

COMMENT

Where are the Millions?

ONE ASPECT OF RECENT MASS upsurge in the Arab world was the absence of Palestinian issue. Also, the nature and role of Israel was far too lost in the very positive uprisings that have wracked the Middle East and North Africa. But there is no 'end run' around the presence of Israel from the perspective of liberating the people of the region. The fact, for example, that "new" Egyptian regime has continued the shameful betrayal of the Palestinians, and that it attacked, detained and arrested protesters at the Israeli embassy on May 15, is a measure of how little has yet changed overall in Egypt since the fall of Mubarak.

The very existence of the state of Israel casts a terrible shadow over the entire Middle East. Israel has consistently arrogated for itself the "right" to invade, bomb, blockade, carry out assassinations within, and generally terrorize people in countries and territories beyond, its formal borders. Israel has been in a near constant state of war with its "neighbors" since its founding-invading Lebanon, for example, in 1978 to drive out Palestinian resistance forces; again in 1982, when Israel orchestrated the massacre of thousands of Palestinian civilians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps; again, from 1982-2000; and again in 2006.

Israel serves as an attack dog for the US interests throughout the whole world—from its backing of the apartheid regime in South Africa to its central role in the genocidal slaughter of almost 200,000 Guatemalan peasants, to its ominous and imposing nuclear arsenal. For this reason, the United States, from the beginning of the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, has sternly lectured the peoples of the region that support for Israel is a non-negotiable criterion for whether or not new regimes will be considered acceptable to the US—sending a message that any new regime had better follow those rules... or else.

In a very inspiring development, on May 15 tens of thousands of protesters converged on, and in some cases heroically crossed the borders of Israel from Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza to commemorate the Nakba (the ethnic cleansing on which Israel was founded in 1948) with courageous protest. Israeli troops opened fire on these unarmed protesters, killing at least a dozen on the Lebanon, Gaza, and Syrian borders. And yet millions are not marching in Arab streets to protest, who only yesterday fought with the police for regime change. □□□