

HAMAS AND THE STRUGGLE TO LIBERATE PALESTINE

By James Supple

THE US has blamed Hamas for causing Israel's assault. Kevin Rudd has called them a "terrorist organisation". Israel would have us believe they are "Islamic terrorists" who cannot be negotiated with. In fact Hamas are the legitimate elected leaders of the Palestinians. Their support has grown at the expense of Fatah, the party which emerged to lead the Palestinians out of the national liberation struggles of the 1960s.

The Palestinians are a people dispossessed from their lands. Many of them have lived for generations in crowded refugee camps. They are subject to daily humiliation at the hands of Israeli occupying soldiers, and have faced continual military assaults from the Israeli army. In Gaza 80 per cent of the population relies on food aid from the UN to survive.

Yet Palestinians in the Occupied Territories have put up heroic resistance to the illegal Israeli occupation. Hamas was founded during the first Palestinian uprising, or intifada, in 1987.

The intifada was a movement of a whole people in revolt against poverty and oppression. It involved not only about military clashes but strikes, marches and co-ordinated acts of civil disobedience.

It was this uprising that forced Israel into the Oslo negotiations.

But Fatah, which led the negotiations, was discredited by the continual compromises with Israel this involved, which delivered Palestinians nothing. The hope that Israel would agree to a peace deal where Palestinians would be given control of lands in the Occupied Territories was an illusion.

All through the Oslo negotiations in the 1990s Israel built more settlements in the Occupied Territories and tightened its military control over the daily lives of Palestinians. Living standards collapsed as Israel prevented Palestinians travelling from their homes to jobs inside Israel.

Hamas rejected the Oslo Accords as a dead end. As a result it won the elections for control of the Palestinian Authority that governs



Above: Palestinian children express their anger at the occupation by hurling rocks at Israeli tanks

the West Bank and Gaza in 2006.

The West responded by refusing to acknowledge the Palestinians' democratic choice. Israel withheld tax revenues due to the Palestinian Authority and encouraged other governments to withhold aid.

Then Israel and the US supported a coup by Fatah in the West Bank to topple the Hamas government. Hamas was able to prevent a similar attempt in the Gaza strip.

Israel has since tightened its blockade of Gaza, restricting supplies of fuel, medicines and food. This is a policy of collective punishment of the entire civilian population, designed to force them to abandon Hamas.

How can Palestine be free?

Despite Hamas' refusal to capitulate to Israel, the Gaza Strip remains isolated and surrounded by hostile forces. Hamas cannot militarily defeat Israel. On their own, the Palestinians lack the economic or military power to take on Israel—a state armed and backed by the US.

Israel's defeat by the Lebanese resistance group Hezbollah in 2006 showed that Israel and its backers could be beaten by wider forces.

The onslaught on Gaza has trig-

gered mass demonstrations across the region, such as in Egypt (see box). Early last year Palestinians broke through the border with Egypt and demanded food, water and supplies. This triggered mass protests of solidarity across Egypt and shook Hosni Mubarak's pro-US regime.

What worried Mubarak and his allies in the US and Israel was the

possibility of the Palestinian liberation struggle becoming tied to the Egyptian resistance and workers' movement.

Freedom for Palestine relies on such a wider regional uprising to topple the corrupt Arab regimes. The ruling class in countries like Egypt have no interest in fighting imperialism—they have grown rich through making their peace with the US and Israel while the mass of the population remains poor.

But the working class inside Egypt and across the Middle East has both an interest and the power to successfully challenge imperialism.

It is workers who keep the oil flowing through the pipelines of Saudi Arabia and Iraq, workers who take ships along the Suez Canal, workers who bake bread, drive trains, serve fries at McDonald's and sweep the floors of tourists' hotel rooms.

This labour supports the economy of every Middle Eastern state, and therefore the stability of every Middle Eastern government.

Recent years have seen the revival of workers' strikes in Egypt. The solidarity on display in the current wave of protests in defence of Gaza can be the basis for constructing a workers' movement across the Middle East that can finally bring liberation—for Palestine and the whole region.

EGYPT RAGES AT HATED REGIME

EGYPT'S DICTATOR Hosni Mubarak has sealed the country's border with the Gaza Strip to block any Palestinians fleeing the carnage. He has halted attempts by ordinary Egyptians to rush emergency supplies into the Palestinian territory. He has even told Egyptian troops to fire on Palestinians attempting to cross the border to safety.

All this triggered an unprecedented wave of mass protests in Egypt that has spread from the capital Cairo to smaller towns and cities. The most notable was the demonstration in Arish, the largest city in the Sinai region. Tens of thousands took to the streets chanting "Hosni Mubarak you

bring us shame!"

Arish is about 37 miles from the border with Gaza. It became a lifeline for Gaza when Palestinians stormed the border with Egypt in January last year.

