

Sharon's funeral pays homage to war criminal

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Yesterday's state ceremony and funeral for former Israeli general and prime minister Ariel Sharon was a gathering of political gangsters assembled to pay tribute to a fallen colleague in whose crimes and abuses they were all complicit. At the forefront were US Vice President Joseph Biden, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Delegations from just 21 countries attended the official service in Jerusalem, which was generally downplayed in the global media. The basic sentiment was admiration for Sharon, a serial war criminal whose wars of aggression, massacres and targeted assassinations of Palestinians were accompanied by the theft of Palestinian land on a massive scale. But the politicians and media felt obliged to exercise a degree of restraint in expressing their respect for a man justifiably despised by millions of working and oppressed people not only in the Middle East, but around the world.

Biden, speaking on behalf of US imperialism, and Blair, the mouthpiece for the former regional colonial power Britain, had a vested interest in covering up the crimes of Sharon, since their governments supported them at the time and have since employed and expanded the same methods and made them a standard part of their foreign policy.

No foreign head of state participated, and only one government leader, Czech Prime Minister Jiri Rusnok. There were no delegations officially listed from the Middle East, Africa or Latin America. Two foreign ministers were on hand, those of Germany and Australia. Other ministers or deputy ministers were present from Italy, Bulgaria, Britain, Holland, Singapore, the Philippines, France, Canada, Romania, Greece and Cyprus, along with the chairman of the

Russian Duma.

In the course of the ceremony there were no references to Sharon's many crimes, such as his military unit's killing of 69 people, half of them women and children, in the Jordanian village of Qibya in 1953—one of many carried out raids to force Palestinians to flee their homes; his invasion of southern Lebanon in 1982, which killed more than 19,000 people; and his relentless backing for the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements on the West Bank. Most notorious was his personal collusion with the Lebanese fascist Phalange in the September 1982 massacre of over 3,000 Palestinian refugees in Beirut's Sabra and Shatila camps—a proven crime for which he was never prosecuted.

According to media reports, few ordinary Israelis came to bid farewell to Sharon, either at the ceremony or the previous day's lying in state. As well as a butcher of Palestinians, Sharon was known for his reactionary, free market social policies, his fierce opposition to working class struggles, and his family's corruption. He became Israel's largest private farm owner, in a country that ranks among the worst in the world for poverty and inequality. After yesterday's proceedings, Sharon was buried on his 1,000-acre property near the Gaza Strip.

Biden led the largest foreign delegation, which featured two Democratic members of Congress, the US ambassador, Biden's national security advisor and the National Security Council's director for Israeli and Palestinian affairs. In his eulogy, Biden spoke for the entire gathering when he said Sharon's death felt "like a death in the family." The US vice president embraced Sharon's nickname, "bulldozer," describing him as an "indomitable" warrior whose "arc of life traced the journey of the state of Israel."

Likewise, Blair, who dispatched thousands of British troops to join the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, and who has functioned since 2007 as envoy of the fraudulent Middle East “peace” process sponsored by the US, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia, expressed his admiration for the “bulldozer” who left “considerable debris in his wake.”

Netanyahu hailed Sharon as a member of the generation of Israel’s “founding fathers,” who fought in the front line of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) for many years, culminating in the 1967 Six Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War. These wars definitively marked the emergence of Israel as a US-backed expansionist entity, permanently transforming the Palestinians into refugees.

As in the media tributes to Sharon, Biden made a cynical attempt at the end of his speech to present Sharon as a man “trying to reach peace.” This was a reference to Sharon’s decision in 2005 to withdraw Israeli soldiers and settlers from the Gaza Strip.

In fact, Sharon’s move was a continuation of his lifelong commitment to confining Palestinians to ghettos, while preventing Arabs from becoming a majority inside Israel itself and securing US support for the permanent annexation of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Blair’s participation underscored the sham of the US-led “peace process,” which seeks to permanently entrench Israel as an armed bastion for US and Western imperialism in the Middle East, alongside a dependent Palestinian statelet ruled by the compliant Palestinian capitalist elite. Blair rejected “the idea that he [Sharon] changed from man of war to a man of peace. He never changed. His strategic objective never wavered... When that meant fighting, he fought. When that meant making peace, he sought peace with the same iron determination.”

Sharon was a forerunner of the increasingly naked turn by the imperialist powers to outright criminality and neo-colonialism, not least in the overthrow of Gaddafi’s regime in Libya and the drive to do the same in Syria.

Before the proceedings began in Jerusalem, residents of the West Bank village of Qibya recalled the 1953 massacre. Hamed Ghethan, who was four years old when the raid by Sharon’s unit took place, told

journalists he could remember older residents placing their hands over children’s mouths so they wouldn’t make a sound. “Sharon’s name reminds me of... martyrs from my village,” he said as he surveyed the ruins of buildings destroyed in the military action.



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