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Israel kills 17 border demonstrators in Gaza

Israeli troops, using live fire, killed at least 17 Palestinians and injured more than 1,400 during demonstrations along Gaza's border with Israel and in cities throughout the Palestinian enclave. The demonstrators were armed solely with stones and homemade firebombs.

The Israeli army, using riot control measures, injured a further 27 Palestinians in clashes in the city of Nablus as nearly 900 Palestinians demonstrated in cities throughout the West Bank.

The organisers of the protests have called for six weeks of demonstrations, called the "Great Return March," along the border of Gaza that has been subject to an 11 year-long illegal and inhumane blockade by Israel and Egypt.

The demonstrations, starting on Friday, are set to continue for six weeks until May 15, the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel and the subsequent war between Israel and her Arab neighbours, which the Palestinians commemorate as Nakba (Catastrophe) Day.

Following the 1948-49 war, only about 200,000 of the 1.2 million Palestinians remained in the parts of Palestine that had become Israel. While many fled to avoid the war, most left out of fear of what might happen to them at the hands of Zionist terrorists. Their homes and land were seized by the newly established state. One of the most notorious incidents was the Deir Yassin massacre where 250 men, women and children were murdered in cold blood by Menachem Begin's Irgun group, as it went from house to house to drive out the Palestinians.

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According to the United Nations, there are presently some 5 million registered Palestinian refugees. They include those expelled, or their descendants, following the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948-49 and the June 1967 war, as well as countless others expelled later from the Occupied Territories or Israel. The majority have lived their lives in wretched conditions in refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Many now live elsewhere in the Middle East, while others have moved to the West.

Israel adamantly refuses to acknowledge the principle of the right of return for Palestinian refugees and their descendants because this would be tantamount to accepting responsibility for what happened to them. Moreover, since it would end the Jewish majority in Israel, it has been repeatedly denounced as a threat to the very survival of the Zionist state.

Friday's demonstrations also mark 42 years since Land Day—commemorated every year by Palestinians throughout the world—when Israeli security forces shot and killed six Palestinian citizens of Israel protesting the expropriation of Palestinian-owned land in northern Israel to build Jewish communities. A further 100 were injured and hundreds were arrested during the March 30, 1976 protest.

A key demand of the Great Return March is the full implementation of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 of December 1948, which stipulates that “the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date.”

Of the 1.9 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, 1.3 million are refugees, according to a Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics report in February 2018.

The Palestinians have set up several tent camps to house thousands near the Israel-Gaza border. They will camp out near the fence as part of an extended protest, with weekly demonstrations on Fridays until Nakba Day on May 15.

Israel made extensive preparations. Barbed wire fences have been set up and more than 100 snipers deployed. The government confirmed ahead of yesterday's protest that it would use “riot dispersal means” that include tear gas and sound bombs as well as firing at “the main instigators” of the protest. It called in the army as opposed to the police and Border Police, citing Land Day demonstrations within Israel and fears of attacks in Jerusalem.

Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Gadi Eizenkot said that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) would not allow “mass infiltration” or tolerate any damage to the barrier on Israel's border with Gaza during the protests.

He said, “We have deployed more than 100 sharpshooters who were called up from all of the military’s units, primarily from the special forces,” and added, “If [Israeli] lives are in jeopardy, there is permission to open fire. We won’t allow mass infiltration into Israel and to damage the fence, and certainly not to reach the communities.”

To this end, the entire border area has been declared a closed military zone. This is nothing short of a shoot-to-kill policy.

In addition, Israel has put pressure on Facebook to censor Palestinian journalists and any critical reporting of Israel. Last week, the social media corporation dutifully shut down the page of a major Palestinian news outlet, the Safa Palestinian Press Agency, which has 1.3 million followers, as well as its Instagram account. Facebook defended its action, claiming it was a move against “hate speech” and “incitement.”

According to *Ha’aretz*, Facebook has closed about 500 pages of Palestinian activists and journalists since the beginning of the year. The paper notes that Safa is a “ Hamas-affiliated” counterpart to Wafa, the official Palestinian news agency controlled by the Palestinian Authority and the Fatah faction led by Mahmoud Abbas. As such, its reporting is typical of a wide range of Palestinian news outlets.

The Facebook ban takes place in the wake of the live streaming of the Palestinian teenager Ahed Tamimi slapping a heavily armed Israeli soldier in the West Bank. Her arrest and sentencing to an eight-month prison term, along with the jailing of her mother for filming the incident, have made her an international rallying point for Palestinians.

The Israeli foreign ministry has briefed its embassies and sought to pre-emptively lay the blame for any clashes on “ Hamas and the other Palestinian organisations who have manufactured this entire campaign.”

Just hours before the demonstrations began, an Israeli tank shell killed a Gaza farmer who had been gathering crops and wounded another in a southern Gaza village.

The Great Return March takes place amid rising tensions over the collapse of Gaza’s already blighted economy following the crippling blockade and Israel’s murderous assaults on Gaza in 2008-09, 2012 and 2014 that killed 1,417, 147 and 2,250 Palestinians respectively and destroyed much of Gaza’s basic infrastructure and tens of thousands of homes.

Further power cuts led to water shortages and untreated sewage after the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority stopped paying Israel for fuel for Gaza’s power station and electrical transmission, and ended or cut salary payments to thousands of public sector workers.

While these measures forced Hamas into “reconciliation” talks with Fatah, the talks have stalled and brought no material relief.

In October, the World Food Programme announced a cutback in its food voucher programme in Gaza due to a budget shortfall. Earlier this year, the Trump administration withheld funding for food aid and the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA), which supports some 1.2 million in Gaza, cutting off Gaza’s last remaining lifeline.

For months there have been almost weekly demonstrations protesting the blockade and the humanitarian crisis. Last December, tensions rose to fever pitch after US President Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Earlier this year, Gaza’s traders closed in protest over the deteriorating situation.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has described Gaza as a “constant humanitarian emergency.” Last year, a UN report stated that the living conditions for Gaza’s 2 million inhabitants had deteriorated even “further and faster” than the prediction made in 2012 that the enclave would become “unliveable” by 2020.

The imperialist powers, so eager to employ human rights to justify war in their own geostrategic interests have once again remained silent in defence of their regional policeman.

The author recommends :

[The expulsion of the Palestinians and the origins of Land Day](#)

[29 March 2002]