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زبانهای اروپایی

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14.01.2024

Israel's War on Palestine and the Global Upsurge Against It

Author Bio: *This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).*

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Source: Globetrotter

Tags: News, Politics, War, Time-Sensitive, Middle East/Israel, Middle East/Palestine, North America/United States of America, Africa/South Africa, Europe/Russia, Europe/Ukraine, Asia/China, Asia/Taiwan, Europe/United Kingdom, Europe/Germany

[Article Body:]

Hundreds of millions of people across the world have been deeply moved by the atrocity of the Israeli war on Palestine. Millions have attended marches and protests, many of them participating in such demonstrations for the first time in their lives. Social media, in almost all the world's languages, is saturated with memes and posts about this or that terrible action. Some people focus on the Israeli attack on Palestinian children, others on the illegal targeting of Gaza's health infrastructure, and yet others point to the annihilation of at least four hundred families (more than ten people in each family killed). The focus of attention does not seem to be diminishing. Holidays in December went by, but the intensity of the protests and the posts remained steady. No attempt by social media

companies to turn the algorithm against the Palestinians succeeded, no attempt to ban the protests—even the display of the Palestinian flag—worked. Accusations of antisemitism fell flat and demands for the condemnation of Hamas were dismissed. This is a new mood, a new kind of attitude toward the Palestinian struggle.

Never before in the 75 previous years has there been such sustained attention to the cause of the Palestinians and of Israeli brutality. Israel has launched eight bombing campaigns on Gaza since 2006. . And Israel has built up an entire illegal structure against the Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank (an apartheid wall, settlements, checkpoints). When Palestinians have tried to resist—whether through civic action or armed struggle—they have faced immense violence from the Israeli military. Ever since social media has been available, images from Palestine have circulated, including of the use of white phosphorus against civilians in Gaza, and including the arrest and murder of Palestinian children across the Occupied Palestine Territory. But none of the previous acts of violence evoked the kind of response from around the world as this violence that began in October 2023.

Genocide

The Israeli armed violence against Gaza since October has been in a qualitatively different form than any previous violence. The bombardment of Gaza was vicious, with Israeli aircraft hitting residential areas with no concern for civilian life. The number of dead increased day by day at a rate not seen before. Then, when Israeli ground forces entered Gaza, they effected an illegal mass eviction of the Palestinian civilians from their homes and pushed them further and further south toward the border with Egypt. The Israelis violated their own promises of “safe zones,” hitting areas more densely packed than before because of the internal displacement. It was this scale of violence that provoked an early use of the term “genocide” to describe what was happening in Gaza. By early January, more than 1 percent of the entire Palestinian population in Gaza had been killed, while over 95 percent had been displaced. The kind of violence used here was not seen in any contemporary war, neither in Iraq (where the U.S. disregarded most laws of war) nor in Ukraine (where the death toll of civilians is far smaller despite the war now lasting two years).

The momentum of mass protest pushed the government of South Africa to file a dispute in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Israel for the crime of genocide. Both countries are parties to the 1948 Convention Against Genocide, and the ICJ is the venue for dispute settlements. The 84-page filing by the South African government documents

many of the atrocities perpetrated by Israel, and also, crucially, the words of Israeli high officials. Nine pages of this text (pp. 59 to 67) list the Israeli officials in their own words, many of them calling for a “Second Nakba” or a “Gaza Nakba,” a use of the term “Nakba” or Catastrophe that refers to the 1948 Nakba of the Palestinians from their homes that led to the creation of the State of Israel. These words are chilling, and they have been widely circulated since October. Racist language about “monsters,” “animals,” and the “jungle” shape the speeches and statements by these Israeli government officials. Israel’s Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on October 9, 2023, that his forces are “imposing a complete siege on Gaza. No electricity, no food, no water, no fuel. Everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly.” This, along with the character of the Israeli military strikes, is sufficient as a benchmark for the accusation of genocide. At the hearing at the ICJ, Israel was unable to respond credibly to the South African complaint.

It is a combination of the images from Gaza and the words of these Israeli high officials—backed fully by the United States government and many of the governments of European states—that provoked the sustained anger and desolation that has driven these mass protests.

Legitimacy

Over the course of the past two years—from the start of the war in Ukraine until now—there has been a rapid decline in the legitimacy of the West, notably the countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), led by the United States. These wars are not the cause of this drop in legitimacy, but they have accelerated the decline in the legitimacy of the NATO countries, particularly in the Global South.

Since the start of the Third Great Depression in 2007, the Global North has slowly lost its control over the world economy, over technology and science, and over raw materials. Billionaires in the Global North deepened their “tax strike” and withdrew a large share of social wealth into tax havens and into unproductive financial investments. This left the Global North with few instruments to maintain economic power, including by making investments in the Global South. That role was slowly taken up by China, which has been recycling global profits into infrastructural projects across the world. Rather than contest China’s Belt and Road Initiative, for instance, through its own commercial and economic project, the Global North has sought to militarize its response with massive spending (three-quarters of global military spending is by the NATO states). The Global North has used Ukraine and Taiwan as levers to provoke Russia and China into military conflicts so

as to 'weaken' them rather than contest growing Russian energy power and Chinese industrial and technological power through trade and development.

It is clear to the majority of people in the world that it is the Global North that has failed to address the crises in the world, whether the climate crisis or the consequences of the Third Great Depression. It has tried to substitute a language of euphemism for reality, using terms such as "democracy promotion," "sustainable development," "humanitarian pause," and—from UK Foreign Secretary Lord David Cameron and Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock—the ridiculous formulation of a "sustainable ceasefire." Empty words are no substitute for real actions. To speak of a "sustainable ceasefire" while arming Israel or to speak of "democracy promotion" while backing anti-democratic governments now defines the hypocrisy of the Global North's political class.

The Israelis say that they will continue this genocidal war for as long as it takes. As each day goes by of this war, the legitimacy of Israel deteriorates. But behind that violence itself is the much deeper end of the legitimacy of the NATO project, whose sanctimonies sound like nails being dragged across a bloodied chalkboard.