The Gaza war crimes and the bankruptcy of nationalism

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The Palestinian territory of Gaza is the scene of war crimes committed by the state of Israel that defy words. What is to be said about yesterday's bombing by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) of a UN-run school in the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanoun, which killed at least 15 people and inflicted terrible wounds on 200 more, overwhelmingly women and children? The IDF had been provided the coordinates of the facility and informed on numerous occasions that the area was occupied by large numbers of civilians seeking refuge from endless artillery and air strikes. The IDF shelled it regardless—the fourth time in a week that UN shelters have been targeted.

The bombing of the UN school is just the latest outrage. As well as schools, the IDF has attacked hospitals, water plants, sewage treatment plants, ambulances and journalists. The indiscriminate Israeli assassination attempts against leaders of the Islamist Hamas movement have murdered dozens of their family members. In just 18 days, at least 800 Palestinians, mainly civilians, have been killed and over 5,250 injured.

The invasion of Gaza testifies to the depraved and bankrupt character of the Zionist regime in Israel. The government headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu represents an isolated and demoralised ruling class that has lost its head and has no answer to the crisis it confronts except disorientated and homicidal outbursts of violence. This mass slaughter against a defenceless Palestinian population serves only to deepen the revulsion and hostility toward Zionism throughout the Middle East, around the world and among Jewish workers in Israel itself.

The US and European imperialist powers who defend Zionism are being no less discredited. Anger grows every time President Barack Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry and European politicians repeat the contemptible justification for war crimes—"Israel has the right to defend itself"—while declaring their "concern" over civilian deaths. The Egyptian regime and the other Arab states throughout the Middle East that collaborate with Israel are despised by their populations because of it.

Two weeks of growing demonstrations and unrest in East Jerusalem and the West Bank portend the eruption of another intifada—a generalised uprising of the Palestinian masses—against both Netanyahu's government and the venal Palestinian Authority of President Mahmoud Abbas that has accommodated itself to every Israeli atrocity. More and more Israelis are revolted by their own government.

Outrage, condemnation and protests, however, are not a sufficient response. What is required is a political perspective that can unite the working class of all religious and ethnic backgrounds in a common struggle for socialist internationalism.

Sixty-six years after the establishment of Israel, and 47 years since the expansionist war of 1967 and the seizure of the Occupied Territories, the entire Zionist project—a reactionary perspective of carving out a sectarian Jewish capitalist state in the Middle East—has manifestly failed.

Decades of repression and killing have not broken the resistance of the Palestinian population who were originally dispossessed in 1948 and continuously displaced by the spread of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories.

Zionist ideology maintains that the dispossession of the Palestinians is justified by the Holocaust and the need to establish a safe haven for the Jewish people. Today, the Israeli government carries out crimes that more and more resemble those of the Nazis. The 1.8

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million people in Gaza are imprisoned in a modern-day ghetto, enduring a hell on earth and deliberately deprived of clean drinking water, adequate food, electricity and health services in what can only be described as a genocidal policy.

The nationalist propaganda in Israel that the Zionist state represents all those of the Jewish faith cannot refute the reality that it is a capitalist society, divided by class and wracked by social antagonisms. The beneficiaries of Zionism are an oligarchy of capitalist billionaires and millionaires and a thoroughly corrupt political establishment. The richest 500 Israelis have tripled their wealth over the past 12 years, while the wages of workers have been slashed to maintain the competitiveness of Israeli corporations on the world market.

As in every country, Netanyahu's government is directing a class war against the working class in response to the systemic global economic breakdown, imposing savage austerity cuts and tax hikes that impact most severely on the poor. The onslaught on Gaza is in large measure motivated by the desperation of the Israeli capitalist class to divert the insoluble crisis of Israeli society into anti-Arab chauvinism and war against the Palestinian masses.

The situation in Israel and the Middle East, it must be understood, is just one manifestation of a broader crisis of the entire capitalist system. As in the years preceding the outbreak of World War I, the division of the globe into rival national-states and the subordination of economic life to the accumulation of profits for a capitalist minority cannot be reconciled with the integrated and interdependent reality of the world economy. The globalisation of production over the past three decades has raised to a new intensity the inherent contradictions of capitalism that led to the world wars of 1914 and 1939.

The ruling classes of not only the United States but all the imperialist powers now view militarism and war as the only means to subordinate global resources and markets to their narrow national interests. The various propertied cliques in the artificial nation-states created by so-called decolonization are universally promoting sectarian or ethnic-based divisions to try to stake their claim to wealth and privilege against their rivals.

Amid carnage, civil war and imperialist intrigue in country after country, the International Committee of the Fourth International has warned in its resolution "Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War" of the growing dangers of a third world war. The same processes, however, are propelling the working class toward social revolution.

This tendency was powerfully seen in the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Had that revolution not been aborted, the situation in the Middle East would be very different from what it is today. The ability of the Egyptian ruling class, and the imperialist powers that stand behind it, to keep control underscores the central historical problem in the working class in the Middle East and internationally—the crisis of perspective and leadership.

It is this crisis that the WSWS and the ICFI are fighting each day to resolve, confident that events are creating the conditions for mass struggles against the capitalist class in every country.

Nowhere is the necessity for the international unity of the working class and the struggle for socialism as stark as in the Middle East. The solution to the catastrophe created by capitalism and the nation-state system is the abolition of both, through the establishment of the United Socialist States of the Middle East, as part of the fight for world socialist revolution.

The strategic task of the hour is the fight to build sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, as the new leadership of the working class and the oppressed masses.

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