

Gaza's Economy Collapses; With any hope of peace

According to a new report by the World Bank. After a decade-long Israeli blockade and a series of large-scale military assaults, the economy of Gaza is in "freefall".

At a meeting of international donors in New York, coinciding with the annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, the World Bank painted an alarming picture of Gaza's crisis. Unemployment now stands at close to 60% and the economy is contracting at an ever faster rate.

While the West Bank's plight is not yet as severe, it is not far behind, countries attending the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee were told. Gaza's collapse could bring down the entire Palestinian banking sector. In response, Europe hurriedly put together a €40 million aid package, but that will chiefly address Gaza's separate humanitarian crisis – not the economic one – by improving supplies of electricity and potable water.

In recent weeks, mass protests along Gaza's perimeter fence have been revived and expanded after a summer lull, nonetheless, the political will to remedy the situation looks as atrophied as ever. No one is prepared to take meaningful responsibility for the time-bomb that is Gaza. In fact, the main parties that could make a difference appear intent on allowing the deterioration to continue. Instead, Israel is upholding the blockade as tightly as ever, preventing the flow of goods in and out of the enclave. Fishing is limited to three miles off the coast rather than the 20-mile zone agreed in the Oslo accords. Hundreds of companies are reported to have folded over the summer.

Intensifying the enclave's troubles is the Trump administration's recent decision to cut aid to the Palestinians, including to the United Nation's refugee agency, UNRWA. It plays a critical role in Gaza, providing food, education and health services to nearly two-thirds of the population. The food budget is due to run out in December, and the schools budget by the end of October. Hundreds of thousands of hungry children with nowhere to spend their days can only fuel the protests – and the deaths.

The Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas, headquartered in the West Bank, has no incentive to help. Gaza's slowly unfolding catastrophe is his leverage to make Hamas submit to his rule. That is why the Palestinian Authority has cut transfers to Gaza by \$30 million a month. But even if Mr Abbas wished to help, he largely lacks the means. The US cuts were imposed primarily to punish him for refusing to play ball with US President Donald Trump's supposed "deal of the century" peace plan. Israel, the World Bank notes, has added to Mr Abbas's difficulties by refusing to transfer taxes and customs duties it collects on the PA's behalf. And the final implicated party, Egypt, is reticent to loosen its own chokehold on its short border with Gaza. President Abdel Fattah El Sisi opposes giving any succour either to his domestic Islamist opponents or to Hamas.

At the UN General Assembly, Mr Trump promised his peace plan would be unveiled in the next two to three months, and made explicit for the first time his support for a two-state solution, saying it would "work best". Mr Netanyahu vaguely concurred, while pointing out: "Everyone defines the term 'state' differently." His definition, he added, required that not one of the illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank be removed and that any future Palestinian state be under complete Israeli security control.

Thanks to Jonathan Cook

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INSIDE NICARAGUA'S ULTRA ULTRA LEFTIST OPPOSITION

Nils McCune is a longtime resident of the Nicaraguan city of Tipitapa. He has worked closely with the country's rural campesino movement and observed the coup from the ground. He is also an astute observer of the country's politics and history. I asked Nils about the role of the Sandinista Renovation Movement (Movimiento Renovador Sandinista – MRS) party in marketing the recent coup in Nicaragua as a progressive popular mobilization.

Nils McCune: I think that for decades, probably for centuries, the elite have done politics, right? And everybody else has the job of just sort of carrying out the economic activity that allows the elite to stay where they are. And in Nicaragua, that model lasted for decades and decades until the 1920s when, out of the civil war that the United States got involved in and used as a pretext to occupy the country, a figure named Augusto César Sandino formed his own army to fight against the US presence here.

And that army was based upon the idea of a difficult struggle in which the elite would cede ground to workers and to peasants, because only workers and peasants have the strength to carry out a long-term struggle for their own interests that's capable of beating imperialism. That was his thesis, and he was really the developer of guerrilla warfare in the Americas, he was the first person to use it.

It was successful. The US Marines left Nicaragua after six years of occupation. And then Sandino was betrayed and killed by Somoza, the Somoza regime got started. But the reason that's important to keep in mind is that when the Sandinista Revolution successfully took power in 1979, there was a combination of oligarchy families that were very unhappy with Somoza, as well as young revolutionaries from all social classes.

So several of the very top-level, cabinet-level, cadre of the Sandinista Front of the 1980s were in fact the children of these oligarchy

families, for example, the Cardenal brothers who were the Ministers of Education and Culture, as well as Carlos Fernando Chamorro who was the owner of *La Barricada*. So during that time there was a role for the sort of, the black sheep of these oligarchy families to get to be revolutionaries in that context.

But as soon as the Sandinista Front lost power in 1990, there was an exodus of these children of the oligarchy from the party, because they were used to being ministers. They didn't want to have to be opposition figures in an opposition party, they didn't want to have to defend the gains of the revolution out on the street, fighting cops. They didn't want to suffer with the Nicaraguan people.

Many of them left and bought houses in Los Angeles or in Miami or in Spain. Many of them went on to write books. And what's interesting is that – [interrupted for a moment by Max's lifting up a book, *The Country under My Skin*] – yeah, Gioconda Belli, right? Belli is one of the other famous oligarchy families here in Nicaragua.

So these people have led their illustrious lives. They've maintained contact in some cases with the US solidarity activists who gave their time, their energy, their sweat, sometimes their lives, to support the Sandinista Revolution, and who were often able to make good friends with people who spoke English, people who had high-level positions in the Sandinista Front.

So the ex-Sandinistas have always sort of had the ear of the US and European Left. And this part of the MRS was formed out of a combination of legitimate grievances with the Sandinista Front at the 1994 congress, as well as sort of a social democratic tendency which at the time wanted to reject Marxism, said that socialism was a passé idea, and wanted to form new alliances.

So once that party was formed, they sort of started to create their own idea for what they could do. They never had popular support, they never did

neighborhood organizing like the Sandinista Front had, and they never went out to defend the gains of the revolution. So as soon as they went into an election, they were able to garner only this classic 2%.

Meanwhile, the Sandinista Front, with all of its heirs, stuck with the large majority of the people, and has never had less than 35% support here. So that's really a key to start to understand these two political forces that sort of claim the Sandino tradition.

There's a little bit more to it. So we have the MRS, which is a social democratic analysis, which is the MRS Movement for Sandinista Renovation, and then there's an ultra-left MRS, which is the Movement for the Rescue of Sandinismo. In both cases, they're the intellectual left-sounding arm of reactionary politics in Nicaragua, which have continually tried to destroy the Sandinista Front and destroy historical memory of struggle, to enable the elite to turn Nicaragua into a copy of several other countries where the Left has never been able to successfully take power and run a country.

The secret here, and what makes Nicaragua different, is that there is a historical memory of defeating the Somoza regime and defeating the elite in building up a popular basis for a nation. And that memory is what allows Nicaraguans to face imperialism. It's a constant source of strength, and that's what they're going after.

So that's my take on the MRS. They're very strong outside of the country, they're very weak within the country. There's not one MRS member in Tipitapa because it's a very working-class city. I would doubt that there are any working-class MRS members in all of Nicaragua. They do hold enormous sway over the NGO sector, and they are who has been the most agile in receiving foreign support in this country.

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