**The right to resources**

Sultan Barakat

Monday, Mar 11, 2024

Over the past few months, appalling videos have emerged from the conflict zone in Gaza of Israeli troops looting the properties of Palestinians who have fled their brutal aggression. Soldiers can be seen smiling to the camera and showing off watches, jewellery, cash, and even carpets and sports jerseys that they had stolen from Palestinian homes. Historical artefacts stolen from Gaza have even been put on display at the Knesset.

While similar acts of looting by Russian soldiers in Ukraine were well-documented and mocked, international media has hardly paid attention to the Israeli pillaging of Gaza.

Some may find it hard to believe that the well-paid soldiers of a rich country would engage in such crimes, but to the people of Palestine, this is hardly surprising. The scenes in these videos are highly reminiscent of what Palestinians saw happen to their properties as they fled ethnic cleansing by Zionist forces in the 1948 Nakba.

As Israeli historian Adam Raz describes in his recent book, Looting of Arab Property in the War of Independence, Jewish fighters and civilians looted everything from jewellery, books, and embroidered gowns to food and livestock to furniture, kitchenware and even floor tiles.

Once established, the state of Israel continued to steal on a greater scale from the Palestinians, taking their land and property. Palestinian natural resources, particularly water, have also been looted. Today, the war in Gaza is serving as a convenient cover for another theft on a grand scale; this time Israel is seeking to plunder the maritime offshore gas reserves that are the property of the state of Palestine.

In late October, the Israeli Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure announced that it had awarded concessions for natural gas exploration to Israeli and foreign companies in zones that significantly overlap with the maritime borders of Gaza.

Needless to say, Israel as an occupier has no right to award licences in areas that it does not hold sovereignty over under any circumstances.

Palestine is a party to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and has declared its maritime boundaries in accordance with these principles.

Israel has not signed UNCLOS. It also does not recognise the state of Palestine and has recently doubled down on this position with a vote in the Knesset to “oppose a unilateral recognition of the Palestinian state” despite growing calls globally, including from the US, its main sponsor, for a two-state solution.

The combination of these positions has given Israel the excuse for not recognising the maritime borders of Palestine and for expropriating the resources in these areas. These Israeli claims, of course, do not make its actions legal.

One has to wonder why foreign companies, including Italian Eni, British BP and Dana Petroleum, a subsidiary of Korea National Oil Corporation, have decided to continue their participation in this deal, particularly amid the continuing Israeli campaign of what the International Court of Justice has identified as a plausible case of genocide.

On February 8, four human rights organisations in Israel and Palestine – Adalah, Al Mezan, Al-Haq, and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights issued a joint news release regarding the awarded gas exploration licences in the occupied waters of Palestine.

They announced that they have sent a letter to the Israeli Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, demanding that the award and the related tender be cancelled. They also said they have sent legal notices to Eni, Dana Petroleum and Israeli Ratio Petroleum, asking them not to undertake any activities related to the licences.

“You should be aware that the International Criminal Court currently has an active investigation open into international crimes committed in territory of the State of Palestine, and has jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute any individual(s) it finds responsible for committing war crimes, including pillage. Complicity in war crimes like pillage is also a serious criminal offence and corporate actors can be subject to individual criminal liability … Complicity in violations of [international humanitarian law] can also expose companies like yours – and your managers and staff – to the risk of civil actions for damages,” the notices warned.

Excerpted: ‘Israel is pillaging not just Gaza’s cities but also its waters’.

Courtesy: Aljazeera.com