

Israel, Gaza and the aid flotillas

Julie Hyland, Robert Stevens
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On May 31, Israeli commandos carried out a massacre onboard the ship Mavi Marmara, which was carrying humanitarian supplies to the besieged population of Gaza, killing nine unarmed passengers. Autopsies on the bodies showed they had been shot a total of 30 times—five with gunshots to the head at close range.

Two months on, the major imperialist powers continue to whitewash this act of cold-blooded murder. Not a single action of any consequence has been taken against Tel Aviv by the Western governments, the United Nations or the European Union.

Just the opposite. Less than a week after the assault, US President Barack Obama described Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a “man of peace” at a White House press conference. Washington’s support for the Netanyahu government and its criminal activities was epitomised by its endorsement of Israel’s refusal to participate in an international inquiry into the killings.

While mouthing only the mildest protests against the killings, the UN and the EU have similarly refused to hold Tel Aviv to account for its act of international piracy. No major European government has officially censured Israel, much less instituted sanctions against it.

Meanwhile, the siege of Gaza continues, its 1.5 million people reduced to penury and near-starvation in accordance with Israel’s strategy to crush Palestinian resistance to the occupation of their lands. Threats by Israel against another aid ship, travelling from Libya to Gaza earlier this month, were averted only when the convoy diverted to an Egyptian port.

The response of the international ruling elite underscores the futility of the political perspective underlying the aid convoys. It demonstrates that no amount of protest or pressure on Israel, its Western imperialist allies, official international institutions or

the Arab and other Middle Eastern bourgeois regimes will end the oppression of the Palestinians and secure their democratic rights.

The perspective of pressure on the ruling elites goes hand in hand with the fundamentally nationalist perspective of the so-called “two-state solution” in the Middle East. This is based on an acceptance of the legitimacy of the Zionist state and the basic imperialist-dominated setup in the region, with the addition of a supposedly independent Palestinian statelet existing alongside Israel.

It has long been clear that should such a Palestinian entity ever come into existence, it would be a travesty of genuine national liberation and Palestinian sovereignty. It would be a disjointed entity ruled by compradors such as Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, with borders remaining under the control of Israel. The only beneficiaries of such a state would be the Palestinian bourgeoisie, who would be in a better position to exploit the Palestinian working class.

The Gaza aid convoys began with the formation of Viva Palestina (Long live Palestine), a British-based charity in January 2009. Viva Palestina founder and former Labour Party (now Respect Party) MP George Galloway has announced a further aid convoy from London for Gaza, beginning September 18.

While there is no doubting the humanitarian impulses and courage of many of those who have participated in the aid convoys, this should not be allowed to conceal the false political perspective on which they are organised.

Viva Palestina claims that “international opinion” can force Israel to end its blockade. Its aim is to direct outrage at the situation in Gaza into appeals to various Western governments and their agencies to “do the right thing”.

Its statement announcing the September convoy

asserts that the attack on the Mavi Marmara produced a “sea change in international opinion” against the blockade. As proof of this it cites the “important institutions” now calling for an end to the siege of Gaza, including the United Nations and the European Union.

Such claims misrepresent the real role of the UN and the EU in facilitating Israel’s ongoing repression of the Palestinian people. So, too, do the flotilla organisers’ efforts to portray one or another of the Middle Eastern states, most notably Libya and Turkey, as the allies of the Palestinian masses.

The Mavi Mamara flew under a Turkish flag, and the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation—led by the son of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi—participated with Viva Palestina in the second convoy. Galloway, who is notorious for his long history of collaboration with numerous bourgeois Arab regimes, recently hailed Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip as a “hero of the Islamic world”.

In reality, Libya and Turkey’s cooption of the aid convoys is a cynical ploy. Not only is it aimed at concealing their refusal to do anything of any substance to challenge Israel’s crimes against the Palestinians, it is intended as a cover for the repression of political opponents and minorities they are carrying out within their own borders.

For the Arab bourgeoisie, it is their relations with the imperialist powers that are sacrosanct—not the democratic rights of the Palestinian people or any of the oppressed masses across the region whose economic exploitation provides the basis for their own gargantuan wealth, as well as that of the transnational corporations and banks.

It is Egypt on whom Israel relies to seal and police Gaza’s borders. At the same time, the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority of Abbas in the West Bank continues to function as Tel Aviv’s partner, even as Israel continues its repression of Gaza and the Palestinian territories.

All of this is painfully apparent, yet the aid convoys have been adopted uncritically by the entire gamut of middle-class pseudo-left groups, which act as cheerleaders in advancing various bourgeois states or Islamist movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah as the supposed vanguard of an anti-imperialist struggle.

What characterises the politics of all the organisations

involved—such as the Left Party in Germany, the New Anti-Capitalist in France and the Socialist Workers Party in Britain—is their rejection of the revolutionary mobilisation of the workers and oppressed masses of the Middle East, of all religions, as the only viable basis for resolving the plight of the Palestinians.

For the petty-bourgeois groups, Israel is just one reactionary mass. In reality, Israel is one of the most socially polarised countries in the world. The Israeli bourgeoisie has for years been slashing the social welfare programs on which Israeli workers depend and attacking wages and working conditions in pursuit of “free market” policies.

One of the motives for the Zionist regime’s reckless and belligerent attacks on the Palestinians—as well as its provocative stance within the Middle East as a whole—is to provide a lightning rod for rising social and political tensions within Israel itself.

It is the commonality of the class issues faced by Arab and Jewish workers alike that provides the objective foundation for a united political offensive against the Israeli state, the Arab bourgeois regimes and their imperialist sponsors in the fight for the United Socialist States of the Middle East.

Such a perspective must be fought for against all those parties and organisations that work to subordinate the working class to an alliance with one or another of the imperialist powers and the client Arab regimes.

Only in this way—by forging workers’ unity for the overthrow of the capitalist profit system and the nation-state framework on which it is based—can the enormous resources of the Middle East be utilised for the benefit of all its peoples.



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