

Washington bears guilt for Gaza war crimes

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The Israeli massacre of Palestinians in Gaza is a war crime for which not only the government of Israel but also that of the United States bears full responsibility.

The relentless bombing campaign, which in its first 48 hours has left at least 300 dead and 1,000 wounded, is a deliberate slaughter of innocent civilians and an act of state terror. The toll of casualties, many of them women and children, is certain to rise. As Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Gabi Ashkenaz put it, "This is only the beginning."

The pretense that this assault is an act of retaliation for the recent scattered rocket attacks that have been carried out against Israeli territory from inside Gaza is preposterous. Israel, with the collaboration of Washington, has been preparing the current bombing campaign and threatened ground assault for months, under the cover of the supposed cease-fire with Gaza's Hamas-led administration.

"These people are nothing but thugs," said White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe, who insisted that Israel was only acting to "defend itself" against "terrorists."

This is the official story that is largely echoed by the mass media and endorsed by the leadership of the Democratic Party.

Few bother to point out that not a single Israeli was killed by the homemade rockets that supposedly justified Israel launching its Gaza bombardments and killing 300 (one Israeli died in a rocket attack afterwards.) Such a disproportionate response is hardly an aberration. During the last eight years, barely a score of Israelis have died in rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza. During the same period, Israeli forces have killed nearly 5,000 Palestinians.

Nor is there much concern over the fact that Israel chose to launch its bombing in the most crowded and desperately poor urban area on the face of the earth precisely at the hour that schoolchildren were making their way home. Under these conditions, ritualistic US statements urging Israel to "avoid civilian casualties" amount to mocking the victims.

Having maligned an entire people as "thugs," the White House has given the green light for a bloodbath. More importantly, it has provided the indispensable resources for carrying out this crime, assuring Israel more than \$3 billion a year in US military aid and supplying the IDF with the deadly tools of its trade—F-16 fighter jets, Apache attack helicopters, TOW and Hellfire missiles and the fuel and spare parts needed to keep them in operation.

The dispatches from inside Gaza provide a graphic accounting of what Washington got for its arms and money.

Safa Joudeh, a freelance journalist in Gaza City, writes: "There were piles and piles of bodies in the locations that were hit. As you looked at them you could see that a few of the young men were still alive, someone lifts a hand, and another raises his head. They probably died within moments because their bodies were burned, most had lost limbs, some of their guts were hanging out and they were all lying in

pools of blood."

Ewa Jasiewicz reports from Gaza: "We saw a bearded man, on a stretcher on the floor of an intensive care unit, shaking and shaking, involuntarily, legs rigid and thrusting downwards. A spasm coherent with a spinal chord injury. Would he ever walk again or talk again? In another unit, a baby girl, no older than six months, had shrapnel wounds to her face. A relative lifted a blanket to show us her fragile bandaged leg. Her eyes were saucer-wide and she was making stilted, repetitive, squeaking sounds."

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* carried a report from its correspondent on the scene: "Relatives search among the bodies and the wounded in order to bring the dead quickly to burial. A mother whose three school-age children were killed, and are piled one on top of the other in the morgue, screams and then cries, screams again and then is silent."

The *New York Times*, hardly known for its sympathy for the Palestinians, acknowledged: "Still, there was a shocking quality to Saturday's attacks, which began in broad daylight as police cadets were graduating, women were shopping at the outdoor market, and children were emerging from school.

"The center of Gaza City was a scene of chaotic horror, with rubble everywhere, sirens wailing, and women shrieking as dozens of mutilated bodies were laid out on the pavement and in the lobby of Shifa Hospital so that family members could identify them. The dead included civilians, including several construction workers and at least two children in school uniforms."

This is not self-defense; it is premeditated mass murder. The aim of the "shock and awe" campaign, as the assault on Gaza is widely described in Israel, is similar to that conducted by the US against Iraq—regime change.

Neither the Zionist regime nor Washington accepted the victory of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian election—hailed by the Bush administration (before the results were known) as part of a flowering of democracy in the Middle East wrought by American militarism.

In response, the US and its Israeli ally did their best to provoke a Palestinian civil war and military coup and, when this proved ineffective in ousting Hamas from power in Gaza, subjected the territory's one-and-a-half million people to relentless collective punishment. They imposed a siege that choked off supplies of food, medicine, potable water and electricity, condemning masses of people to poverty, unemployment, hunger and disease. The present killing represents a qualitative escalation of this merciless policy of making life for the people of Gaza so intolerable that the Hamas regime would fall.

