

The bombing of Syria: a new eruption of US-Israeli aggression

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With its bombing raid deep inside Syria Sunday, the Israeli regime of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has opened the door to a wider war in the Middle East.

While Israel justified the attack on Syria—the first in 30 years—as retaliation for the October 4 Haifa suicide bombing that killed 19 civilians and wounded scores more, it offered no proof that either Syria or the target of its missile attack were in any way linked to this atrocity.

Washington quickly signaled its support for the latest act of Israeli aggression. President Bush said on Monday that he had spoken with Sharon and stressed that “Israel’s got a right to defend herself, that Israel must not feel constrained in terms of defending the homeland.” A White House spokesman said Bush did not even raise the bombing of Syria in the conversation, much less criticize it.

At the United Nations, US officials indicated they were prepared to veto a proposed resolution that condemns the attack on Syria as an act of “military aggression” and warns of “a dangerous deterioration that threatens regional and international peace and security.”

US Ambassador to the UN John Negroponte, who currently presides over the Security Council, tabled the resolution without scheduling any vote. He issued a statement declaring Syria “on the wrong side of the war on terrorism,” effectively declaring that Syria got what it deserves.

Whether or not the Israeli regime cleared the attack with the White House beforehand is not known, though both Washington and Tel Aviv claim that there was no prior discussion of the bombing raid. In any case, the Israeli regime is confident that it can act with impunity in carrying out military aggression against its Arab neighbors and no specific permission is required. “You don’t ask for a green light and you don’t get a green light,” an Israeli official told the *Washington Post*.

The transparent Israeli objective is to convince Washington to expand its occupation of Iraq west into Syria or even east into Iran. A senior adviser to Sharon claimed after the raid that the alleged training camp had been financed by Iran.

“We will not tolerate the continuation of this axis of terror between Teheran, Damascus and Gaza,” said the aide, Raanan Gissin, in an obvious attempt to echo Bush’s “axis of evil” rhetoric.

Syria next target in “war on terrorism”?

At the United Nations, Israel’s ambassador, Dan Gillerman,

appealed directly for the extension of Washington’s “war on terrorism” into a war to topple the regime in Damascus. “Syria would do well to take a hard look in the mirror and count itself fortunate that it has not yet, for unfortunate reasons, been the subject of concerted international action as part of the global campaign against terrorism,” he said, adding slowly after a brief pause, “Not yet.”

In recent months, the Bush administration has repeatedly threatened Damascus, describing the Syrian government as a “rogue state” and “terrorist sponsor,” while alleging that it possesses “weapons of mass destruction” and has allowed guerrilla fighters to cross its border into Iraq to resist the US occupation.

Many of these unsubstantiated charges directly parallel those used as the pretexts for launching the unprovoked war on Iraq.

Last April, intelligence sources leaked information on contingency plans for a US invasion of Syria drawn up on the orders of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. The plans reportedly involved US forces invading under the cover of conducting “hot pursuit” of fleeing elements of the Saddam Hussein regime. Like the Israeli regime itself, the right-wing and pro-Zionist cabal in the Pentagon’s civilian leadership has promoted the expansion of the Iraq war into Syria.

Richard Perle, a member of the Defense Policy Board who has the closest political and ideological ties with the top officials in the Pentagon, welcomed the Israeli bombing. “It will help the peace process,” he told the *Post*, adding that he did not understand why Israel had not struck Syrian targets earlier, because “to go after terrorists and not after their bases makes no sense.”

Meanwhile, the Haifa terrorist bombing provoked renewed demands from within Sharon’s government for carrying out a previously announced plan to assassinate Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

In an evident attempt to forestall a major new Israeli attack on the occupied territories, Arafat declared a state of emergency and appointed a new cabinet headed by his nominee for prime minister, Ahmed Qureia. Palestinian officials indicated they were preparing a crackdown on militants of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the two organizations that have claimed responsibility for most recent suicide bombings.

Social roots of suicide bombings

Neither the military attacks of the Israeli regime nor the pathetic promises of the powerless Palestinian authority to rein in Islamic

militants will resolve the underlying political oppression and social deprivation that have given rise to the horror of suicide bombings. These attacks are themselves the product of the intense anger and desperation of a population of 3.5 million Palestinians who have been reduced to the status of humiliated prisoners in their own land.

