

Hands off Gaza!

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The International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* denounce the Israeli military's murderous assault on the Palestinian population of Gaza. The combined air and ground attack on the densely populated and virtually defenseless enclave is a war crime.

The incursion of Israeli troops, tanks and artillery, on top of the ongoing bombardment from air and sea of civilian targets, sets the stage for a sharp increase in the bloodletting, which in the first eight days of the aggression has already claimed the lives of over 500 Palestinians and wounded more than 2,400, including scores of women and children.

As always, the Israeli regime's use of military violence is accompanied by a staggering level of cynicism, hypocrisy and deceit. A state that possesses one of the most modern and sophisticated military machines in the world is once again casting itself as the victim.

The claim that this latest aggression is a legitimate reaction to Hamas rockets falsifies the events that preceded the assault on Gaza. Prior to Israel's launching of its air war on December 27, not a single Israeli was killed by the recent spate of home-made and largely ineffectual Qassam rockets fired from Gaza. The increase of such rocket firings was provoked by Israel's shattering of a cease-fire with a cross-border raid in November that killed six members of the Hamas security force. Israel defied the terms of the cease-fire, refusing to lift its deadly blockade of Gaza, which for 18 months has deprived the impoverished population of food, medicine, potable water and electricity. It agreed to the cease-fire in the first place in order, by its own admission, to undertake intense preparations for the present war.

Since Israel launched this latest round of aggression, four people in southern Israel have been killed by Palestinian rockets. The loss of all life is regrettable, but it is an ugly fact that the media applies very different standards in its valorization of Israeli and Palestinian lives. The latter, judging from the coverage of events by CNN and other western media outlets, count for very little. The ratio of Palestinian to Israeli deaths in the current war is more than 100 to one. Over the past eight years, approximately 20 Israelis have died in rocket attacks from Gaza, while Israeli forces have killed nearly 5,000 Palestinians.

The rocket attacks from Gaza reflect the desperation of Hamas and the Palestinian population. Israel deliberately

provokes such actions in order to create a pretext for pursuing its aggressive and expansionist aims.

What is the situation in Gaza, created by Israel and backed by the United States, the European powers and their allied Arab bourgeois regimes, including the US-Israeli Quisling, Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas? A million-and-a-half people are imprisoned in an area the size of metropolitan Detroit—a sliver of land wedged between the desert and the Mediterranean Sea. They are prevented from leaving by Israeli troops to the north and east and troops of Egyptian dictator Mubarak to the south.

As unpleasant to the Israeli regime as the comparison may be, the plight of Gaza resembles nothing so much as the tragic fate of the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland.

There are, without question, Israeli intellectuals, youth and class-conscious workers who are opposed to the invasion of Gaza and deeply ashamed of the crimes being committed by the regime in their name. They are, we are sure, horrified by the implication of the Jewish people in crimes that recall the atrocities of the Nazis. But if, as is claimed by opinion polls, some 80 percent of Israelis support the military onslaught on this tortured territory, this can only attest to the deep level of disorientation and demoralization among broad sections of the population. Not the least of Israel's crimes is its cynical exploitation of the horrors of the Holocaust to justify its own criminal actions.

It is not possible to discuss the assault on Gaza without placing central emphasis on the role of the United States. The American ruling elite has served as Israel's chief enabler and co-conspirator for the past four decades—ever since Israel seized Gaza and the West Bank in the 1967 war.

The Bush administration is reprising the criminal role it played in the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon—running interference for Israel to block all diplomatic initiatives for a cease-fire so as to give the Israelis maximum time and scope to murder Palestinians and smash a hostile Arab movement. The time-line of the past few days indicates that the Bush administration urged the Israelis to launch their ground invasion now in part to scuttle efforts by the European Union to broker a truce.

