

COMMENT

Seventy years later, Israel adds a new chapter to the Nakba

Tuesday 15 May 2018, by [AWAD Sumaya](#) (Date first published: 15 May 2018).

The Nakba isn't forgotten history, but the inspiration for the continued resistance of millions of Palestinians in Gaza and around the world, writes Sumaya Awad.

SEVENTY YEARS ago, Israel was founded through the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Today, 70 years later, Israel continues to wage war on Palestinians—driving them from their homes and denying them equal rights.

On May 14, as Israelis celebrated Donald Trump's cruel provocation in relocating the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, Palestinians in besieged Gaza came out to protest an American president legitimizing the colonization of their land—and to demand the right to return to the homes and land stolen from them.

For that, they were massacred in cold blood. Israeli soldiers killed at least 55 Palestinians and injured more than 1,000, firing live ammunition into the crowds.

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, Israeli mobs harassed and assaulted Palestinians protesting the U.S. embassy moving to a contested international city. Israeli forces, aided by U.S. troops on the ground, confiscated Palestinian flags and herded protesters like cattle.

As they watched unarmed Palestinian protesters beaten and arrested by security forces, Israeli counterprotesters chanted: "Burn them, shoot them, kill them. [\[1\]](#)"

Meanwhile, the new U.S. embassy opened its doors in Jerusalem for the first time. First family members Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman attended the ceremony.

Trump himself was missing from the scene, but made sure to send a video celebrating the opening. Leading one of the prayers at the relocation ceremony was Robert Jeffress, a Baptist pastor from Dallas, Texas, who has referred to Islam as "a heresy from the pit of hell."

MAY 15, the day after Israeli independence day, is the day that Palestinians commemorate the Nakba, which means catastrophe in Arabic. It is the day that Palestinians remember the 750,000 civilians forcibly displaced from their homes and the more than 4 million acres of Palestinian land confiscated and occupied by the fledgling Israeli state.

The Zionist slogan prior to the founding of Israel had been "a land without a people for a people without a land." But in truth, Palestine had to be *made* into a land without a people.

So between March 31 and May 15, 1948, Zionist militias destroyed more than 200 Palestinian

villages, massacred their inhabitants, and used terror to expel hundreds of thousands more Palestinians.

Today, 7 million Palestinians are forbidden from returning to their occupied villages and towns. Though many live as refugees in neighboring countries or as immigrants overseas, the majority of Palestinians live within miles of their now-occupied homes.

Often framed as a religious war spanning millennia, the Nakba was, in fact, the result of the late 19th-century political movement that aimed to cleanse Palestinians from their land in order to create a Jewish-majority state in historic Palestine [2].

Israel has attempted to frame the Nakba as just one side of the story in a two-sided conflict. In 2011, the Israeli Knesset passed the Nakba Law, which penalizes public institutions receiving funding from the state for mourning or commemorating the Nakba.

But no matter how hard Israel tries to erase the Nakba from memory, the reality is that the state's origins are inseparable from the brutality of 1948.

Trump's decision back in December to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem set off a series of protests around the world. Jerusalem has been and continues to be a symbol of Palestinian sovereignty.

At the time of the announcement, an overwhelming majority of the United Nations General Assembly voted against Trump's decree, but this international body holds little power to check the ambitions of a major imperialist state like the U.S.

Although nearly 40 percent of Jerusalem's population is Palestinian, Palestinians are not afforded the right to vote, the right to buy land or the right to build on land they possess. Palestinians in Jerusalem—as, indeed, throughout Israel—live in a segregated society that discriminates against them at every turn.

In Jerusalem, the streets are heavily militarized, the buses are segregated, and places of worship frequented by Palestinians are barricaded with checkpoints and numerous restrictions.

Although legally allowed to live anywhere in the city, the majority of Palestinians are kept in East Jerusalem, where Israel has steadily been revoking residency cards. Since 1967, nearly 15,000 Palestinian residents of Jerusalem have had their residency revoked [3].

IT IS clear that Trump's announcement—and Israel's enthusiasm for it—is a provocation designed to bind the U.S. and Israel closer together as the two countries, led by right-wing fanatics, embrace ethno-nationalism.

While this maneuver meshes neatly with Trump's pandering to the constituency of far-right Christian Zionists in the U.S., there's more to it than that.

From the very first days of Trump's presidency, he has time and again showed his loyalty to the Israeli state, perhaps most clearly by his decision to appoint his former bankruptcy attorney David Friedman as U.S. ambassador to Israel. Friedman used to serve as the president of the American Friends of the Bet El Institutions, where he raised money to fund the construction of illegal Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank.

Other Trump appointees, like National Security Advisor John Bolton, also have strong ties to the apartheid state. Indeed, Benjamin Netanyahu was right last year when he said, "Israel does not have

a better friend than Mr. Trump.”

For years, Palestinians have been fighting against the expansion of Israel’s settler-colonial project. The constant threat to Palestinians in Jerusalem—from the revocation of residency cards to the innumerable bureaucratic hoops Palestinians must go through to build homes, own land, enroll in schools and visit their places of worship—is now magnified by the embassy move.

In very concrete terms, Israel just relocated the building that represents its biggest ally, military sponsor and partner in crime from the western edge of its occupied lands to the very center. For anyone who still thinks that either the U.S. or Israel plans to pursue a two-state solution, this move has obliterated that flimsy illusion.

IN HIS book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* , Israeli historian Ilan Pappé cites primary material from the documents of the Hagana militia to reveal the true designs of Israel’s founders.