The Haifa suicide bomber's biography is indicative of the source of the bloody attacks on Israeli civilians. She was identified as Hanadi Jaradat, a 29-year-old woman from the West Bank town of Jenin, which has been the target of unrelenting Israeli attacks for weeks. The woman, who was studying to be a lawyer, saw her own brother and cousin killed by Israeli troops outside their home in June. Last year, the Israeli military occupied the town, subjecting civilian homes to tank fire and killing or wounding several hundred civilians. In the aftermath of the Haifa bombing, Israeli tanks moved back into Jenin, imposing a curfew on the population and demolishing the home of Jaradat's family.

These ceaseless repressive measures by the Israeli occupation forces have turned the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip into a living hell.

The stark economic and social impact of the occupation was spelled out in a 25-page draft report prepared by UN special envoy Jean Ziegler that was recently leaked to the press. It charges that Israel's policy of "collective punishment" has disrupted food production and distribution to the extent that 22 percent of Palestinian children under five suffer severe malnutrition and most families have only one meal a day. It described such conditions as "absurd" given the proven ability of the land to produce an adequate food supply.

"The occupied Palestinian territories are on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe as a result of the extremely harsh measures imposed by the occupying Israeli military forces since the outbreak of the second *Intifada* in September 2000," the report states.

"There can be no justification for harsh internal closures that prevent people from having access to food and water, otherwise the imposition of such military measures are amounting to what has been called a 'policy of starvation,'" the report added.

According to a recent survey by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), nearly two-thirds of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are living below the poverty line, while the unemployment rate is over 40 percent.

Within the past week, the Sharon regime has intensified its attack on the Palestinians, unveiling a series of initiatives that threaten a massive extension of Israel's expropriation of land in the occupied territories.

The Israeli cabinet unveiled plans to construct another 600 residences in three illegal settlements inside the West Bank. While the so-called "roadmap" promoted by Washington as the path to a negotiated, two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict demands a halt to new settlement activity, the Bush administration described the expansion merely as "unhelpful."

Sharon's cabinet also announced its intention to move ahead with a "security wall" that cuts deeply into the occupied West Bank, effectively seizing control of large swathes of Palestinian land. According to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, the wall will leave more than 80,000 Palestinians trapped either behind the wall or surrounded by security fences on all sides. The effect will be to condemn these people to a grim economic and social limbo, cut off from the rest of the Palestinian population, their work, schools, jobs and family members, while barred from entering Israel itself. Fully a quarter of a million Palestinians living in east Jerusalem will also be

cut off from the rest of the West Bank.

A further initiative defended as a security measure is to extend protective fences around every one of the 170 illegal Israeli settlements scattered across the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Each fence is to encompass a 400-meter radius around the settlement, effectively seizing control of large areas of land and further disrupting the lives of Palestinians under occupation.

Like the bombing of Syria, the so-called targeted assassinations of Palestinian militants and leaders and the daily repression that has claimed some 3,000 Palestinian lives in three years, these measures are not designed principally for security, but are rather aimed at the systematic dispossession of the Palestinian people. Sharon and his right-wing Zionist allies are determined to sabotage any possibility of creating an independent Palestinian state and remain committed to achieving a "greater Israel" through the expulsion of masses of Palestinians from their land.

Both the horrific bombing in Haifa and the Israeli attack on Syria make a mockery of the Bush administration's claim that its war against Iraq would create the conditions for a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Like the supposed weapons of mass destruction, terrorist ties and other pretexts given for a predatory colonial war, this justification has proven utterly fraudulent.

On the contrary, US aggression has emboldened Israel to intensify its brutal crackdown on the Palestinians, and now launch military attacks neighboring Arab countries. Defending its action at the UN, Israel accused those condemning its attack on Syria of engaging in a "double standard." The body cannot allow some nations to "protect its citizens against terrorism," while denying the right to others, the Israeli ambassador declared. The statement amounted to using the US war of aggression against Iraq as a precedent to justify whatever military attacks Israel sees fit—a conception that the Bush administration embraces.

Washington's unconditional support for Israel, no matter what crimes it commits against the Palestinian people or neighboring countries, poses the direct threat that US soldiers will be sent into another unprovoked war to kill and be killed.

Both Bush and Sharon see new acts of war in the Middle East as a means of diverting attention from mounting political, economic and social crises at home. Under conditions in which the Israeli regime possesses nuclear weapons, this militarist path carries with it the real threat of a global conflagration.



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