US vetoes UN resolution opposing Arafat's murder

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In what can only be interpreted as a green light for its Israeli allies to carry out the coldblooded assassination of the elected president of the Palestinian people, the US Tuesday vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution opposing the murder of Yasser Arafat.

The resolution, which was backed by 11 of the 15 members of the Security Council, with Britain, Germany and Bulgaria abstaining, demanded "that Israel, the occupying power, desist from any act of deportation and to cease any threat to the safety of the elected president of the Palestinian Authority."

It went on to denounce both Israel's "targeted assassinations" of militant leaders and Palestinian suicide bombings, "all of which have caused enormous suffering and many innocent victims." It further called for a cessation of "all acts of terrorism, provocation, incitement and destruction."

Washington's ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, dismissed the resolution as "lopsided," adding, "This resolution wasn't going to add anything constructive to the advancement of peace." Instead, he insisted, the measure should have demanded that the "Palestinian Authority must take action to remove the threat of terrorist groups."

Over the last three decades, the US government has vetoed some 30 UN resolutions either affirming the rights of Palestinians or condemning Israeli acts of repressive violence. Most recently, it blocked one condemning the Israeli army's deliberate killing of United Nations personnel in the occupied territories.

Successive Israeli governments have understood these vetoes, combined with the tens of billions of dollars in US aid and loans that have been poured into the Zionist state, as a carte blanche to carry out armed incursions into Palestinian territories as well as neighboring Arab states, the seizure of land for new settlements and the assassination of Palestinian leaders and activists.

The latest veto is no different. While US officials have publicly stated their disagreement with the proposal to murder Arafat, they have done so strictly on tactical grounds, leaving the door open to supporting just such a monstrous crime in the not so distant future.

Thus, Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser, echoed the words of the Sharon regime in an interview with the *New York Times*, declaring that Arafat "stands as an obstacle to peace."

The Israeli-US contention that Arafat is personally responsible for the breakdown of the so-called peace process and the bloodshed that has dominated the region for the past three years is absurd on its face.

The Palestinian president has been subjected to effective house arrest by the Israeli security forces that have laid siege to his compound in Ramallah for more than a year and a half. Moreover, a so-called peace plan that has produced only death and misery has been so discredited among his people that his own stature had suffered because of his association with the US-backed treaties. Paradoxically, the Israeli threat to take his life has revived his standing as a symbol of the Palestinian national struggle to which he has devoted his life.

Behind the demonization of Arafat lies the more fundamental conception that the Palestinians as a whole are responsible for the Middle East conflict and that Israel's 36-year-old occupation of the West Bank and Gaza represent merely a defensive action against terrorism.

In an editorial published September 12, the day after the Israeli cabinet discussed the liquidation of Arafat, the *New York* Times gave voice to this approach. "The problem all along has been that certain things never changed—anti-Israel terror and incitement on the Palestinian side, extensive Jewish settlement building

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in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by Israel. Together, they have brought the process to its knees. The two are not equivalent. You cannot equate blowing up children on a bus with building on land someone else considers his."

Given the moral scales used by the *Times*, what precisely would be "equivalent"? Were the Palestinians to possess the same massive arsenal of US supplied armaments as Israel, supplemented of course by nuclear and other "weapons of mass destruction," they could presumably seize back the land taken over for Zionist settlers or even take land for themselves from Israel. But, given that they don't, it would seem that the only option granted them by the *Times'* editors is to bow to Israeli occupation and accept whatever Sharon dictates.

The conception that this occupation involves merely "building on land someone else considers his" is truly breathtaking. First, it should be remembered, Israeli security forces have killed some 2,400 Palestinians just since September 2000. Included in these figures, according to Israel's secret police agency, Shin Bet, were 551 "terrorists", that is, Palestinians who were armed. The rest were what the US military refers to as "collateral damage," nearly 400 of them minors and 100 aged 12 or younger. The Israeli Human Rights Information Centre, B'Tselem has concluded that "80 percent of the Palestinians killed were not connected to armed actions."

In addition to the dead, tens of thousands have been wounded, many of them unable to secure proper medical care.

Meanwhile, the use of roadblocks, curfews, closures, collective punishment such as the demolition of houses and entire apartment blocks, as well as random daily armed terror by Israeli troops has turned the life of the Palestinians into a hell on earth.

The deliberate division of the Palestinian territories by Zionist settlements, Israeli-controlled roads, checkpoints and roadblocks has strangled the economic life of the territories. According to a recent report released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/tb50d4_en.pdf:

* Last year the per capita income of the occupied territories fell to less than half of its 1999 level.

* Nearly two-thirds of the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, some 2 million people, are living under conditions of extreme poverty, with an income of less than $2 a day.

* The unemployment rate has climbed to over 40 percent.

* Since 2000 the economic growth recorded over the previous 15 years has been wiped out.

This is not a question of some abstract property dispute. Israel has made life impossible for the Palestinians. These abysmal conditions are the fruits of an illegal occupation maintained by Israel with full support from Washington. That they produce acts of resistance is inevitable. The sentiments of desperation and anger that motivate suicide bombers to carry out attacks inside Israel are entirely understandable, however counterproductive and horrific the tactic they have chosen.

The Sharon government has worked deliberately to provoke these desperate acts of terror, carrying out assassinations of Palestinian leaders with the full knowledge that the response will be another bombing. The bombings in turn provide the Israeli regime with the justification for carrying out new military attacks on the Palestinians, seizing more land—the number of Zionist settlers has doubled since the Oslo accords of a decade ago—and reducing the areas relegated to the Palestinian people to ever-smaller, divided enclaves.

The ultimate goal of Sharon and his supporters is a massive "ethnic cleansing" that would expel the 3.5 million Palestinians from the occupied territories and create a "Greater Israel" extending from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River. The proposal to murder Arafat is, in the final analysis, a step towards the realization of a strategy aimed at eliminating the Palestinians as a people.

The US veto at the UN only confirms that Washington is fully complicit in this criminal policy.

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