People in the city helped Palestinians grab much needed supplies and temporarily break the Israeli blockade.

The Mubarak regime is now facing a whirlwind of anger from every corner of the country. It has been able to quell the protests for now with its usual mass arrests and vicious repression.

But the demonstrations have deepened the crisis of a regime that has been rocked by two years of strikes and protests.

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ISRAEL AND PALESTINE: HOW CAN THERE BE PEACE?

By Alex Callinicos
Socialist Worker UK

THE BRUTAL assault on Gaza poses the perennial question of how Israel can ever coexist peacefully with the rest of the Middle East.

For over 30 years the Palestinian movement, supported by much of the left and progressive opinion worldwide, has had an official policy for addressing this question—the two-state solution.

The idea is that a settlement could be reached between Israel and the Palestinians allowing the two to live side by side peacefully in separate, democratic states. The late Yasser Arafat, president of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), justified signing the 1993 Oslo Accord by arguing it was a step towards this.

But the experience of the "peace process" since Oslo has produced very clear evidence that the two-state solution cannot work. One reason is the massive imbalance of power between the two sides.

Israel is one of the greatest military powers in the world, backed and subsidised by the US. In contrast the Palestine Authority (PA) is given limited authority over a fragmented territory, and is financially dependent on outside powers such as the European Union that can withdraw their support at whim, as Hamas has discovered.

Israeli policy has worked to perpetuate this imbalance—to keep the PA weak and dependent. The justification the Israeli leadership gives for all the measures that weaken the PA is the need to preserve the security of the Jewish state. This is more than just hypocrisy.

Israel is a settler colonial state—a state on territory seized from the original inhabitants and occupied by privileged outsiders backed by the Western imperialist powers. All settler states face the problem of what to do with the people whose land they stole.

Solution

The best solution—from the settlers' point of view, of course—is extermination, ideally stretched over several centuries. The US, Canada,

and Australia bear witness to the success of this policy.

Another solution is to turn the original inhabitants into the settlers' labour force. This happened in South Africa, Rhodesia, Kenya, and Algeria. This has the big disadvantage that sooner or later the dispossessed get organised and take the country back, as they did in all these cases.

The Zionist colonisers drove out millions of Palestinians, most to neighbouring countries. The rest are still subject to Israeli rule, which to differing degrees they resent and resist, with enormous sympathy from the Arab masses.

The result is to leave Israel in a permanent state of insecurity. It lives alongside those it dispossessed, in a state of perpetual war with them.

Israel can't exterminate the Palestinians—even the Nazis needed the cover provided by the Second World War to attempt the Holocaust. Right wing Israeli politicians advocate expelling the Palestinians to neighbouring states, but this would just increase antagonism with the Arab world.

But Israel can't make peace with the Palestinians. The only real settlement would be one that allowed the millions of Palestinian refugees to return—but this would destroy the basis of Israel as an exclusively Jewish state.

So any Israeli "settlement" with the Palestinians is necessarily phoney. Israel's participation in the Oslo "peace process", was based on the cynical assumption that the PLO was an undemocratic organisation that could enforce order on the Palestinians. Hence a dose of real democracy—such as Hamas's election victory—threatens to blow everything apart.

The only real way out lies in the policy that the PLO abandoned in the mid-1970s—a single secular and democratic Palestinian state in which Jews and Arabs, Christians and Muslims live together on the basis of equality.

This may seem completely utopian amid the present carnage. But don't the horrors currently unfolding demand radical solutions?

GAZA AND THE US WAR FOR CONTROL OF THE MIDDLE EAST

ISRAEL'S MURDEROUS assault on Gaza has, once again, been willingly backed by the US. The US has given Israel diplomatic cover by blocking resolutions in the United Nations Security Council calling for a ceasefire.

Israel is the key US ally in the Middle East. Its army is, in effect, an extension of the US military due to massive US military aid. This is set at \$3 billion a year for the next decade—the most received by any single country.

US support allows Israel to maintain one of the world's most advanced military arsenals. It is armed with state of the art F15 and F16 bombers, Apache attack helicopters, tanks and nuclear weapons.

The US has promised to allow Israel to maintain a "qualitative edge" in military technology over the rest of the Middle East.

Since 2001 Israel has been a key player in the US "war on terror". The US's real aim was summed up by Condoleezza Rice's talk of a "new Middle East"—one where US control was absolute.

But the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have failed to cement US authority. The resistance there have dragged the military superpower into a deep quagmire, with the likelihood of humiliating military defeats.

In the face of the US debacle in Iraq, it looked to Israel in 2006 to try to regain the initiative in the region with its war on Lebanon.

They hoped that wiping out Hezbollah would weaken other opponents of US power such as Iran and Syria. But, as in Iraq, resistance fighters brought the invaders to a standstill. Hezbollah fighters delivered Israel its first military defeat since its foundation.

