

German Chancellor Merkel defends Israeli onslaught on Gaza

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel has given her full backing to the murderous attack launched by Israel on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. On Monday, government spokesman Thomas Steg said that Merkel, in a telephone call to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, declared that the responsibility for the war lay "clearly and exclusively" with Hamas.

"The chancellor attaches importance to the fact that in evaluating the situation in the Middle East there should be no mistaking or forgetting the chain of cause and effect," Steg said. Merkel is of the opinion, he continued, that Israel has the right to protect its population and defend its national territory.

While millions of people all over the world have been shocked and horrified by the Israeli military machine's bombardment of defenseless Palestinian civilians, Merkel did not issue a word of regret for the suffering of Israel's victims. Instead, she remarked cynically that she presumed the Israeli government was doing everything it could to avoid civilian casualties.

According to Israeli sources, on the first day of the offensive its military dropped no less than 100 tons of bombs on a densely populated area approximately 40 kilometers by 10 kilometers and home to 1.5 million people. The first attack took place during daylight, at a time when many Palestinians, including school children, were conducting everyday business.

Merkel went on to demand that Hamas "immediately and permanently" stop its rocket attacks on Israeli territory. Not a single Israeli had been killed by the primitive Kassam rockets fired by Hamas in recent weeks, while repeated provocations by the Israeli military over the same period had killed many Palestinians.

According to eyewitness reports, the situation in the

Gaza Strip has become increasingly desperate. At the start of the Israeli bombardment, *Spiegel Online* reported on the difficulties in treating the thousands of injured, writing, "In the Schifa hospital in Gaza the injured are being treated on the floor because no more stretchers or beds are free." The report quoted Raed al-Arini of the hospital administration: "The hospital has a bed capacity of 585, but we have 700 injured here."

Contrary to the declarations of the German chancellor, the Israeli offensive is not aimed at the protection of Israeli territory or its population. The purpose of the "shock and awe" campaign against Gaza is to overthrow the Hamas government. This policy of "regime change" is the very policy conducted by the US in Iraq.

When Merkel speaks of cause and effect, she completely distorts the historical facts.

Since 1967, Israel has defied all relevant United Nations resolutions and, contrary to international law, either occupied or imposed siege conditions on the Gaza Strip. In 1967, the strip of land was inhabited by 380,000 people, half of whom were Palestinian refugees from Israel. Today, approximately 1.5 million live in the Gaza Strip, more than two thirds of whom are either refugees or their descendants.

In 2005 the Israelis withdrew their troops, and some right-wing settlers also had to leave the area. But Israel kept control of the air space, the territorial waters and the border crossings. This makes the entire Gaza Strip into little more than a huge prison camp.

Since the victory by Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian elections—elections hailed by the US and the European Union before the result was known as an important "democratic change"—the US and Israel have worked to force Hamas from power in Gaza.

When all its attempts failed, Israel imposed a

blockade, preventing supplies of food, medicine, drinking water and electricity to the Gaza Strip and provoking a humanitarian disaster. Three quarters of the population depend on food assistance and 80 percent live below the poverty level. Some 90 percent of factories in Gaza were forced to close down last year.

Whenever the Israeli government considers it necessary, it closes the border crossings and bombards the Palestinian areas. In the past eight years the Israeli military has killed nearly 5,000 Palestinians.

What the German government terms the "criminal activity" of Hamas is, in fact, its efforts to counter this desperate situation. However, the Islamic Hamas movement has no real perspective to counter the Israeli offensive. The firing of Kassam rockets on Israel and the dispatch of desperate young Palestinians to carry out suicide missions are aimed at pressuring Israel to return to the negotiating table in order to secure a lifting of sanctions.

In 2003, Merkel, in her function as chairman of the Christian Democratic Union, unconditionally threw her weight behind the US in the Iraq war. She supported the illegal US invasion at that time and since then, as chancellor, has supported the CIA practices of kidnapping and torture—all in the name of the "anti-terror" struggle.

Her full support for Israeli war crimes in Gaza is consistent with this record of complicity with US imperialism and its chief ally Israel in the Middle East.



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