Officers leading the seizure of Palestinian towns received clear instructions to either “[destroy] villages (by setting fire to them, by blowing them up, and by planting mines in their deris) and especially of those population centers which are difficult to control continuously” or to besiege and search Palestinian villages, with any armed resistance to be “wiped out and the population expelled outside the borders of the state.”

Between 1947 and 1948, the Hagana was given orders to instill fear and terror in Palestinians in order to drive them out en masse. These orders were carried out in dozens of villages and towns, leaving more than 400 villages completely destroyed and hundreds of Palestinian men, women and children massacred.

Then, as now, the powers backing the formation of the Israeli state cared little about Palestinian lives. To them, the very existence of Palestinians was a threat.

In place of these destroyed villages, Israel has built illegal settlements, resorts, parks and other institutions Palestinians are barred from entering. Yigal Allon, a military commander during the 1948 ethnic cleansing and later a general in the Israel Defense Forces, was quoted in an early Israeli leader’s diary as defending the indiscriminate killing of all Palestinians:

We need to be accurate about timing, place, and those we hit. If we accurse a family—we need to harm them without mercy, women and children included. Otherwise this is not an effective reaction. During the operation there is no need to distinguish between guilty and not guilty.

Seventy years after Allon said these words, Israel continues to apply his strategy. In a statement following the release of a video depicting an Israeli laughing and cheering as he shot unarmed Palestinians in Gaza [\[4\]](#), Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman insisted, “There are no innocent people in Gaza. [\[5\]](#)”

Over the course of the last seven weeks, Israel has murdered at least 90 Palestinians in Gaza as they marched peacefully to demand their right of return. More than 7,000 have been injured in these mass demonstrations.

AFTER TRUMP’S announcement that the embassy would move to Jerusalem, Israel waived numerous permits to expedite the construction of the new U.S. building. The enthusiasm for Trump and his far-right political ideology has been welcomed in Israel with open arms.

In Jerusalem over the course of the past few days, Jewish residents have been parading in the streets of the city, waving Israeli flags; forcing their way into the al-Aqsa compound, which is one of Islam’s

holiest sites; and celebrating both the annual flag day ceremony as well as the embassy move.

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat announced last week on Facebook that a traffic plaza near the embassy would be renamed “United States Square” in honor of Trump and his decree. A large sign near the embassy reads, “Trump, make Israel great.”

Since 1948, Israel has strengthened its expansionist project, incorporating more Palestinian land under its control and subjecting Palestinians to a brutal occupation. In fact, at the height of the so-called Oslo “peace process” between 1993 and 2000, the number of illegal Jewish-only settlements doubled.

In the last couple years, Israeli settlement construction has again risen sharply, with an estimated 3,700 new settlement homes approved in 2018 alone [6].

These settlements are illegal under international law, according to the Fourth Geneva Convention. However, just this month, the Israeli committee tasked with legal issues pertaining to settlements built in the West Bank released the Levy Report, officially called the Report on the Legal Status of Building in Judea and Samaria. The 200-page report lays out detailed proposals and recommendations for the legalization of Jewish-only settlements built on Palestinian land.

AT THE heart of both the protests in Gaza and the Trump’s decision to relocate the U.S. embassy is a driving factor, viewed from opposite vantage points: the struggle of Palestinians to demand their right of return.

More than anything, remembering the Nakba today is about confronting the fact that Palestinians are illegally and unjustly prevented from returning to their homes. Many Palestinians to this day hold the keys to properties from which they were expelled.

This is why Palestinians are marching and dying in Gaza. And this is also precisely why Israel expedited the move of the U.S. embassy. The more Israel’s project expands, the more difficult it is for Palestinians and their supporters to realize their just demands to return.

All the while, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and fellow Palestinian elites are nowhere to be found.

Not a single one of the so-called Palestinian representatives released a statement regarding Jerusalem in the days leading up to the embassy relocation. Instead, most of these cabinet members were out of the country during yesterday’s ceremony and massacre.

The Nakba is not a thing of the past. Its impact is felt by every single Palestinian, and its memory shields against a systematic attempt to whitewash the violence and bloodshed that characterized Israel’s birth 70 years ago, and that sustains Israel’s apartheid regime today.

Claims that Palestinians are “violent,” “terrorists” or a “security threat” are more dubious than ever. What threat can children or the disabled possibly pose to an advanced military and nuclear power? Why is the Palestinian boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement—a nonviolent strategy for attaining justice and accountability—criminalized more than the murder of Palestinians?

The last seven weeks in Gaza are a reminder that no matter what Palestinians do, they will be characterized as violent instigators. Their existence, no matter how dismal, will be considered a threat—and their resistance a chance to indiscriminately slaughter them.

The 55 Palestinians murdered yesterday—and the 49 others killed during the Great Return

marches—did not die in vain. While the Nakba is an ongoing reality for millions of Palestinians, so is their resistance.

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P.S.

* May 15, 2018:

<https://socialistworker.org/2018/05/15/israel-adds-a-new-chapter-to-the-nakba>

Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 44400), [Trump's new embassy opens in Jerusalem - Gaza suffers most horrific day of violence for four years](#).

[2] <https://socialistworker.org/2010/06/10/zionisms-colonial-project>

[3] <https://972mag.com/jerusalem-by-the-numbers-poverty-segregation-and-discrimination/91425/>

[4] <https://youtube.com/watch?v=olSBiC-kDpA>

[5] <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/no-innocent-people-gaza-says-israeli-defence-minister-1155018849>

[6] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israel-approves-plans-for-thousands-of-new-settlement-units-in-the-west-bank/2017/10/10/a3fd5058-ad29-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.437cf2b2ecf3