

Senate Democrats endorse Israeli war crimes

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As evidence of Israeli war crimes mounted and amid signs that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are launching a new and even bloodier phase of the two-week war against the embattled people of Gaza, the Democratic leadership of the US Senate Thursday led the passage of a bipartisan resolution endorsing Israel's actions. The resolution passed by a unanimous voice vote.

The resolution begins by "recognizing the right of Israel to defend itself against attacks from Gaza and reaffirming the United States' strong support for Israel in its battle with Hamas."

The preamble of the document contains 12 paragraphs vilifying Hamas as a "terrorist" organization and blaming it entirely for the ongoing war in Gaza. It includes one brief mention of the "humanitarian situation in Gaza," but quickly adds that Israel has "facilitated humanitarian aid."

It goes on to declare "vigorous support and unwavering commitment to the welfare, security and survival of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state with secure borders" and to recognize Israel's "right to act in self-defense to protect its citizens against acts of terrorism."

It then demands that Hamas halt all rocket attacks, renounce violence, recognize Israel and accept all previous Palestinian-Israeli agreements.

That Israel should curtail its blitzkrieg against the people of Gaza, which has claimed the lives of nearly 800 men, women and children and left over 3,200 others wounded, is not even remotely suggested by the Senate resolution.

Speaking before the vote, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (Democrat from Nevada) declared, "When we pass this resolution, the United States Senate will strengthen our historic bond with the state of Israel, by reaffirming Israel's inalienable right to defend against attacks from Gaza."

Reid invited his Senate colleagues to "imagine that happening here in the United States. Rockets and mortars coming from Toronto in Canada into Buffalo, New York. How would we as a country react?"

While the absurd analogy must have proved unsettling for Canadians, one might just as well imagine how the population of New York state would react if Canada invaded, seized their homes and land and herded them all into Buffalo, subjecting them and their children to military occupation, near starvation and continuous armed attacks.

Chiming in his agreement, the resolution's co-sponsor, Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, added, "The Israelis ... are responding exactly the same way we would." Indeed, it is no accident that the Israeli media have described the military onslaught against Gaza as "shock and

awe."

Under conditions in which masses of people all over the world are expressing shock and revulsion over the one-sided slaughter that the Zionist military machine has unleashed against the virtually defenseless population of Gaza, this resolution is an obscenity.

It is another telling piece of evidence that the Democratic Party and its elected officials represent not the sentiments or wishes of the American people, but rather those of a narrow ruling elite that is committed to advancing its aims through militarism and is utterly indifferent to the fate of the working class, the poor and the oppressed in Palestine, the US or any other country.

While president-elect Barack Obama has maintained a discreet silence on Washington's policy toward the bloodbath in Gaza since it began nearly two weeks ago, the resolution backed by his former Democratic colleagues in the US Senate speaks eloquently for him.

There is no question that an Obama administration will maintain US imperialism's backing for Israeli aggression and repression of the Palestinian people and will continue funneling the over \$3 billion in annual military aid that provides the Israeli Defense Forces with the weaponry now being used to massacre innocent civilians.

In another indication that in this crucial foreign policy arena the former candidate of "change" will carry out a policy of essential continuity with that of his predecessor, it was announced Thursday that former US diplomat Dennis Ross has been tapped to serve as the Obama administration's "ambassador at large" and chief adviser on the Middle East.

The announcement came first from Ross's present employer, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), a pro-Israeli think tank that he joined after leaving the State Department in 2001. WINEP was founded by Martin Indyk, a research director for the American Israeli Political Action Committee who was later appointed US ambassador to Israel.

Ross also became a foreign affairs analyst for Fox News and a supporter of the Project for the New American Century's campaign for a US war against Iraq in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. He later joined the steering committee of the I. Lewis Libby Defense Fund, organized to support the former chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney who was convicted in connection with the leaking of CIA agent Valerie Plame's name in retaliation for her husband's exposure of the Bush administration's phony case for the Iraq war.

While Ross was a leading figure in US-brokered talks between Israel and the Palestinians, all of the so-called peace initiatives that

he helped push through quickly failed. According to one Arab negotiator quoted in a book on these negotiations, “The perception always was that Dennis started from the Israeli bottom line, that he listened to what Israel wanted and then tried to sell it to the Arabs... He was never looked at ... as a trusted world figure or as an honest broker.”

