

Egypt leads Arab regimes in facilitating Israel's assault on Gaza

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Israel's mass murder in Gaza could not be carried out without the complicity of the Arab regimes. Egypt, the most populous and powerful Arab state, has played a crucial role in enabling a genocidal offensive against the defenceless Palestinian population.

Since ousting Muslim Brotherhood (MB) President Mohammad Mursi and initiating a reign of terror in July last year, Egypt's military dictator Abdul Fattah el-Sisi has followed in the footsteps of his predecessors, Hosni Mubarak and Mursi, in policing Gaza's southern border crossing at Rafah. Blockading the only entry point to the impoverished enclave that is not controlled by Israel has turned Gaza into an open-air prison for its 1.8 million inhabitants.

The US client regime has worked with Israel to tighten the blockade even further, declaring Hamas a terrorist organisation, blowing up or flooding most of the tunnels linking Gaza and Egypt. This cut off a vital lifeline used for smuggling food, medical supplies, construction materials and fuel upon which the Palestinians depended in Gaza, sending prices skyrocketing.

Earlier this year, Egyptian security forces established a buffer zone or empty zone near Rafah, extending 300 metres in populated areas and 500 metres in open areas, by demolishing homes in the area. The stated purpose was to prevent armed Islamist militants in Northern Sinai using Gaza as a base from which to attack Sinai.

The Sinai Peninsula has seen a spate of attacks by jihadists targeting the gas pipelines between Egypt, Israel and Jordan, as well as Egypt's security forces. With its interests largely congruent with Israel's, Egypt has been working closely with Tel Aviv to suppress the jihadists.

Such is the shortage of fuel for power supplies in Egypt that the government is considering allowing

energy companies operating there to import gas from Israeli companies. BG, formerly British Gas, has started negotiations with Israel to supply Egypt with 7 billion cubic metres of LNG annually for 15 years.

Israel's latest onslaught on Gaza, the cynically misnamed Operation Protective Edge, was closely coordinated with Egypt—which evacuated its border guards in Rafah the day before to avoid being hit by Israel's bombardment. The army has intensively patrolled the Sinai border to prevent militant groups there from launching attacks alongside Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood offshoot that controls Gaza. Just last week, militants in Sinai fired rockets toward Israel. Egyptian security forces said that they had prevented the firing of two more rockets by militants towards the southern Israeli resort of Eilat.

The Israeli bombardment has affected buildings on the Egyptian side of the border, without provoking any adverse response from Cairo. According to an article on the *Al-Monitor* web site, fighter jets have been targeting tunnel entrances in southern Gaza with highly explosive concussion bombs to destroy the entrances on the Palestinian side and parts of the underground tunnels. A resident said the intense bombing was far worse than any of the previous wars on Gaza, and of a different type since they were causing "abnormal quakes to the ground and subsequently to our homes" and likened it to an earthquake of force 5. He feared that if the bombing continued, the ground could collapse because there were more than 1,000 tunnels under their homes.

Israel has also hit the Gaza bureau of Qatar-based *Al-Jazeera* with two very precise shots fired straight into the building housing its office. This took place the day after Israel's Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, called for *Al-Jazeera* to be banned, accusing it of being

a Hamas mouthpiece. For its part, Egypt has closed *Al-Jazeera*'s bureau in Cairo, and a kangaroo court sentenced four of its journalists to long prison terms for supposedly supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorism in Egypt. This is in line with its ongoing opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood and its backers in Qatar, which is also home to Hamas's external affairs bureau chief, Khaled Meshaal.

Cairo sealed the Rafah crossing to prevent Palestinians fleeing the Israeli military. It has refused to allow the wounded to seek treatment at hospitals in Egypt, while preventing medical delegations and an aid convoy from reaching Gaza residents.

Israel's assault was intended to scupper any prospect of political unity between Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah-led faction of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation that rules the occupied West Bank on behalf of Israel, and Hamas, which controls Gaza, under the new National Unity Government agreed a few months ago. The original objective, as set out by Israel, to destroy Gaza's tunnels, has now widened to encompass the destruction of Hamas itself.

It takes place amid increasing bellicosity on Israel's part, which recently launched strikes against Syria from the Golan Heights, which it has occupied since 1967. It is working closely with Saudi Arabia, which played a crucial role in overthrowing MB rule in Egypt and bringing el-Sisi to power and has backed the Sunni Islamist forces in Syria and Iraq, as part of its broader strategy of containing Iran.

The war against Gaza is aimed not just at suppressing the Palestinians, but forging a closer unity in the Middle East against Iran and its supporters. For many years, Iran acted as one of Hamas's major backers. After an attempt by Qatar to break this alliance, Israel's offensive is once more driving Hamas closer to Tehran—as Jerusalem seeks to create the conditions in the Middle East for a broader US-led or sanctioned offensive against Syria and Iran.

The Iranian speaker, Ali Larijani, and the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, General Mohammad Ali Jafari, have this week boasted that they supplied Hamas with the necessary technology to make their own weapons, while supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamanei has called for the Palestinians to expand their resistance from Gaza to the occupied West Bank. On Wednesday, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman

Marzieh Afkham told a press conference that Iran has held political consultations with other countries, including nonaligned states, on ways to help the Gaza people.

El-Sisi has provided the crucial cover for Israel's ground assault, with his brokering of a bogus ceasefire proposal after discussion with Saudi Arabia, the Arab League and Washington. A key element of the Egyptian proposal was the end of Hamas rule in Gaza, with the return of the Fatah-led PA that had been expelled following an attempted coup against Hamas, the victor of elections in January 2006 in the West Bank and Gaza, in 2007. Egypt insisted that it would not reopen the Rafah crossing until it was guarded by the PA, under the control of strongman Mohammed Dahlan, Israel's preferred successor to the ailing Abbas.

The ceasefire was rejected by Hamas, which insists it will not end hostilities without the lifting of the blockade, the release of prisoners agreed in exchange for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and those detained in the West Bank in the aftermath of the killing of three Israeli youths as well as the extension of Gaza's fishing rights to their previous limit.

The actions of the region's rulers once again demonstrate that the realisation of the most basic democratic and national tasks in the oppressed countries can only be achieved through the independent political mobilisation of the working class, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective. The Palestinian question is bound up with the success of the socialist revolution. It poses the need to unify the Arab and Jewish working class in a struggle to overthrow the venal and sclerotic regimes in the region and establish the United Socialist States of the Middle East.



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