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## ***Aaron Bushnell Refused to Remain Silent in the Face of Gaza's Horrors***

Bushnell died so that Gaza could live. He died for a free Palestine and to remind us that many Americans oppose Israel's occupation, apartheid and siege of Gaza, as well as the decades-long oppression of the Palestinian people.



The gruesome self-immolation death of Aaron Bushnell was a protest against the abject misery in Gaza inflicted by Israel and backed by the U.S. government

Aaron Bushnell blew himself up in front of the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 25, 2024, in protest of Israel's war on Gaza.

On Sunday, a young American dressed in military uniform made his way to the door of the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C. He started a live stream and introduced himself.

*My name is Aaron Bushnell. I am an active member of the U.S. Air Force and I will not continue to be complicit in genocide. I'm about to engage in an extreme act of protest, but compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of its colonizers, it's not extreme at all. This is what our ruling class has decided is normal.*

The horrific footage shows Bushnell, 25, as he stops in front of the embassy, puts down his phone, sprays himself with a flammable liquid and sets himself on fire.

His last words: "*Free Palestine.*"

When Bushnell collapsed, police officers who had been watching the tragedy unfold rushed to the scene. As the embassy security officer held a gun pointed at Bushnell's burning body, an agent with a fire extinguisher was heard yelling at him, "*I don't need guns; I need fire extinguishers!*"

Bushnell collapsed as he shouted "*Free Palestine*" in intense, horrifying pain. He succumbed to his injuries and died at a local D.C. hospital shortly after.

Bushnell was a U.S. military man who gave his life to protest the horrors committed in Gaza with the complicity of his own government. He served in the U.S. Air Force for nearly four years. His LinkedIn profile shows that he graduated from basic "first flight and first class" basic training. His friends and loved ones describe him as "a force for joy in our community." An online post remembers him as "*an incredibly gentle, kind and compassionate person.*" (Bushnell's social media account still displays a Palestinian flag on his profile.)



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Bushnell's death comes as the Biden administration continues to arm Israel to the eyeballs, lavishing billions of dollars on it while providing diplomatic cover for its war crimes in Gaza, vetoing several UN resolutions for a ceasefire. The United States has rewarded Israel's war crimes with a war crime of its own, as it continues to starve Palestinians by halting funding for UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. This interruption of funding is a collective punishment of the Palestinian people for seeking justice at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), while vowing not to punish Israel for its possible imminent invasion of Rafah, even if it targets civilians, and despite growing fears of genocide and ethnic cleansing. (The U.S. was one of the few countries to defend Israel at last week's ICJ hearing on the Israeli occupation.)

As Bushnell burned, the death toll in Gaza exceeded 30,000 civilians, nearly half of them children. Two million Palestinians have been displaced. Half the population is on the brink of starvation as Israel continues to deprive the besieged Gaza Strip of food, water and medicine, condemning thousands of Palestinians to a slow and agonizing death.

Bushnell is not the first American to set himself on fire to protest the genocide in Gaza. Last December, a protester self-immolated in front of the Israeli consulate in Atlanta, Georgia, in what police described as "probably an extreme act of political protest." A Palestinian flag was found at the scene as part of the protest.

Self-immolation is an act of radical protest that aims to shock and mobilize people to act, while alerting us to the horrors of war. Protest has a deep-rooted tradition in U.S. anti-war activism. In 1970, a young Californian named George Winne Jr. died after setting himself on fire in San Diego, California, to protest the Vietnam War. As he lay dying, he asked his mother to write to President Richard Nixon about the reason for his action. His letter read: *Our son George Jr. set himself on fire on the UCSD campus on May 10. Before he died, he told us that he had chosen the most dramatic way he could think of to draw people's attention to the most deplorable situation in the world and in this country.*

In early 1991, Gregory Levey, a peace protester and professor in Amherst, Massachusetts, set himself on fire to protest the first Iraq war. Raymond Moules did the same three days later in Springfield, Virginia.

The extreme tactic also has international precedents, from Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc, who set himself on fire in Saigon in 1963 to protest the U.S. war on Vietnam, to Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire in the town of Sidi Bouzid in 2010 and helped spark the Arab Spring.

Setting oneself on fire is not a tactic that any sane person would choose to employ lightly. It's an action born out of desperation, out of a sense that no other tactic, from writing and calling elected officials to attending protests or engaging in civil disobedience, has the capacity to hasten an end to the stream of horrors we've seen in Gaza since October. Bushnell's action was extreme, but surely many of us can relate to his feelings of hopelessness, anger, and anguish generated by seeing ethnic cleansing live on our social media platforms, and then seeing how very few elected politicians muster up the courage to demand an end to such horrific violence.

Bushnell died so that Gaza could live. He died for a free Palestine and to remind us that many Americans oppose Israel's occupation, apartheid and siege of Gaza, as well as the decades-long oppression of the Palestinian people. His death should serve as a call to action, an urgent plea that we do everything we can to end the endless atrocities committed in Gaza with American public money and with the approval of American public officials, to ensure that no one ever again feels compelled to take their own life in such a chilling protest.

Shortly before his death, Aaron posted the following message online: "Many of us like to ask ourselves, 'What would I do if I were alive in slavery? Or in the Jim Crow South? Or during apartheid? What would I do if my country was committing genocide?' The answer is: you're doing it. Right now."

*Seraj Assi*

*Original: [Aaron Bushnell Refused to Be Silent on the Horrors in Gaza](#)*

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*Translation available Français*

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