Ross’s role was essentially that of Israel’s attorney, justifying its every violation of previous agreements while demonizing Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat as wholly responsible for the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations.

Speaking at a synagogue in Maryland earlier this week, Ross took the same line as the Bush administration on the ongoing war against Gaza, declaring that the US should support a cease-fire only if it guarantees that Hamas “can’t rebuild.” The Jewish Telegraphic Agency, a New York-based news agency which reported the speech, wrote that Ross added that “Israel left Lebanon and Gaza, and in both instances, ‘things got a whole lot worse’—which doesn’t provide much confidence about a withdrawal from the West Bank.”

Assured of continued backing from both the current and the incoming US administrations, the Israeli government is intensifying its criminal war against the people of Gaza.

The United Nations agency responsible for providing food and other basic necessities to the vast bulk of Gaza’s population announced Thursday that it is suspending operations in the Israeli-occupied territory because of what it described as the “deliberate targeting” of its aid workers, which made it impossible to guarantee their lives and safety.

The action, which threatens to deepen what is already a humanitarian catastrophe, came after Israeli tanks shelled a UN convoy, killing two Palestinian forklift drivers and wounding two other aid workers. They were in trucks headed to the Erez crossing with Israel to pick up food and other humanitarian supplies during what the Israelis had claimed was a three-hour suspension of firing meant to facilitate such distributions.

“They were coordinating their movements with the Israelis, as they always do, only to find themselves being fired at from the ground troops,” John Ging, the head of United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza, told the news agency Al Jazeera.

In another incident, a UNRWA driver was shot to death by Israeli troops near the Kerem Shalom border crossing at the northern end of the Gaza Strip.

Israeli forces also fired on a convoy of three UN vehicles during a Thursday mission to recover the body of another aid worker killed in a previous attack.

UNRWA spokesman Chris Gunness said that the series of deaths made it impossible to resume operations until “the Israeli army can guarantee the safety and security of UN personnel. Gunness charged Israel with “deliberately targeting” aid workers, stressing that all of the locations of UN facilities and movements by its personnel are communicated to the Israeli military.

This development follows the IDF’s shelling Tuesday of the UN’s school in the Jabalya refugee camp, which killed 45 people in one of the worst atrocities since the Israeli attacks began.

UN officials have stressed that Israel’s so-called “humanitarian

corridor,” opened three hours a day between relentless bombardments and killings, is wholly inadequate to distribute food to any significant portion of Gaza’s population.

The attacks on UN personnel represent only one manifestation of a criminal policy of “total war” against Gaza’s population.

One unintentional byproduct of the three-hour suspensions of Israeli bombardments is that they have served to further expose the atrocities perpetrated in the two-week operation as bodies are dug from the rubble and wounded survivors are retrieved from their homes.

In one of the most appalling incidents, the International Red Cross in Geneva reported that on Wednesday its aid workers discovered four starving children lying next to their dead mothers in a house in the Zaytuon neighborhood south of Gaza City. The Red Cross had been trying since Saturday to send ambulances into the area, but only received permission from the Israeli military on Wednesday. The delay was a death sentence for many wounded civilians in the area.

Medical crews from the Red Cross and the Palestinian Red Crescent reported finding 12 corpses lying on mattresses in the house together with the children and their murdered mothers. The children were so weak from hunger that they were unable to stand.

The medical teams were compelled to evacuate surviving wounded on donkey carts because the Israeli military would not allow ambulances into the area. The Israeli troops threatened to fire on the ambulance teams if they did not leave, but the medical workers refused to stop their work until they were actually shot at.

The Red Cross issued a rare denunciation of Israeli actions, calling them unacceptable and charging the Israeli government with having “failed to meet its obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded.” In other words, it accused the Israeli regime of having carried out a war crime.

“This is a shocking incident,” said Pierre Wettach, the Red Cross’s head of delegation for Israel and the Palestinian territories. “The Israeli military must have been aware of the situation but did not assist the wounded. Neither did they make it possible for us or the Palestine Red Crescent to assist the wounded.”

The Geneva Conventions specify that warring parties must ensure “all possible measures to search for and collect the wounded and sick” and stipulates that the wounded “shall not willfully be left without medical assistance and care.”

Meanwhile, according to press reports, the Israeli cabinet has already voted to move ahead with a “third phase” of the operation, sending Israeli troops into the densely populated streets and alleys of Gaza City and other urban areas. “The next phase is inevitable,” one senior Israeli official told *Time* magazine.



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