

Israel's border massacre and human rights hypocrisy

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The Obama administration's reaction to Israel's massacre Sunday of unarmed Palestinian protesters on its borders underscores the hypocrisy of those ascribing "humanitarian" motives to Washington's predatory policy in the region.

Israeli troops opened fire with live ammunition and, in one case, tank fire on Palestinians who demonstrated on Israel's borders with Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza. Tens of thousands joined in the protests, which were called to commemorate the 63rd anniversary of the *Nakba* (Arabic for catastrophe), the term used by the Palestinians for Israel's declaration of independence and the wholesale ethnic cleansing that drove three-quarters of a million Palestinians from their homes in 1948.

In the intervening years, the population of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons has grown to 7.1 million people living without rights or citizenship in neighboring Arab countries, under Israeli occupation in Gaza and the West Bank, or as worse than second-class citizens in Israel itself.

The demonstrators were directly asserting the "right of return" to their homes and lands. This a right that Israel, backed by Washington, has categorically ruled out, and that the bourgeois nationalist leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has made clear it is more than willing to bargain away.

On Sunday, Israeli troops opened fire at the border fence near Maroun al-Ras in Lebanon, killing 10 Palestinian refugees and wounding another 80. Five more Palestinians were killed and at least 30 injured in the Syrian border village of Majdal Shams in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Another Palestinian was killed and at least 86 civilians wounded when Israeli troops opened fire with small arms and tanks on a border protest in Beit Hannon in the northern part of the Gaza Strip. Police and troops also attacked protests in Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron. In

all, 16 people were killed and over 400 wounded, some of them critically.

Asked for President Barack Obama's response to this savage repression, chief White House spokesman Jay Carney mouthed a pro forma declaration of "regret" for the "loss of life" and then issued a blanket defense of Israel's killing spree.

"Israel, like all countries, has the right to prevent unauthorized crossings at its borders," said Carney. "Its neighbors have a responsibility to prevent such activity."

Any sentence containing the words "Israel, like all countries" and "borders" is by definition a lie. Unlike other countries, Israel's borders are constantly shifting as a result of military aggression, on the one hand, and the malignant spread of Zionist settlements on the other. Those who died on Sunday were, in any case, inside Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

Carney went on to place the principal blame for Sunday's bloodletting not on the Israeli government or military, but rather on Syria.

"We're also strongly opposed to the Syrian government's involvement in inciting yesterday's protests in the Golan Heights," he said, adding, "such behavior is unacceptable and does not serve as a distraction from the Syrian government's ongoing repression of demonstrators in its own country."

This line of reasoning echoes the filthy rationalizations made by the Israeli government itself for the killing and wounding of unarmed protesters, the majority of whom died on the Lebanese border, not the Syrian.

Whether the government of Bashar al-Assad facilitated the passage of Palestinian refugees through the militarized Golan Heights border area to divert attention from its own bloody crackdown on internal opposition is hardly the decisive issue in Sunday's events.

The heroism and determination shown by young Palestinians braving tanks and gunfire to demand their

rights is of a piece with the recent revolutionary upheavals by workers and youth in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and elsewhere in the Arab world. In confronting the Israeli state, they were acting equally in defiance of all the Arab bourgeois regimes that have repeatedly repressed and betrayed the Palestinians.

In Lebanon on Sunday, Lebanese troops also opened fire on the Palestinian protesters to drive them from the border. And in Egypt, the military-dominated regime sent troops and police against thousands who assembled outside the Israeli embassy in Cairo in solidarity with the Palestinians. Firing tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition, the security forces left hundreds wounded.

The reality is that Washington supports this repression by reactionary Arab regimes and, above all, backs Israel in its systematic violence and oppression against the Palestinian people.

The shameless duplicity and hypocrisy of US policy in the Middle East will be on full display in the coming week. Obama delivers a speech Thursday proclaiming his sympathy for the “Arab spring”—and no doubt denouncing the regimes of Gaddafi in Libya and Assad in Syria for their repression.

This will be followed by a White House meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday and then a speech to the American Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC), the main Zionist lobby in the US, in which one can be certain there will be no condemnation of turning automatic weapons and tank fire on unarmed refugees approaching the Israeli border. As the White House spokesman put it, the theme of the AIPAC speech will be, “the unshakeable bond between the Israelis and the Americans and the importance of that relationship.”

It is self-evident that where and when Washington decides to invoke concerns over “human rights” is determined not by some universal moral principles, but rather by definite imperialist interests.

If a country whose policies are at odds with the geostrategic aims of US imperialism carries out internal repression—as in Libya—it becomes the pretext for imperialist intervention aimed at imposing a regime more subservient to Washington and asserting more direct American control over oil reserves.

If another country, one that is aligned with US interests, bloodily suppresses unarmed civilians, as in Bahrain, or, for that matter, Israel, it receives tacit or even explicit support from Washington.

Despite the fact that “human rights” has long served as the most hypocritical and deceitful justification for

imperialist war, it is precisely on this basis that a whole layer of self-defined “liberals” and “lefts” in both the US and Western Europe have swung behind the US-NATO intervention in Libya.

Prominent among them is the University of Michigan professor, Juan Cole, who has used his *Informed Comment* blog to promote the so-called “rebels” based in Benghazi and celebrate the military actions of their sponsors—the Pentagon and NATO.

On Monday, Cole posted a comment headlined “The Arab Spring Comes to Israel,” which described the border killings, reviewed the historical crimes of 1948 and condemned the current policies of the Israeli government. What was glaringly absent, however, was a single word about the massive US military and financial support for Israel that makes its crimes against the Palestinians possible.

Nor did he explain how the US could be defending “human rights” in Libya while backing mass killings and repression in Israel.

Having spent the last two months vigorously defending the US-NATO imperialist intervention in Libya, Cole and his ilk lack either the credibility or the inclination to oppose Washington’s policies elsewhere in the region.

Palestinian working people and youth are now entering a decisive new stage in their long and bitter struggle. They will find allies not among these so-called “lefts” and “liberals,” who have cast off their “antiwar” past to align themselves with imperialism, but rather among the workers coming into struggle throughout the Middle East—including in Israel—and in the American and international working class.

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