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زبانهای اروپایی

By Edo Konrad

17.08.2022

What was the point of this Gaza war?



Sources: www.972mag.com

With the announcement of an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire on Sunday night, Israeli analysts have been quick to regard as a success the "harmonious" campaign of interim Prime Minister Yair Lapid and Defense Minister Benny Gantz. After violently arresting Bassam al-Saadi, a senior leader of the Islamic Jihad movement's branch in the occupied West Bank, the Israeli army locked up border communities around Gaza for nearly half a week in anticipation of an alleged retaliatory attack. It eventually began launching airstrikes in the Gaza Strip, to which Palestinian militants responded with barrages of rockets. The escalations have resulted in 44 Palestinians killed, including 15 children, and more than 350 injured.

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Lapid and Gantz, who reportedly launched the operation without the necessary consent of the security cabinet, have earned praise for the relatively low price Israelis paid in this latest wave of violence, as well as for the swift and "precise" attacks on top Islamic Jihad commanders inside the strip. Aside from a series of protests by Palestinians and Israeli leftists across the country, the Israeli public, which benefits greatly from the status quo of an endless siege and colonial rule, hailed an attack that appears to have changed very little on the ground.

Yet despite praise for Israel's leaders, the stories coming out of Gaza, where two million Palestinians, many of them refugees from the Nakba, live in unsustainable conditions, were almost impossible to bear. Images spread of charred children's bodies, demolished buildings and hundreds of people fleeing their homes with their most valuable possessions on their backs. Gaza residents, many of whom are still rebuilding after Israel's last war in the Strip in May 2021, will have to bury the dead and treat the wounded, with a future in which violence will be all but guaranteed.

The three-day assault echoed another Israeli operation in 2019: the assassination of Islamic Jihad commander Baha Abu al-Ata, who died in his sleep in his home. Back then, I wrote that former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had initiated the assassination as an "escape route from his political or legal quagmire." This time, it was Lapid who seemed to be looking for an image of victory, perhaps in an attempt to polish his credentials hard before the Israeli elections. The result was an unprovoked offensive against a civilian population whose lives are largely dictated by the whims of the Israeli security apparatus.

This is how Israel's military and political establishment prefers to run things. Gaza, in many ways, has become the most extreme version of Israel's bantustanization project in Palestine. Instead of having to directly manage millions of Palestinians, the logic of Israeli apartheid demands that the various enclaves in the occupied territories remain somewhat autonomous, while maintaining the supreme power to control and intervene in their affairs in Israel's interests.

As a result, while in the West Bank, Israel has outsourced much of its security tasks to a weakened and authoritarian Palestinian Authority, in Gaza, an almost hermetically sealed territory is controlled by the equally authoritarian Hamas.

Contradictory as it may seem, Israel does not really want to overthrow Hamas; it needs it to maintain the *status quo*, continually thwarting the possibility of Palestinian unification while preventing an even more radical group, such as Islamic Jihad, from taking its place. Israel will fight these Palestinian groups to keep them in line and its system of control will eventually remain in place.

But if elected in November, Lapid is likely to learn the same hard lesson as his predecessors: that every military "victory" in Gaza is Pyrrhic, and that Israel, for all its bombast, has no long-term strategy for the strip that does not include incessant war and bloodshed. There has never been, nor will there be, an Israeli military solution to Gaza; the killing of Palestinian fighters and commanders only opens the doors to new generations of hardened militants willing to pick up the torch of armed struggle.

Most importantly, there is no reason to believe that an entire people living under the brutality of a 15-year siege, and more than seven decades of dispossession, would suddenly decide to give in to their colonial overlords. Anything other than the dismantling of these oppressive structures is nothing but a violent retouching of a dangerous *status quo*.

Edo Konrad is the editor-in-chief of +972 magazine.

<https://www.972mag.com/edition/gaza-lapid-war/>

Translation: Faustino Eguberri for **south wind**

Rebellion 16.08.2022