

European Union backs Israel's Gaza offensive

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The European Union has come out unambiguously in support of Israel's mass murder of defenceless men, women and children in Gaza.

In a statement issued July 22, the EU has destroyed once and for all its pretence of being guided by "humanitarian concerns" in formulating its foreign policy—as exemplified by its pose as a restraining influence over Washington's pro-Israeli stance regarding the Palestinians.

Ever since the Balkan wars of the 1990s, the EU has promoted and taken part in predatory wars for regime-change in the name of "human rights." The list is long, including Libya and Syria in the Middle East and numerous bloody adventures in Africa. Indeed, the statement was issued at the eleventh hour during a meeting Tuesday of 28 EU foreign ministers dominated by the spilling of crocodile tears over the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine, meant to justify aggressive moves against Russia.

However, when it comes to a naked and filthy war crime by Israel against a defenceless Palestinian population, they side totally with the Israelis.

Reading the statement is like stepping into a world turned upside down. Over 650 Palestinians have been killed during "Operation Protective Edge", 75 percent of them civilians, compared with 31 Israeli army personnel. That is over 40 times the figure for all Israeli civilians killed by rockets fired from Gaza in the past 14 years. Yet the EU begins by declaring how it "strongly condemns the indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel by Hamas and militant groups in the Gaza Strip, directly harming civilians" and does not issue a single word of criticism of the Israeli military.

Calling the firing of rockets "criminal and unjustifiable acts", the statement insists that, "All terrorist groups in Gaza must disarm" and "strongly

condemns calls on the civilian population of Gaza to provide themselves as human shields."

The statement then recognises "Israel's legitimate right to defend itself against any attacks", while for good measure also "fully recognizing Israel's legitimate security needs."

The shift by the EU towards open support for Israel's offensive is striking, made all the more so by being widely reported on the very day that Navi Pillay told an emergency debate at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva there was a "strong possibility that international law has been violated" by Israel, "in a manner that could amount to war crimes."

There are, of course, the usual calls for the Israeli military operation to be "proportionate and in line with international humanitarian law," for "the humanitarian and socio-economic situation in Gaza" to be addressed, and a reiteration of the EU's call for "a comprehensive peace agreement based on a two-state solution." But no one is fooled by this—least of all the Israeli government. Israel's Foreign Ministry expressed its "satisfaction", calling the EU's statements "consistent with the concepts that guide Israel in its struggle against terrorism."

The *Jerusalem Post* quoted a senior diplomatic official saying that "what is good in the statement is new and dramatic, and what is not good is old and was expected."

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, former British Foreign Secretary William Hague and his successor, Philip Hammond, worked with the Czech Republic and Holland to ensure that a position uncritically supportive of Israel was taken.

The statement alludes to the broader geopolitical considerations behind this stance, citing how "Recent events in the wider Middle East pose serious threats to

the EU as well as to its immediate neighbours.”

In addition, *Haaretz* noted that the foreign ministers had “argued for several days behind closed doors” over whether to make any reference to the broader Middle East “peace process”—before deciding to do so because there was a growing concern that the EU “has generally taken a back seat to the US” whereas “some European leaders are now arguing that it is time for a more active role.”

Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt is cited stating that the EU could be “a substantial part” of “any international [mission] that might be necessary to reach a more comprehensive solution” in the Middle East.

For its part, Israel’s foreign ministry makes clear the EU’s offer to become a strategic partner is understood, writing in its communiqué that the statement “opens the door to implementing... common principles to restore quiet and security.”

This is not only a question of support for the suppression of the Palestinians. The targeting of Hamas, a key ally of Iran, is bound up with a broader effort by Israel to stoke the flames of war throughout the Middle East. Operation Protective Edge was launched just over two weeks after Israel mounted a series of air strikes against Syria, prior to which President Benjamin Netanyahu had urged the United States to pursue a regional policy of encouraging a Sunni/Shia conflict so as not to “allow Iran to dominate Iraq the way it dominated Lebanon and Syria.”

In siding with Israel, the EU is making clear that it not only is ready to sanction other criminal actions in the oil-rich region, but it is also ready to carry out its own atrocities—whether in Syria, Iraq, Jordan or Iran itself.

To facilitate their predatory aims, the leaders of the EU are determined to stifle any and all domestic opposition—in the first instance to Israel’s depraved actions, but, by extension to militarism and war in general. They are targeting the massive anti-war sentiment among European workers and young people.

The same foreign ministers’ meeting occasioned a joint statement by Germany’s Steinmeier, Laurent Fabius of France and Italy’s Federica Mogherini condemning anti-war protests as “anti-Semitic,” after rioting broke out in the suburb of Sarcelles, outside Paris, during which Jewish businesses and synagogues were targeted, and in response to alleged anti-Jewish

sentiment expressed in Berlin.

The three foreign ministers pledged to make use of “all legal measures” to maintain public order. A mass demonstration earlier that day took place in defiance of a ban imposed by the Socialist Party government of President Francois Hollande. There is every reason to assume that other bans will follow, using the actions of a few to vilify and slander the many more who are animated by genuine sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians.



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