

Has Israel Declared War on the International Community?

By Pablo Ouziel

Yesterday, with amazement, many of us around the world witnessed through a live-feed on the Internet how heavily armed sea pirates – dressed in full military combat gear – descended from Israeli military helicopters unto the decks of the Mavi Marmara – a Turkish flagged humanitarian aid ship carrying hundreds of nonviolent peace advocates from around the globe.

These events took place in International waters, 100 kilometers off the coast of Gaza. The nonviolent peace advocates were on a life-saving mission to liberate the people of Gaza, from the open-aired prison imposed on them by Israel under the consent of its ally, the United States. After being surrounded by Israeli military vessels and with helicopters hovering over their heads, these courageous nonviolent peace advocates watched with amazement and terrorized, as Israeli commandos boarded the Mavi Marmara shooting randomly and killing and wounding many of the advocates on board. Following the massacre, the ship was taken to Ashdod port where those who survived have either been arrested awaiting deportation, or are being treated in hospitals across Israel.

As these events have unfolded, popular furor has grown across continents, and demonstrations have been witnessed in front of Israeli embassies around the globe. The UN Security Council has had an emergency meeting to discuss the issue, spokespeople of different states have expressed deep concern about the events, and as Israeli ambassadors stationed in different nations jitter at the possibility of being expelled, the group of elders – the eminent leaders brought together by Nelson Mandela – has condemned the attack as “completely inexcusable.”

It was only a few weeks ago that the Israeli authorities denied entry to professor Noam Chomsky at the Allenby Bridge border crossing from Jordan to Jericho, in the Palestinian West Bank. Professor Chomsky was on his way to speak at Bir Zeit University. To many of us here in the West, at the time, it seemed bizarre that the Israeli government would commit such a foolish act, by barring academic freedom and freedom of speech in such an open and hostile manner. Professor Chomsky is after all, one of the world’s most renowned academics, and without a doubt, a source of inspiration to many who are advocating nonviolently for peace. What was hard to imagine at the time of this incident, was that professor Chomsky’s refusal of entry into the Palestinian Occupied Territories, although in one sense a continuity of Israeli policy against the Palestinian people and all who befriend them, also marked an intensification of Israel’s open assault on the values and rights of the citizens of the broader international community.

As Western citizens, we have become accustomed by now to the brutal treatment of Palestinian people by Israeli security forces through their daily acts of orchestrated state-terrorism. It comes as no surprise to us, when we hear of the continued extermination of the population of Gaza, and its non-stop humiliation and degradation. A crime which is beyond comprehension and which has already tragically led to the 22-day onslaught on Gaza in late 2008 early 2009 – a destruction of such magnitude, that it is now referred to by many around the world as the Gaza Massacre. An event during which, according to the United Nations Fact Finding

Mission's Goldstone Report, Israeli Defense Forces committed war crimes and possible crimes against humanity.

As Western citizens, we are also used to the ongoing suffering of the people of Gaza, whose physical, psychological, and spiritual hardship is tested on a daily basis as they endure the reality of living in an open-air prison, which their jailers are free to bomb and destroy whenever they please. A situation against which, although condemnation has been strong, international pressure has not succeeded. What we are not accustomed to in the West, however, is to witnessing the Israeli government blatantly attacking hundreds of nonviolent peace advocates from around the globe, congregated on ships navigating in international waters. Peace advocates, whose aid campaign to Gaza has been widely publicized, and who have clearly informed their respective governments of their initiative.

In the West, we have become accustomed to the propaganda machine of the Israeli government filling the global airwaves with fabrications, defamations and outright lies following each crime committed, each violation of international law. Like the Israeli military, the Israeli propaganda apparatus is highly sophisticated. Nevertheless, this latest act seems like a challenge to the world, and I am not sure whether propaganda can bury it. Perhaps in the West, we have become immune to the daily deaths of Palestinians, or to the tragic death of a Western nonviolent peace advocate being shot by the Israeli defense forces while in Palestinian territory. I do not think however, that populations from around the globe can tolerate Israel's interception of a peaceful convoy in international waters, with its subsequent shootings and killings of citizens from many different nationalities. Parliamentarians, Nobel laureates, spiritual leaders, humanitarian aid workers, and journalists amongst others, forced to endure the terror inflicted upon them by lethal Israeli military commandos.

Clearly, the attack on the Mavi Marmara is a premeditated act, and one for which the Israeli propaganda machine has been preparing for a while. Professor Norman Finkelstein has described Israel as a lunatic state, and has warned of the risk of such a state having hundreds of nuclear weapons. Watching through the Internet live-feed, Israel's attack – in international waters – on global citizens brought together by a call to civic duty, all one can hope for as a member of the global nonviolent peace advocacy community, is that the pressure we exert on our governments forces an end to Israel's ongoing crimes against humanity. If Israel is not stopped following this tragedy, it will become clear to us, that just like the Palestinians we have all become targets for the Israeli military, and thus, are no longer protected from Israel's lunacy.

The world has failed to defend the Palestinians for years, but yesterday Israel made a geopolitical turn by declaring war on the citizens of the world. It made all of us Palestinian, and now it is the responsibility of our governments to respond. Will the nations of the international community defend the rights of their citizens as well as the rights of the Palestinians? Will the siege on Gaza end, and those who have repeatedly broken international law, committed war crimes and crimes against humanity be tried and punished? Or has Israel just declared war on the citizens of the world with the implicit consent of its international allies? One cannot predict the outcome of this massacre; nevertheless, there are clear signs pointing to the potential beginning of a new epoch, for Israel, for Palestine, for the Middle East, and for the citizens of the

world. Defining this epoch will revolve around determining whether Israel's latest act, is an act of war against numerous members of the International community.