. By weighing heavily in favor of Israel, the United States have lost the moral ground to be a peace broker in the Middle East. It's now a part of the problem in Israel-Palestinian conflict, it's not a part of the solution.

Successive American president collaborated with Israeli leaderships in carrying out fascist policy denying basic human rights to the Palestinian population. Obama opposed Palestinians entry into the United Nations. But the General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a resolution welcoming Palestine as member of the United Nations. The United Nations have been made ineffective as many of its resolutions were vetoed by the United Nations at the Security Council.

A group of 28 Senators have urged Biden to take effective steps to restrain Israel from more airstrikes and impose cease fire and save the lives of people in Gaza. Biden, under mounting pressure from the party members conveyed a message to Netanyahu that if "he carries the conflict much further, he risks losing significant backing in Washington." But Netanyahu remained defiant and vowed to destroy more Hamas targets. Senator Robert Menendez condemned Israel for not accepting cease fire and said, "I am deeply troubled by reports of Israeli military actions that resulted in the death of innocent civilians in Gaza as well as Israeli targeting of buildings housing international media outlets."

Senator Bernie Sanders, the conscience of the American people, wrote to the New York Times last Sunday pointing the deeper reality of life for millions of Palestinians living under blockade and occupation. He pointed to havoc unleashed in recent weeks by rampaging mobs of Jewish extremists in Jerusalem, as well as the questionable Israeli attempts to forcibly evict the Palestinians residents in East Jerusalem. Sanders reminded the White House, "We must recognize that Palestinian rights matter, Palestinian lives matter."

***The writer is a member of the Voice for Justice.**