

Stop the massacre in Gaza!

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The Israeli onslaught against Gaza, now entering its second week, has killed and maimed hundreds of Palestinian civilians—men, women and children. A largely defenseless and severely deprived population has been subjected to unrelenting bombardment from air, land and sea. Much of the territory's already dilapidated infrastructure is being reduced to rubble.

Among the targets are schools, government offices, a building housing international press

in Gaza City and the home of a Gazan grocer, whose entire family—including four children ranging in age from one to seven, and four women, one of them 83—were murdered in a missile strike Sunday.

The Israeli government has authorized the mobilization of 75,000 reservists and massed tanks on the Gaza border in preparation for a repeat of the 2008-2009 ground invasion that claimed the lives of 1,400 Gazans, the bulk of them civilians.

As these war crimes unfold to the horror of people around the world, the Israeli leadership, the Obama administration in Washington and the corporate media all invoke the “right of self-defense” as justification for Israel's aggression.

President Obama sounded this theme Sunday in remarks delivered at a press conference in Bangkok, Thailand. “Let's understand what the precipitating event here was that's causing the current crisis, and that was an ever-escalating number of missiles; they were landing not just in Israeli territory, but in areas that are populated. And there's no country on Earth that would tolerate missiles raining down on its citizens from outside its borders. So we are fully supportive of Israel's right to defend itself from missiles landing on people's homes and workplaces and potentially killing civilians. And we will continue to support Israel's right to defend itself.”

As with every crime carried out by US imperialism and its Israeli ally, the present one in Gaza comes

wrapped in lies, cynicism and hypocrisy.

The claim that Israel launched its latest blitzkrieg in response to an “ever-escalating number of missiles” is a patent lie. In the entire year preceding the current carnage in Gaza, not a single Israeli was killed by a missile from the Palestinian enclave. The days preceding the Israeli attacks saw articles in the Israeli press noting that, after a brief spike, precipitated by repeated Israeli incursions into Gaza and the killing of several civilians, including children, rocket attacks had subsided.

The Israelis and the Hamas leadership were engaged in Egyptian-brokered discussions on a long-term ceasefire agreement. The principal Palestinian intermediary in these talks was Ahmed Jaabari, the leader of the Hamas military wing. On November 14, within hours of his receiving a draft of the agreement, he was struck with a Hellfire missile in a resumption of Israel's infamous “targeted killings.”

This extra-judicial execution was carried out as a deliberate provocation, the opening act of Operation Defense Pillar. It is not a matter of “self-defense,” but naked aggression by one of the world's most heavily armed nations against one of its most oppressed populations.

As in every circumstance, Obama rallies to the defense of the oppressor against the oppressed. He parrots the Israeli regime's incessant refrain about “no country on Earth” tolerating rocket attacks, but does not bother to ask who on earth would tolerate the conditions endured by Gazans: 1.7 million people, in their great majority refugees violently expelled from their homes and land, confined to the world's largest open-air prison, subjected to a blockade that causes untold suffering and hunger, and forced to endure continuous attacks by the Israel Defense Forces.

The indifference to the loss of Palestinian life, particularly on the part of the US government and the

media, is stunning, though by now hardly surprising. Obama expressed his hope that Israel would not launch a ground invasion, warning that it would pose a greater risk of Israeli fatalities than just continuing to slaughter Gazans with bombs and missiles.

The present bloodbath in Gaza is unfolding barely 100 miles from the continuing US-backed civil war in Syria. Yet in Gaza there is virtually nothing of the media's feigned sympathy for Syria's civilian casualties, exhibited in the service of a colonial-style intervention for the purpose of regime-change. No one in the West is calling for the ouster of Netanyahu for killing civilians or advocating the imposition of no-fly zones or humanitarian corridors in Israel. On the contrary, Tel Aviv is given an explicit carte blanche to carry out the most horrific crimes.

The slaughter in Gaza is driven not by some existential threat from the ineffectual rockets fired from its territory. Rather, Israel's motives are to be found both further afield and closer to home.

The attack on Gaza is aimed at preparing a far greater war, involving both Israel and US imperialism, against Iran. Tel Aviv sees its aggression as a means of derailing any potential for a negotiated settlement regarding Iran's nuclear program, while neutralizing opposition from Gaza in the event of an attack on Iran.

At the same time, the turn to war is driven by the mounting internal contradictions plaguing Israel and the entire Zionist project. Many have noted that this war, like the last, has been launched on the eve of an Israeli election, with a vote scheduled in January.

It is true that militarism provides a means of dragooning popular support behind an incumbent government. In Israel's case, however, it plays the more essential role of diverting attention from social conflicts at home.

Israel is today one of the most socially unequal countries on the planet. A recent report found that fully one-third of Israelis—and 40 percent of the country's children—are at risk of falling into poverty, while a tiny elite of multi-millionaires and billionaires monopolizes an ever-greater share of the wealth.

Social deprivation and inequality have given rise to mass demonstrations across the country as the Netanyahu government imposes right-wing and regressive economic and social policies.

The attempt to contain social unrest by recourse to

militarism and war assumes an increasingly fascistic and repulsive character. Thus, Gild Sharon, the son of Israel's former prime minister Ariel Sharon, argues in a *Jerusalem Post* column, "We need to flatten entire neighborhoods in Gaza. Flatten all of Gaza. The Americans did not stop with Hiroshima... They hit Nagasaki too. There should be no electricity in Gaza, no gasoline or moving vehicles, nothing."

This rant was hardly unique. "We must blow Gaza back to the Middle Ages, destroying all the infrastructure including roads and water," Israeli Interior Minister Eli Yishai told the media.

The Zionists justified the creation of Israel—by means of the ethnic cleansing of nearly one million Palestinians—as a refuge for Jews against Nazi oppression. Today one hears in this country the echoes of Hitler and Goebbels.

These fascistic policies will be turned against not only the Palestinians in the occupied territories, but increasingly against the working class and the oppressed within Israel itself. This has already begun with the racist attacks against African immigrants.

The international revulsion over the latest massacre of Palestinians by the Israeli military, backed by Washington, is undoubtedly shared by a significant layer of class conscious workers and intellectuals within Israel itself.

In the final analysis, the only progressive way out of the bloody crisis in the Middle East lies in the unified mobilization of the working class, Arab and Jewish alike, in a common struggle against Zionism, imperialism and the regimes of the Arab bourgeoisie on the basis of the struggle for a socialist federation of the Middle East.

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