

The inhuman toll of human war - Palestine bleeds

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ABSTRACT

The current crisis due to the Israeli-Palestine conflict has reignited the question of the nature of human warfare and the destruction that ensues. Given the ancient history of human wars it is not surprising that nations still go to war over petty issues; however it is indeed pitiable that despite modern progress and knowledge, the yawning gap of strife in human relations still persists and leads to large scale destructive activities. Moreover, human progress has also caused the creation of weapons much more lethal than in the past, so that it has facilitated the induction of wars as a means to solve contentious issues that could be resolved with goodwill and mutual understanding on the part of all stakeholders.

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INTRODUCTION

Human warfare is as old as human existence on earth. The concept of “friends” and “enemies” is perhaps ingrained into our lifestyles, if not in our DNA. Probably no greater effort is put into any human endeavor other than getting rid of perceived enemies, so that the end point is utter annihilation of the enemy, rather than mere subjugation or surrender, or to convert former enemies to friends. Looking at the war machinery of developed nations, one wonders whether there has been any true progress towards making the planet safer for life; rather it appears that the aim of life is to appear superior to one another by any possible means, even if it means destroying the planet through sustained destructive wars.

There is no need to look for historic wars, though plenty of material exists to describe the barbarities suffered by the warring sides from each other and from the essential nature of war. Modern history is replete with series of wars unleashed for a variety of ulterior motives, none of which could in fact be materialized, thereby leaving only destroyed cities and civilizations in the wake. Just looking at the sizeable list of small and large wars conducted since 1900 leaves the mind boggled, as it appears to be a routine activity of human beings. At an estimate, 37 million people died fighting in wars since 1800 without accounting for the civilian deaths and other casualties related to the after-effects of war.¹ World War I accounted for the deaths of 7 million soldiers, while World War II caused the deaths of over 21 million soldiers.¹ Also worthy of mention is the use of atomic weapons over Hiroshima and Nagasaki towards the end of

World War II (August 6 and 9, 1945), which destroyed these cities entirely and accounted for an estimated 129,000 - 226,000 civilian casualties, of which almost half occurred on the first day; still later, people continued to die for months afterwards from the effects of radiation, burns, and other casualties.²

Fast forward to the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one finds a rich history of turmoil and wars ever since the state of Israel was announced on Palestinian soil on May 18, 1948, based on a UN resolution of 1947 (though conflicts on Palestinian soil by the Jewish settlers date back further). The first of these major conflicts was sparked by the creation of Israel and lasted till 1949, resulting in the displacement of 75,000 Palestinians and the division of the land into three zones, viz. the State of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Thereafter a series of conflicts arose, also involving the neighboring Arab states of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The current crisis originating on October 07, 2023, has the background of continued unresolved tensions and attacks in the region, since all mediation efforts over decades had failed to resolve the disputes. Given the open support of the USA and its allies, and a lackluster puppet role of the United Nations, a one-sided global policy supporting Israel had become the order of the day, and still continues. Thus, Israel could openly declare war on Palestine and proceed with its mandate of seizing full control of Gaza through military genocide against its civilian population.³

This onslaught and military blockade of Gaza resulted in innumerable sufferings for the Palestinians. An estimated 50,000 houses were destroyed and about 250,000 damaged, representing around 60% of the housing facilities of Gaza. Other casualties included schools and hospitals, including those of NGOs and the WHO.⁴ Israeli military cut off water and electricity to the area, and blocked almost all humanitarian aid, in addition to using illegal white phosphorus bombs on civilians. They also forcefully evacuated about 90% of the population of Gaza and even bombed the evacuee convoys on their way to seek refuge in other places and neighboring countries.⁴ By February 2024, an estimated 13,000 children had been subjected to violence and killed by indiscriminate and deliberate Israeli targeted bombings.⁵

Estimates by various third party agencies during October 7-26, 2023, put the toll of non-combatant casualties (including children, women and elders) at 61-68% of the total casualties; other estimates put the figure of civilian casualties even higher at 90%.⁵ Furthermore, over 2 million people are experiencing famine conditions (with related complications) due to aid blockade. The total death toll could not be estimated due to the ongoing Israeli onslaughts, but are roughly estimated at over 25,000 civilians, with predictions of 58,260 - 74,290 excess deaths by August 2024.⁵

Throughout this genocidal turmoil, most of the world, including the Muslim countries, just stood idly by, and sufficed to make sympathetic comments rather than develop action plans to resolve the issue. However, as events unfolded, and news of Israeli barbarities flooded in, most countries adopted a pro-Palestine stand and condemned Israel, as well as started to provide humanitarian aid to Palestine. Additionally, public opinion in most western countries, including the USA and UK,

was evidenced by large scale protest marches against Israel, and these continue even today. Many countries, previously neutral, opted to recognize Palestine as an independent state, or to support a two-state solution to the Palestinian issue. Moreover, the USA was strongly criticized for its strong support of Israel and their continued supply of weapons to it; this condemnation included other NATO and non-NATO countries such as India for their continued sale of arms to Israel.

All these measures did little to stem the Israeli onslaught, which continues unabated and threatens to extend to other areas of the region with the intent of fully occupying more Palestinian land and eliminating its occupants. It has become obvious that the Israeli government has chosen the pretext of the Hamas attack on Israel as a declaration of open war against Palestine and to seize this opportunity to occupy as much of Palestine as possible with the sympathetic support of pro-Israeli nations. It remains to be seen what the final outcome will be and whether there could be a permanent and peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

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