The *New York Times* Sunday gave a concise analysis of the real relationship between the Israeli blockade and the rocket attacks from Gaza. The siege, it stated, had led to "the near death of the Gazan economy," adding, "While enough food has gone in to avoid starvation, the level of suffering is very high and getting worse every

week."

Hamas had entered a cease-fire with Israel in a bid to reopen trade and alleviate this suffering. While the rocket attacks, supposedly Israel's main concern, fell "dramatically in the fall to 15 to 20 a month from hundreds a month," the *Times* noted, "Israel said it would not permit trade to begin again because the rocket fire had not completely stopped..." It was this intransigence that led to the collapse of the Israeli-Hamas cease-fire.

From the outset, Israeli actions have been motivated not by concerns for security, but rather by political aims. In the first instance, there is the desire to oust the Hamas administration in Gaza. Also in play are the desires of the Zionist establishment and military to offset the humiliation they suffered in Lebanon in 2006.

For Washington, support for and direct complicity in Israeli war crimes is bound up with a wider strategic policy of creating a new order in the Middle East, one designed to assure undisputed US domination of the region and its oil wealth. Israel represents the junior partner in this bloody venture and is allowed to satisfy its aggressive appetites because they are seen as furthering US imperialist interests.

Regime change in Gaza is viewed by US policymakers as a steppingstone to similar changes elsewhere, particularly in Syria and Iran. Indeed, the unfolding events in Gaza foreshadow a broader intervention in the Middle East and the threat of a new war against Iran.

It is not, it must be noted, merely a question of the US and Israel. The assault on Gaza has enjoyed the direct or tacit support of the Arab bourgeois regimes, in the first instance that of Egypt, which has set up machineguns on its border with Gaza to shoot down fleeing Palestinians. The West Bank-based Palestinian Authority of President Mahmoud Abbas has likewise offered justifications for Israel's crimes.

The Bush administration has pursued its policy in the Middle East with relentless violence for the past eight years. There is no indication, however, that it will fundamentally change with the transfer of the White House to President-elect Barack Obama in less than a month.

Obama has maintained a discreet silence on Gaza, while consulting with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice from his vacation home in Hawaii. His aides have complacently insisted that there is "one president at a time" and it would be inappropriate for the advocate of "change we can believe in" to voice an opinion on the slaughter being carried out with US-supplied warplanes, bombs and missiles.

Elements of the Zionist establishment in Israel have voiced suspicion about Obama's policies, and there have been some suggestions that his approaching January 20 inauguration may have played a role in the timing of the Israeli assault.

It strains credulity, however, that Israel would have carried out its actions without prior consultations not only with the Bush administration, but with the Obama camp as well. Rather than trying to push through its Gaza attack out of fear of a less sympathetic environment in Washington after Obama enters the White House, it is far more likely that the Israeli government was doing Obama a favor by carrying out a crime that he supported before he had to take public responsibility for it.

The reality is that the Democratic president-elect has sworn to maintain US support for Israel and has repeatedly defended Israel's "right to self-defense," including during its criminal war against Lebanon in 2006 and in regard to its repeated attacks on Gaza. He has likewise promised to maintain the US pledge of \$30 billion in arms aid to Israel over the next decade.

Those he has chosen as his top aides—the congressman and former

Israeli citizen Rahm Emanuel as chief of staff and his former presidential rival Hillary Clinton as secretary of state—are known for having criticized the Bush administration for being insufficiently supportive of Israeli aggression.

During the election campaign last summer, Obama made a trip to the southern Israeli town of Sderot, which had been a target of rocket attacks from Gaza, to provide an explicit justification for the kind of assault now being waged.

"If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I'm going to do everything in my power to stop that," Obama said during the visit. "And I would expect Israelis to do the same thing." He uttered not a word of sympathy for the Palestinians and gave no indication of what actions he expected from parents in Gaza who have watched their children torn to pieces by US-supplied bombs and missiles.

Meanwhile, Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi issued a statement providing an explicit endorsement of the Israeli bombing campaign. "When Israel is attacked," she said, "the United States must continue to stand strongly with its friend and democratic ally."

The response of Obama and the Democrats to the ongoing atrocity in Gaza represents a stark warning. Far from representing a last gasp of militarist aggression on the part of the lame duck Bush administration, the assault on Gaza is an indication of the shape of things to come.

The coming to office of the new Democratic administration will not spell an end to the crimes associated with US imperialism, but rather their continuation. Driven by the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression, American militarism will play an ever more prominent role in Washington's desperate struggle against its rivals for the domination of dwindling markets and vital resources.

The struggle against war and the fight to hold accountable the authors of war crimes from Iraq to Gaza can be advanced only through the independent mobilization of the working class in a new mass political movement based upon a socialist program.

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