

# Australia: Labor government backs Israeli assault on Gaza

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9 January 2009

The Australian Labor government has declared its full backing for Israel's criminal military attack on Gaza. After more than a week of sustained air bombings and a ground invasion that has left around 700 dead, including more than 200 children, and thousands wounded, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and his deputy leader Julia Gillard have adamantly refused to condemn the Zionist state's actions, echoing instead its lying pretext that they are a defensive response to alleged ceasefire violations by Hamas.

With Rudd on leave when Israel commenced its bombardment of Gaza on December 27, Gillard issued the government's first response as acting prime minister. "Clearly the act of aggression was engaged in by Hamas which commenced shelling with rockets and mortars into Israel," she declared. "That is what breached the ceasefire, and Israel responded."

Gillard's account of the conflict—which turns reality on its head—underscores the Labor government's complicity in Israel's war crimes.

In fact, not a single Israeli was killed by the crude, short-range Qassam rockets that were fired from Gaza in the lead-up to the Israeli military assault. Moreover, the ceasefire was earlier violated by Israeli forces in November, when they assassinated six members of the Hamas security force.

Even when formally in place, the so-called ceasefire was accompanied by an unrelenting Israeli siege of Gaza that effectively shut down the territory's economy and deprived its 1.4 million people of food, medicine, regular electricity, and other basic necessities. From January 2006, when Palestinian Authority elections failed to deliver a victory for the US-Israeli quisling faction, Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah, the Olmert government and Bush administration have been carrying out an unrelenting "regime change" campaign against the elected Hamas administration. This has involved the physical blockade of Gaza, an economic embargo and

theft of Palestinian tax revenue, and a series of bombings and assassinations. Israel's current military offensive marks the continuation of this criminal and expansionist strategy.

As the scale of Israel's assault on Gaza's besieged population became clear in the week after the initial bombings—making a mockery of Olmert's claims of a "defensive" response to rockets—the Labor government maintained its support. On Monday, for example, the ninth day, Gillard again condemned "in the strongest possible terms" the firing of rockets from Gaza, while insisting that "we recognise Israel's right to defend itself".

Not a single so-called Labor "left" parliamentarian has offered a word of criticism of these statements.

On the same day, Rudd held a press conference to echo the lies and pretexts earlier advanced by his deputy. Like Gillard, the prime minister cynically expressed his "concern" for civilian casualties, advocated a diplomatic solution, and promised additional Australian aid if required. This was nothing but an attempt to use occasional "humanitarian" rhetoric to cover his government's complicity in Israel's crimes.

Rudd's real priorities were on display in a revealing exchange between the government and the opposition that occurred after a news agency misreported his description of the Israeli ground invasion as an "insurgence". Opposition foreign affairs spokesperson Helen Coonan attempted to use the erroneous news report to condemn Rudd from the right, accusing him of attempting to "equate Israel's military operations to the violent activities of terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda in Iraq". A government spokesperson yesterday leapt to Rudd's defence, chastising Coonan for attempting to score political points over the conflict. Rudd's office insisted that the proofed transcript of the exchange showed he had politely described the invasion as an "incursion".

While Rudd was bending over backwards to assure the Liberals of his credentials as an unconditional supporter of Zionist aggression, neither he nor anyone in the government issued any comment on the most recent Israeli atrocity—the murder of more than 40 children in a UN-run school at the Jabaliya refugee camp.

The Rudd government's open alignment with the actions of the Israeli government has clearly shocked many ordinary people who mistakenly believed the defeat of former Prime Minister John Howard would mark a significant shift in Australian foreign policy. Despite the extraordinarily biased media coverage—led by the Murdoch press, whose op-ed and editorial pages resemble nothing more than rehashed Olmert government press releases—public opposition is widespread and growing.

This week, more than 150 Jewish-Australians added their voice to the popular outrage, signing a public statement condemning the Israeli government's military assault. "History has demonstrated that military punishment has never broken the spirit of a people or produced peace," they wrote. "On the contrary, the assault on the population of Gaza will only inflame hatred of Jews and of the State of Israel while doing nothing to protect the lives of Israelis... We call for an immediate end to attacks on civilians by Palestinians and Israelis. However, since Palestinians have no means of self-defence against the most powerful military force in the Middle East, we particularly call on Israel to end its brutal assault on the vulnerable Palestinian people of Gaza and to reconsider its rejection of the UN Security Council's call for a cease-fire."

In Sydney, Melbourne, and other cities, thousands of people have attended demonstrations against Israel's attacks and against Canberra's complicity. (See "Australia: Thousands rally against Israeli Gaza attacks")

Conspicuously absent from the official platforms of these rallies, however, has been any serious explanation of the Rudd government's backing of Israel and the US. Some speakers have referred to the government being "captive" and "held hostage" by the powerful Zionist lobby, and encouraged protestors to provide a counter-pressure on the government by writing letters to MPs and continuing to demonstrate.

Such positions are nothing but politically dangerous illusions, aimed at covering up the Labor Party's long and sordid foreign policy record. Rudd's strategic orientation is

entirely of a piece with that of his predecessors John Howard, Paul Keating, and Bob Hawke. Support for US imperialism remains the central pillar of the Australian ruling elite's international position, above all in the Asia-Pacific region.

Canberra's unwavering alliance with Washington has gone hand in hand with its bipartisan backing for Israel, US imperialism's chief Middle East proxy, and its militarist measures.

Ever since the founding of the Zionist state in 1948, the Australian Labor Party has been one of its most enthusiastic proponents. Rudd is simply continuing in this tradition. In March last year he initiated an unprecedented parliamentary motion hailing the 60th anniversary of the Zionist state's establishment and "commend[ed] the state of Israel's commitment to democracy, the rule of law and pluralism". In another significant parliamentary vote held last December, Labor joined the Liberals in rejecting a Senate resolution moved by the Greens that called on the Olmert government to allow the world's media proper access to Gaza.

Labor's decades-long record stands as an indictment of any political perspective based on pressuring the Rudd government to defend the Palestinian people. As the *World Socialist Web Site* concluded in its perspective "Hands off Gaza!": "The only real ally of the Palestinian masses is the international working class... 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."



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