

# So Much News About Gaza, When There Was So Little About Yarmouk?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The Yarmouk camp for so-called “Palestinian” refugees in southern Damascus was under relentless bombardment by the Syrian government this past April. The Assad regime was attempting to destroy the last remnants of ISIS fighters in the camp, but in so doing, it bombed the way it usually does – indiscriminately – and killed and wounded many of the “Palestinian” civilians in Yarmouk. That camp is by far the largest of the 13 camps in which “Palestinians” live in Syria, and at its height had close to 200,000 residents. As many know, the “Palestinians” in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan are required by their host governments to live in camps. They are not granted full citizenship in these countries nor, for that matter, anywhere else in the Arab world (though a limited citizenship is granted in Jordan), and they are kept from full

access to educational and vocational opportunities. For it is more important to the Arabs that the “cause of Palestine” be promoted, even if it means damaging the life-chances of generations of those Muslim Arabs who continue to call themselves, wherever they were born and raised, “Palestinians.”

The April 2018 bombing of the Yarmouk camp had ISIS as its intended target, but the Syrians were indifferent as to how many “Palestinian” civilians (i.e., non-ISIS) also died. Several dozen – about 50 – is the estimated number. Of the 6,000 “Palestinians” who were still in Yarmouk on April 19, 5,000 have since fled. The last remaining hospital in Yarmouk was also destroyed by the Syrians. **“Yarmouk was a refugee camp that had already been transformed into a death camp,” said Christopher Gunness, a spokesman for the UN Relief and Works Agency (Unrwa), the agency for Palestinian refugees. And now “things have become unimaginably brutal for the civilians there.”**

The Yarmouk camp had been bombed many times before in the Syrian civil war. In August 2012, two dozen civilians were killed in a single attack by the Syrians. In December 2012, there was an aerial bombing by Assad’s MiG fighter jets. In what would eventually become commonplace, the bombing targeted a hospital, a mosque, and a school, killing more than 100 civilians in the process. The Assad regime suspected that Syrian opposition forces were using Yarmouk as one of their bases. In 2013, there was a siege of the camp, and **at least 135 “Palestinian” civilians died directly from being bombed during the siege. More than 1,020 died indirectly, of starvation.**

In June 2014 the Syrian regime started to cut off water to Yarmouk; this man-made drought, manufactured by the government, continues intermittently to this day. Water had to be smuggled in, for the 18,000 “Palestinians” – less than 10% of those who once lived in Yarmouk – who remained. And as the

number of "Palestinians" decreased to 6,000 earlier this year, the deliberate drought inflicted by the Free Syrian Army remained.

During these years, ever since the siege by Assad's forces began in 2013, the inhabitants of Yarmouk were made aware that their Arab brothers were indifferent. Even their fellow "Palestinians" elsewhere remained silent. **"Of course we've seen how many Palestinians aren't speaking about our crisis," Hakem Said from Yarmouk News Agency explains. "Most people in the camp blame the Palestinian factions the most for what has happened. They have not done anything to help us. But many Palestinians that aren't even in factions have also not said a lot about the siege. We know that if this were happening in Palestine the reactions would have been stronger. We know this and it bothers us a lot."**

It was the same during this latest bombing of Yarmouk by Assad's army in April 2018. There was no outcry over these attacks. Not at the U.N. Not in Europe. Not from any Arab states. Not even from the "Palestinian Authority." But when "Palestinians" belonging to, or egged on by, Hamas, attempted to breach the security fence during the Great March of Return, in order to enter Israel to commit mayhem and murder, and Israel managed to prevent them, there were howls of denunciation at the U.N. and from Arab and Muslim countries. The Arabs and Muslims will protest to high heaven the killing of "Palestinians" by Israelis, but are silent if the killers are other Arabs, for that would dilute the effect, and the propaganda value, of any "Palestinians" killed by the Israelis.