The current assault on Gaza is widely seen as an at-



US-made warplanes are part of the military arsenal provided to Israel by the US

tempt by Israel to reassert its military strength.

Military experts say the Israeli army is now better trained, and many other "lessons" have been drawn from their failure in Lebanon.

Australia's role

Many people were shocked when acting Prime Minister Julia Gillard blamed Hamas for the Israeli rampage. Parroting the White House she claimed, "the act of aggression was engaged in by Hamas... That is what breached the ceasefire,

and Israel responded."

Despite positioning itself against the Iraq war, the new Rudd government is just as solidly behind the US alliance as John Howard was.

Speaking in Washington in March last year, Kevin Rudd declared: "My view of the US's role in international affairs is simple: I believe the US is an overwhelming force for good in the world."

Although it has withdrawn 550 Australian combat troops from Iraq, 1000 military personnel remain in non-combat roles.

Solidarity meetings

Why Australia should break ties with Israel

6.30pm Tuesday January 13
John Curtin hotel, opp Trades Hall, cnr Lygon and Victoria sts

ABC learning and the market: why government must take back public services

6.30pm Tuesday 20 January,

John Curtin Hotel, Lygon St, South Carlton
Contact David on 0418 316 310

Gaza solidarity events

Rally and march for Gaza
2pm, Sunday 18th of Jan, State Library, corner of Swanston and La Trobe streets
Organised by Justice for Palestine, for more info call 0439 454 375

In Afghanistan a further 1000 Australian troops are playing a frontline role in military operations, pushing into areas controlled by resistance fighters. Eight Australian soldiers have been killed there, seven of them in the last year and a half.

Breaking the Australian government from the US coalition would have a real impact.

The US and Israel are increasingly isolated on the world stage. The US is finding it hard to get support from other allies in sending troops to Afghanistan and Iraq.

Australia is one of its few firm supporters. An Australian withdrawal from the "war on terror" would pressure other countries to also end their support.

This means demanding an end to Australian diplomatic and military ties with Israel, and an end to the Australian government's support given by speaking out in defence of Israeli military action.

But the best way we can weaken the imperialist project in the Middle East is to force our government to stop propping up the US occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq by getting Australian troops out.

The situation is on a knife edge for the US. Late last year the departing commander of British troops in Afghanistan, Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith, declared "we're not going to win this war".

So bad is the situation there that new US president Barack Obama wants to move troops from Iraq to avoid defeat.

If the US is forced to quit Iraq and Afghanistan, it will encourage resistance to imperialism across the Middle East and be a blow to Israel's attempt to isolate Palestinian resistance.

STOP ISRAEL'S MASSACRE IN GAZA



ISRAEL HAS expanded its murderous air attack on Gaza into a full ground assault. With all borders sealed, 1.5 million Palestinians are trapped—with little electricity or fuel and severe shortages of food, clean water and medicines.

Gaza's morgues are overflowing—with the injured queuing in corridors to be treated with dwindling medical supplies.

Western leaders blame the Hamas resistance group for the conflict. The media mostly go along with this, or at best portray it as a clash between two sides that are equally to blame.

But Israel is a terror state, armed with F-16 fighter jets,

helicopter gunships and tanks, that is attacking a largely impoverished and isolated people. The West has backed Israel to the hilt.

Israel claims it is trying to stop Hamas firing rockets. But rocket attacks have killed just 19 Israelis in the last eight years. During the same period Israel has killed 3000 Palestinians in Gaza.

Israel's agenda is the destruction of the democratically-elected Hamas government—and wiping out any Palestinian resistance.

An Israeli military spokesman said that "anything affiliated with Hamas is a legitimate target". This means that all of Gaza's infrastructure has

George Bush says there cannot be a ceasefire until the Palestinians surrender to Israel's demands. Kevin Rudd has expressed "concern" about but refused to condemn Israel's attacks.

Both ignore the fact that, while a "ceasefire" held from June to November, no Israeli was killed by rocket fire from Gaza. Israel broke the ceasefire on November 4, forcing the Palestinians to respond.

And during the ceasefire Israel maintained its devastating economic blockade of Gaza. For the past year and a half this has cut off supplies of basic necessities such as food, medicine and water.

A ceasefire on Israel's terms would allow the blockade to continue, with tens of thousands of Palestinians suffering from malnutrition, disease and poverty.

Anger at the slaughter has sparked mass demonstrations across the world in solidarity with the Palestinians and calling for an immediate end to the Israeli bombing and the blockade of Gaza. Millions of people are also demanding that Gaza's borders are opened.

Any hope of lasting peace in the Middle East will only be realised if there is justice for the Palestinian people. This means an end to the racist state of Israel and the so-called "war on terror", which has produced more wars and instability. It is only a global mass movement of ordinary people on the streets that can bring about this change.

Backed by the West

The conflict has exposed the hypocrisy of Western leaders.