

When the Power Goes Out

The visit this week of former Israeli U.N. Ambassador Ron Prosor to the Slifka Center at Yale is a good time to reflect on Israel's management of its relationship with Gaza since it "ended its occupation" in 2005, under the stewardship of Ambassador Prosor.

While there are no longer Israeli settlements in Gaza, Israel controls all land entry points to Gaza, with the exception of the Rafah crossing to Egypt. It also enforces a blockade of the Mediterranean coast of Gaza, with 6-nautical mile buffer zone where Gazan fishermen may operate. The blockade prevents any departures or arrivals at Gazan ports. The only airport in Gaza closed in 2001 after being severely damaged by the Israel Defense Forces. This gives Israel nearly complete control of whom and what enters and exits Gaza. In the "military" wars of Operation Cast Lead (2009), Operation Pillar of Defense (2012), and Operation Protective Edge (2014), Israel rained a devastating array of armaments on Gaza. Human Rights Watch reported in 2009 "Israel's repeated firing of white phosphorus shells over densely populated areas of Gaza during its recent military campaign was indiscriminate and is evidence of war crimes."

But while there is currently a "relative calm" in Israeli military activity against Gaza, Israel is waging an equally destructive and pervasive war by stranglehold. For years, the flow of food has been restricted, cynically limited by a minimum per person calorie count of what it would take to avoid a starvation crisis.

We need only look to the devastation wrought on islands in the Caribbean and Florida by hurricane Irma to understand the effects of destruction of water and power infrastructure. The long-term isolation of Gaza and the periodic "storms" intensify the effects.

Most recently, and apparently at the request of the Palestinian Authority (which administers the West Bank but not Gaza), Israel has restricted the supply of electricity to densely populated Gaza, whose access to electricity was already severely reduced by damage to the local power plant during the Israeli wars, and by limits on the flow of fuel by the siege Israel has enforced against Gaza.

The net effect of the crippled power generation and restricted supply is that availability of electricity is unpredictable, and averages 3 hours per day. In

the past few months, there have been days when there was no electricity at all. This has affected critical infrastructure such as refrigeration, hospitals, and sewage treatment, precipitating a public health crisis. In July, Mohammed Salim Al-Sayis, 5, died of lethal toxic encephalopathy after swimming in the polluted sea. Said his dad: "Because of the electricity blackouts and heat, I decided to take my children to the beach."

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court recognizes that denial of the basic necessities of life can be a violation of international humanitarian law. This latest war against the people of Gaza is being waged by an unholy alliance of Israel, which creates unlivable conditions; the United States, which funds Israeli military and land grab operations to the tune of billions of our tax dollars every year while turning a blind eye to violations of human rights, international and American law; and the Palestinian Authority, which is willing to sacrifice civilian lives in Gaza in its own struggle with Hamas.

Are we surprised to see the Palestinian Authority (PA) complicit in this? Don't be. The PA in many cases acts as Israel's proxy in enforcing its oppressive military rule over the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It is beyond irony that, despite the fact that frequent PA pleas for marginally more humane treatment of Palestinians fall on deaf ears in the halls of power in Israel, the one plea to which Israel has responded positively is the curtailment of electricity to Gaza.

James Baldwin said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." One thing that most American Jews appear to agree on is that their support is essential to Israel's capability to continue on its current course. It is critical for all American Jews to ask themselves if they are really willing to continue to support a state that creates such unlivable conditions for millions of people under its control.

This flyer was written by Jewish Voice for Peace New Haven (www.jvpnh.org), and distribute at the New Haven Sunday Vigil on Sunday, Sept. 24, 2017.

Since 1999, the New Haven Sunday Vigil has been held here every week from 12-1pm at Broadway, Park and Elm Streets in New Haven, CT, to emphatically say NO to the state of permanent, ongoing war against the world being waged by our government and its allies - a war which is terrorizing the planet and destroying lives in order to consolidate enormous power and wealth in the hands of a very few people. We welcome JVP members who join this vigil once a month.

JOIN US TO RESIST THIS ENDLESS WAR!

<https://newhavensundayvigil.wordpress.com>