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American Officials Silent on Israeli Abuse of Palestinian Children

U.S. Complicity

by MATT PEPPE

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Six weeks after being abducted on her way home from school in the occupied West Bank, 14-year-old Malak al-Khatib was released on Friday from the jail where she was being imprisoned by Israeli occupation forces. The youngest Palestinian girl ever to be incarcerated, Malak is one of hundreds of children to be prosecuted through the Israeli military court system each year. As of December 2014, there were 156 Palestinian child prisoners, 17 of which were under 16 years old, according to the Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association. As the benefactor of the illegal Israeli occupation, the United States government is complicit in Israel's disgraceful persecution and abuse of Palestinian children. While American officials refrain from criticizing such abuses, they forcefully condemn any resistance to the violent Israeli occupation that is responsible for innumerable human rights violations against Palestinian children.

During Israel's Operation Protective Edge in Gaza last August, the Obama administration expressed its strongest indignation regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict throughout President Obama's six years in office. After the apparent capture of Israeli Occupation soldier Hadar Goldin by the Palestinian resistance, administration officials said the action was "barbaric" and "outrageous."

That morning a cease-fire was set to take effect after nearly two weeks of fighting in which hundreds of Palestinian civilians had already been slaughtered. A few hours before the designated cease-fire time, Israeli occupation troops continued operations to destroy tunnels inside Gaza that were used to smuggle food and goods denied to the Palestinian territory as part of the eight-year-long blockade imposed by Israel in violation of international law. When the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) reached a tunnel they encountered resistance from Palestinian fighters from the Qassam Brigades. Several Israeli troops were killed. It appeared Goldin had been captured and led away into the tunnel.

The IOF then reportedly employed the savage Hannibal Directive, a repulsive military procedure developed nearly 30 years ago in which the Israeli army uses massive amounts of firepower in an attempt to kill their own soldier rather than allow him to be captured. Journalist Max Blumenthal says that Israeli troops employed an “indiscriminate assault on the entire circumference of the area where ... Goldin was allegedly taken.” According to Blumenthal, this was one of three possible instances of the Hannibal Directive during Israel’s murderous summer rampage in Gaza.

So while Israel carried out a military operation inside Palestinian territory, shortly before or at the time Israel had agreed to cease fire, Palestinian militants – defending themselves from the savage onslaught against homes, hospitals, mosques, parks, sports clubs, cafés, high-rises, ambulances, disability centers, power plants, and UN schools – captured an enemy combatant consistent with the laws of war. Israel then ordered indiscriminate fire to kill him rather than let him be taken alive. This is the situation American officials found to be “barbaric” – by the Palestinians, not the Israelis.

A month later, when Israel finally agreed to a cease-fire (which it has continued to violate nearly every day since with impunity) more than 2,100 Palestinians had been killed, including 578 children.

Among the children whose lives Israel snuffed out were four-year-old Sahir Abu Namous, whose head was blown open by shrapnel; five-month-old Faris Juma al-Mahmoum, whose mother and 18 others were injured in shelling; five-day-old Shayma Sheikh Khalil, born prematurely after her mother was killed by an Israeli airstrike; and four cousins from the Bakir family, Ismail Mahmoud (9), Ahed Atef (10), Zakariya Ahed (10), and Mohammad Ramiz (11), who were playing soccer on a beach. At least one of the cousins was killed when an Israeli warship gunner who had failed to kill him with an original shell explosion re-aimed and fired again.

In his strongest language against the Israeli operation, Obama told Netanyahu that he was “deeply concerned” about further escalation. Yet he did not call any Israeli actions – which numerous human rights groups have since decried as war crimes that must be referred to the International Criminal Court – “barbaric” or “outrageous.” He was apparently not concerned enough to stop the delivery of weapons to resupply Israel, which would use them to massacre more Palestinian children. And he was not concerned enough to direct his administration to join 29 other nations on the UN Human Rights Council in voting just to *investigate* potential war crimes.