The "Palestinians" in Gaza began their Great March of Return on March 30 and officially ended it on Tuesday, May 15, but they may well continue to show up, in dwindling numbers, for a few more Fridays. Hamas organizers had initially hoped to attract 100,000 marchers, but only 30,000 showed up for that first Friday, which was not exactly a vote of confidence in

Hamas, and the numbers steadily went down every subsequent Friday, to a few thousand, before a single last upsurge of close to 40,000 on May 14. In media coverage of the Gaza events, marchers were invariably described as “peaceful” and “unarmed.” But in fact, throughout the seven Fridays of marches, and on the last two days, May 14 and May 15, the Hamas-directed “Palestinians” hurled rocks and Molotov cocktails over the fence, showed up with still other explosives to bury right at the fence, brought wire-cutters to cut through that fence, burned tires to create a smokescreen (making it harder for Israeli soldiers to target them with rubber bullets and tear gas), and – a new weapon – let loose kites to which they had affixed oil-soaked rags, and lit the rags on fire, kites which would then land on the Israeli side of the fence and set farmland ablaze –which is exactly what has happened. A handful of the “Palestinians” have also been armed – non-violently, of course – with axes, grenades, and even the occasional gun. The foreign media has been most reluctant to report on all this deadly weaponry. Only a handful have reported on the swastikas daubed onto the killer-kites.

The Israelis were not eager to engage the Gazan Arabs and thereby to further the propaganda value of the spectacle. They continually warned the marchers, week in week out, not to come close to the security fence; they announced these warnings from loudspeakers, they air-dropped leaflets with the same warnings. Then, to stop the marchers who did not heed the warnings, they always responded first with endless volleys of tear gas, and then with rubber bullets. Only in the most menacing cases (as when some Gazan Arabs managed to cut, or were on the verge of cutting, through the wire of the security fence, or were close to the fence flinging Molotov cocktails over at soldiers in Israel, or planting explosives at the fence, or setting alight Israeli farmland with their kites, did the Israelis use live fire, and then they were very careful to aim for the legs, so as to halt the marchers. How

accurate was their fire? As of the end of May 15, there have been, according to the figures put out by the “Palestinians” themselves (so a little skepticism may be in order), a **total of 109 “Palestinians” killed, and a total of 12,000 wounded. In other words, despite a constantly shifting, confusing, smoke-filled battlefield, 99% of those who were wounded survived; fewer than 1% died from Israeli gunfire.** That bespeaks surgical accuracy by the Israelis, rather than wanton killing. Hamas, of course, did whatever it could to encourage children to take part, hoping for many casualties among them; it even sent a seven-year-old “Palestinian” girl (rescued by the Israelis, who returned her safely to her parents) across the security fence on May 11. Hamas also placed adults with intellectual disabilities at the front of the marchers, hoping that they, too, would become victims of the Israelis. Some people were also paid to participate. These are among the many stories about the Great March of Return that the Western media failed to cover.

Many of those killed were initially reported by the Western media as being innocents, but it has later turned out that quite a few, including a “journalist” – that is, someone wearing a sign saying “Press,” about whose death a great fuss was made – were members of Hamas. Despite the flaming kites, the Molotov cocktails, the burning tires, the rocks, the occasional guns and grenades and axes, despite, too, the membership in Hamas of many of those killed, these people remain “unarmed demonstrators” – and not just on Al Jazeera.

Israel has always maintained that not only did Hamas, a terrorist organization, orchestrate this whole event, and inveigle and even pay others to participate, but its own members took the major role as the most aggressive marchers to the security fence. **In a television interview on May 16, Hamas official Salah Bardawil proudly proclaimed that “[i]n the last rounds of confrontations, if 62 people were martyred, 50 of them were Hamas.”** How many of the 47 demonstrators killed

before May 14 were Hamas members? If among those previously killed, the percentage of Hamas members was roughly the same as it was among those killed during May 14 and 15, that would mean that 40 of the 47 killed during those Friday marches were Hamas members, and of the total of 109 killed, 90 were members of Hamas.

Meanwhile, in late April, other “Palestinians” – many dozens of them – were killed in the Syrian bombardment of the Yarmouk camp, in just a few days, about half the number killed by the Israelis during the seven Fridays of the Great March of Return and on May 14 and 15, during the last final spasm of “Palestinian” rage orchestrated by Hamas. Unlike the Israelis with the Gazan marchers, the Syrians faced no threat from the “Palestinians” in Yarmouk. They had no burning kites or Molotov cocktails. Those “Palestinians” were simply being killed because they were there, stuck in Yarmouk, caught between ISIS and Assad’s army, with both sides indifferent to their fate. No Arab country, not even one of those those opposed to Assad, has bothered to deplore the killings in Yarmouk of “Palestinians” this past April. Nor have any of the “Palestinians” in Gaza or the West Bank mentioned the Syrian Army’s assault on Yarmouk and the “Palestinians” who were killed there. The Yarmouk killings were too close in time to the Great March of Return that had been announced, and the “Palestinians” understood that the Yarmouk story would only draw attention away from the propaganda spectacle about to begin in Gaza, and for Hamas that would never do.

