

# Chaos in the 'Holy Land' and the Rush to Organize for What's Right

by  
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*Rising out of the raw urgency to do something in the face of great injustice, as bombs relentlessly rained upon the defenseless, yet brave and resilient people of Gaza, besieged and surrounded by the most powerful military in the Middle East—and among the top most powerful in the world (Business Insider, Apr. 23, 2014), inside of what is considered to be the most densely populated piece of land on earth, several hundred San Antonians gathered at Alamo Plaza on July 19, in a show of solidarity and to protest a despicable and brutal assault. It was during this event that some of the people demonstrating in front of the Alamo decided to form the peace organization, San Antonio Justice in Palestine (SAJP).*

## The Crisis

In what was dubbed Operation Protective Edge (8 July 2014 – 26 August 2014), Israeli forces unleashed their military arsenal and employed their latest war technology against a people with no army who live under an Israeli occupation dating back to 1967, and a strangling blockade since 2006, dictating almost every aspect of their lives. Control over Gazans is so overwhelming and sadistic that the state of Israel even controls how many calories they are allowed to consume, which is just enough to prevent them from starving (Haaretz, October 17, 2012).

The conflict has a six-decades-old history in which Palestinians have been crowded into less and less land, essentially making them refugees in their own land. In 1947, Palestinians controlled 94 percent of historic Palestine but after one year, they were left with only 22 percent of that land. Many of the people today calling themselves Israelis were themselves, or are descendants from European refugees who settled there after WWII.

This latest assault on Gaza resulted in Palestinians losing even more land to Israeli military leaders wanting to create a “buffer zone” inside Gaza, eventually depopulating an area of 1.8 miles further reducing the strip by 40 percent (The Daily Beast, July 28, 2014) — not to mention land that’s being lost to the ever increasing flood of Jewish settlers into the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the other two areas of historic Palestine under occupation. At the current rate, Palestinians will soon be completely pushed out of their lands making it impossible for a viable Palestinian state in the future. Given the severity of the blockade, and the routine military attacks on neighborhoods and infrastructure, the United Nations estimates that by 2020 Gaza will be an unlivable place for Palestinians (United Nations, August 2012).

This Israeli assault on Gaza is considered to have surpassed in brutality and destruction the previous assault dubbed Operation Cast Lead (December 27, 2008 – January 18, 2009), just two years earlier. Back then, white phosphorous was used on the population, a chemical agent that is banned under international law (Foreign Policy Journal, May 3, 2013). White phosphorous burns



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through the flesh of its victims for days after coming into contact with the agent. Water can't extinguish it. Cluster bombs were also used in the operation. These are explosive munitions containing a cluster of submunitions that burst in the air and spread onto the ground, designed to rip through vehicles and kill or maim anything in its path (Global Research, November 22, 2012).

Operation Protective Edge leveled buildings and flattened whole neighborhoods leaving tens of thousands of people homeless. Designated shelters, such as a United Nation school, were not spared by the merciless Israeli missiles. Under a blockade, with a barrier made up of concrete, wire fencing with posts, sensors and buffer zones on lands bordering Israel, and with concrete and steel walls on lands bordering Egypt since the 1990's, essentially cutting off the

overpopulated enclave of 1.8 million from the rest of the world, Gazans were left with nowhere to run while the bombs dropped from Israeli jets and artillery cannons. Moreover, the intensity of the assault was so severe that military ammunition and ordnances used on Gaza were expended to near depletion, prompting the U.S. to rush to Israel's aid delivering a requested order of ammunition to replenish its forces.

After the fierce bombardment by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), and a Palestinian response, the death toll would tally up to 2,192 Palestinian killed, of whom 1,523 are believed to be civilians, including 519 children, and 11,100 wounded (United Nations). The Israeli body count would amount to 66 soldiers, 6 civilians, and 469 soldiers and 87 civilians wounded.

The United Nations declared a state of emergency in Gaza

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as a result of the 50-day military assault on the coastal strip that inflicted massive damage to infrastructure, which was followed by heavy rains that caused flooding severely affecting the over 400,000 people left homeless by the operation (BBC News, November 28, 2014). Israel continues to regulate how much aid Gazans are allowed to receive from international aid groups and governments for reconstruction and life-supporting materials.

Because of the disproportionate and indiscriminate military onslaught on Gaza, many Americans became appalled by the brutality — and rightly so. Many took to the streets to show their solidarity towards Gazans and the overall Palestinian situation. Chicago saw 8,000 demonstrators. In New York, protesters occupied the Brooklyn Bridge and thousands more demonstrated in other parts of the city; in Oakland, California picketers were able to prevent an Israeli cargo ship from docking, and in the nation's capital about 50,000 protesters gathered to show their solidarity. Furthermore, tons of people flooded Congress' e-mail inboxes and telephone voice mails with their calls, letters and signed petitions — all demanding that the U.S. pressure Israel into stopping the carnage.

Texas was not left behind. In San Antonio, around 400 peace activists came out to show solidarity to Gaza, with over 300 in Dallas, and about 7,000 protesters in Austin.

## Organizing a Campaign for Justice

SAJP (San Antonio Justice in Palestine) is a group of concerned San Antonians whose intent is to bring awareness to the community in regards to U.S. policy in Palestine. We are committed to educating the public and pursuing incremental nonviolent actions to change attitudes in Texas, Washington, and Tel Aviv to bring a fair and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As an organization, we have collaborated with other organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace and organized peaceful protests in front of Cornerstone Church, where Pastor John Hagee uses the pulpit to bullhorn his pro-Israel agenda. His church holds a yearly festival called Night to Honor Israel, in which this year the Israeli Ambassador was to be the guest speaker.

Utilizing the nonviolent strategy of Boycott, Divestment and Sanction, or BDS (which was used successfully in the fight to end apartheid in South Africa), SAJP organized a peaceful and informative campaign to educate shoppers at an ULTA Beauty Store in San Antonio during the Black Friday weekend. ULTA sells the skin care product line AHAVA, which extracts resources from and owns facilities in occupied Palestinian land — which makes it illegal for them to operate under international law.

SAJP also fundraised for the victims of the Gaza onslaught by hosting a dinner at the Episcopal Church of Reconciliation — A Night of Hope: Fundraiser for the Children of Gaza — and had a presence at the annual Esperanza Peace and Justice Center's Peace Market/ Mercado de Paz event by holding a table and selling Palestinian-made products.

In conclusion, peace without justice is no peace at all. As Americans we have the power to sway the political decisions of our leaders, which in turn would affect the political calculation of the Israeli government. Israel is dependent on U.S. funding and political cover to proceed with its political moves. Only the U.S. can deter the State of Israel from continuing with their unjust policies towards Palestinians and halt their ambition to appropriate more of their lands.

Let's work together to end this grave injustice against a people battered under Israeli occupation and who continue to live and die in misery under this oppressive regime; and whose lives don't seem to matter to our elected officials. Write to your representative, and/or join our movement. SAJP's key principles are grounded on human rights, international law, and basic standards of justice to bring about a fair and lasting resolution to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Contact us on the web at [www.sanantonioforjusticeinpalestine.org](http://www.sanantonioforjusticeinpalestine.org), or send us an email at [sa4justiceinpalestine@gmail.com](mailto:sa4justiceinpalestine@gmail.com) to find out about future meetings and events. ♦

*Bio: Giovanni Reyes is an activist and member of San Antonio Justice in Palestine and Iraq Veterans Against the War. His writings have appeared in Claridad de Puerto Rico, La Repuesta, The New York Times Examiner, and Common Dreams.*