On Friday, after the EU and French President Sarkozy had announced a mission to Israel slated for Monday to pressure the Israelis to agree to a cease-fire, US Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice addressed the press outside the White House to once again place the blame for the fighting on Hamas and back Israeli opposition to a cease-fire. On Saturday, President Bush devoted his weekly radio address to restating Washington's *carte blanche* to Israel, setting the stage for the invasion that began later that day.

In the course of his brief remarks, Bush managed to cram in one lie after another—charging Hamas, which won a popular election in 2006 and put down an attempted coup by the Fatah-led and US-Israeli-backed Palestinian Authority in June of 2007—with "taking over the Gaza Strip in a coup," and going so far as to blame Hamas for the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the Israeli blockade imposed eighteen months ago. Bush essentially demanded that Hamas agree to its removal at the hands of the US-Israeli puppet Abbas as a condition for an end to the Israeli aggression.

Late on Saturday, after the Israelis had launched their ground attack, the US intervened in the United Nations Security Council to block a statement urging an immediate truce.

Predictably, President-elect Barack Obama is playing an equally despicable role, maintaining a public silence on the grounds that the US has "only one president at a time." Here the legal principle—silence denotes consent—applies in full. It should be noted that Obama had no similar compunctions only a few months ago when it came to promoting the handout of hundreds of billions in taxpayer funds to his supporters and friends on Wall Street.

While Obama maintains a damning silence, top congressional Democrats, including Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, have gone out of their way to declare their support for Israel's actions.

No less revealing is the response of the United Nations. Its combination of impotence and duplicity recalls the response of the League of Nations in the 1930s to Fascist Italy's rape of Ethiopia. We are once again living through a period when supposed "peace" organizations established by the international bourgeoisie reveal themselves to be instruments of imperialist power politics. The hypocrisy of the UN and the imperialist governments that dominate it is exposed most graphically by their entirely opportunist use of the term "war crime." What is defined as a war crime and who is sent to the Hague tribunal depends entirely on the geo-political and economic interests of the various imperialist powers.

Finally, there is the perfidious role of the bourgeois regimes in the Middle East. This includes not only the outright accomplices of the US and Israel—especially Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia—but also the supposed opponents of Zionism and imperialism, Iran and Syria. While one of the objectives of Israeli and American policy is no doubt to weaken Tehran and Damascus, and prepare the way for military action to effect "regime change" in those countries, it can be reasonably assumed that elements in the US State Department and the

Israeli Foreign Ministry are maintaining back-channel communications with these regimes. It would not be the first time that bourgeois governments shed crocodile tears over the fate of a lesser client in the hope that they could be parlayed into an agreement with the major powers.

The Israelis say more than they intend when they declare that their mass killing in Gaza is necessary to create the conditions for a so-called "two state" solution to the Palestinian question. This only reveals the reactionary character of this policy, which envisions the creation of an Israeli-dominated mini-state, divided by security roads, Israeli settlements and barriers, which will serve as a prison for the Palestinian people, guarded and policed by a puppet Palestinian bourgeois regime. Such an outcome will do nothing to address the conditions of poverty and repression that dominate daily life for the Palestinian workers and youth, while offering the Zionist state an opportunity to ethnically cleanse Israel by expelling its Arab population to the Palestinian Bantustan.

The only real ally of the Palestinian masses is the international working class. The wave of international protests against the Israeli aggression, in Europe, Asia and North America as well as the Middle East, is a clear sign of a shift in mass sentiment. The outrage and revulsion at Israel's war crimes are indicative of a growing response of the working class not only to imperialist militarism but also to the deepest economic crisis of the world capitalist system since the Great Depression.

It is the united mobilization of the working class of all countries, including Arab and Jewish workers, that holds the key to a genuinely democratic and progressive solution to the crisis in the Middle East. This must take the conscious form of a struggle against Zionism, imperialism and the Middle Eastern bourgeoisie for a socialist federation of the Middle East, as part of the world socialist revolution.

This is the international socialist perspective fought for by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Gaza, the lifting of the blockade and full restoration of normal trade and economic conditions, and the provision of massive aid to the Palestinian people.



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