A [recent report in Maclean’s](#) describes the situation in Yarmouk:

*In Ramallah, the humanitarian catastrophe suffered by Syria’s Palestinians has only rarely warranted any attention from Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian National Authority. In Gaza, Ismael Haniyeh of Hamas has had frosty relations with the Assad regime, but he has taken great care to stay on the good side of the Khomeinists in Tehran, who*

*provide both Hamas and Assad with armor and money.*

*What this means is that Syria's Palestinians have not only been left on their own against Assad's barrel bombers and Russian warplanes. They are just as likely to be killed in encounters with the various jihadist forces ostensibly identified with the Syrian opposition camps, including the Islamic State and Al Qaida's affiliates. In places like Yarmouk, Latakia and Deraa, they have died at the hands of Assad's allies in Iran's Quds Force and Hezbollah. Assad's mercenary allies in Syria include the PFLP-GC, the Palestinian Liberation Army, the "Free Palestine" organization, Fatih Intifada, and Liwa Quds – all terrorist groups armed to the teeth and claiming to be fighting in the interests of the Palestinian people.*

By the Action group's calculations, 3,702 Palestinians have been killed in Syria over the past seven years. That's nearly twice the number of Palestinian civilians who were killed during Israel's Operation Pillar of Defence in Gaza in 2011, and Operation Protective Edge in 2014. But when Syrian Palestinians die, they die far from the television cameras, and their deaths prompt no rallies and marches in the streets of the NATO capitals.

Such hypocrisy no longer amazes. We expect it whenever Israel is concerned. South Africa has "recalled" its ambassador from Israel. Belgium has called in the Israeli ambassador to express its displeasure at the casualties in Gaza. Russia, that celebrated champion of civil rights, has expressed its "deepest concern." But the most outrageous outrage was that expressed by the inimitable Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Even though the Israelis made endless efforts to warn the marchers away from the security fence, by loudspeaker and leaflet, fired tear gas and rubber bullets to try to head them off through non-lethal means, and only as a last resort did they use live fire, taking great care to aim below the knee, so that 99% of

those wounded survived, Erdogan had the gall to accuse Israel of the crime of “genocide” and of being a “terrorist state” because it dared to defend its borders against those hellbent on harming it. Erdogan does know something about “genocide” because – according to the U.N. – his troops have since 2015 killed thousands of Kurds, most of them civilians, inside Turkey, and displaced tens of thousands more as they destroyed large parts of Kurdish cities, including Diyarbakir, Nusaybin, Silopi, and Sirnak. And earlier this year, in Afrin in Syria, Turkish troops killed more than 500 Kurdish civilians – that is, roughly five times the number of “Palestinians” killed in Gaza since March 30. None of the Kurdish civilians killed in Afrin threatened the Turkish state, while the Hamas-led “Palestinian” marchers were baying for Jewish blood – that was the whole point of their breaching the fence. Yet here is Erdogan declaring that Israel is guilty of “genocide.”

France’s Macron has let the Israelis know that the “Palestinians have a right to peacefully protest,” as if that was what they had been doing all along. Did Macron manage to miss the spectacle of all those marchers who flung Molotov cocktails and pipe bombs over, and buried explosives beside, the security fence, and sent flaming kites toward Israeli farms, while others used wire-cutters in an attempt to massively breach the fence itself, so that the “Palestinians” could rush in en masse to kill Israelis, with whatever weapons they had? What “peaceful protest” is he talking about? Has he taken leave of his senses?

The next time someone tells you about what those terrible Israelis did to those innocent unarmed marchers in Gaza, mention the orchestration of those marchers by Hamas, mention the mentally deficient adults and children, including a seven-year-old girl (rescued by the Israelis), inveigled into taking part, mention the Molotov cocktails, the pipe bombs, the tires set aflame, the flaming kites with swastikas painted on them, the axes and guns and grenades wielded by some of those



“unarmed” marchers. And then describe the care the Israelis took throughout to warn the marchers, by loudspeakers and by leafletting, not to approach the security fence, before employing non-lethal force, and when, as a last resort, Israeli soldiers used live fire to halt those marchers who came close to or were at the fence, attempting to breach it, those soldiers took extraordinary care, by aiming to hit below the knees, to avoid killing, which is why 99% of the wounded survived. And once you have delivered yourself of all of that information then, as a parting shot, be sure to ask “And why didn’t anyone report on what happened to the ‘Palestinians’ in Yarmouk?”

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