The U.S. government will not even oppose Israeli child abuse carried out against the U.S.'s own citizens. Several weeks before the bloodbath in Gaza, 15-year-old Tarek Abu Khdeir, a Palestinian-American from Tampa, was savagely beaten by Israeli police. The teen from Tampa was visiting Jerusalem with his family shortly after his cousin had been abducted, doused with gasoline and burned alive by Israeli settlers. Tarek and his family claimed he was ambushed while on his family's property. After the assault by Israeli police that left the teenager with head wounds, Tarek was jailed. This was deemed by the U.S. administration to be "profoundly troubling," but again not "barbaric" or even "outrageous."

For teenagers who do not hold American citizenship, their mistreatment by the U.S.-funded occupation does not elicit as much as a shrug from American officials. As the *Electronic Intifada* reported, Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem have recently demanded that the Israeli forces stop harassing schoolchildren and provoking confrontations with them.

Human rights groups have claimed that Palestinian children are often accused of stone-throwing. Such was the case for Malak al-Khatib. She was also accused of having a knife, which would not be a problem if she were an Israeli settler, many of whom carry and use guns with impunity.

Malak was convicted after an alleged confession obtained after hours of questioning by Israeli soldiers. Like many Palestinian children interrogated by Israeli authorities, Malak was unaccompanied by an adult. Her father dismissed the veracity of her alleged confession, telling the Israeli paper *Haaretz*: "How can you question her without her parents and without a lawyer? Interrogate a little girl like this and she'll admit to being in possession of an M16 rifle, too." Malak maintains her innocence, saying she was neither throwing stones nor carrying a knife.

Regardless, throwing stones is a legitimate act of resistance in accordance with international law. A 1987 UN General Assembly resolution validates the right to resist occupation, explicitly differentiating terrorism from the "struggle of peoples for national liberation." The resolution grants "peoples under colonial and racist regimes and foreign occupation ... the right .. to struggle to this end." The measure was approved with 153 votes in favor. Only the United States and Israel voted against it.

Even militant resistance against occupying troops is protected as part of struggle against occupation. Clearly, stone-throwing unquestionably falls within the protections explicitly stated by the UN resolution. In fact, some people have even said that Palestinians have a "duty to throw stones."

"Throwing stones is the birthright and duty of anyone subject to foreign rule," wrote Israeli journalist Amira Hass. "Throwing stones is an action as well as a metaphor of resistance. Persecution of stone-throwers, including 8-year-old children, is an inseparable part – though it's not always spelled out – of the job requirements of the foreign ruler, no less than shooting, torture, land theft, restrictions on movement, and the unequal distribution of water sources."

The Israeli occupation uses stone-throwing to punish and abuse children like Malak whose land they have illegally occupied for 47 years.

The human rights group Defence for Children International Palestine found that “Palestinian children detained by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank last year fell victim to a pattern of abuse designed to coerce confessions.”

They reported that Israeli occupiers ordered solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, and torture against children. “Impunity for violations was a significant obstacle in 2014 as DCIP filed nine complaints with Israeli authorities concerning the ill-treatment and torture of five children while in Israeli military detention. Not a single indictment has been issued against a perpetrator,” the group wrote.

Another human rights group reported that 240 children detained in Jerusalem over one year suffered sexual abuse by Israeli authorities.

Yet the only thing that the United States government will declare as “barbaric” is the capture of an adult Israeli combatant by the Palestinian resistance in a defensive military operation. To American officials, Palestinian life – even that of children – does not matter. When Israeli teens are killed, President Obama and American officials express their condolences and lament the “terror against innocent youth.” This is never reciprocated for Palestinian children, who are killed by Israelis at more than 15 times the rate of Israeli children being killed by Palestinians. 2,060 Palestinian children have been killed since September 2000 compared to 133 Israelis.

The United States government has long held as policy that its strategic relationship with Israel matters more than any concerns for justice and human rights. Not even the lives of Palestinian children matter enough to force American officials to show any semblance of humanity by demanding accountability for the crimes and injustices they aid and abet in Palestine. The only real outrage the U.S. government is capable of showing is when Palestinians dare to resist the violent colonial oppression that Israel subjects them to, under approving American sponsorship.