

US Secretary of State Pompeo endorses Israeli murder of Gaza protesters

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Recently confirmed US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo capped off his four-day trip to the Middle East on Monday by declaring the administration's total support for the Israeli military's ongoing murder of unarmed protesters in Gaza.

Pompeo made his remarks at a news conference alongside Jordan's Foreign Minister Aydan Safadi. Asked by a reporter whether he believed Israeli troops had used "excessive force" in response to the "March of Return" protests that have occurred at Gaza border fences each Friday over the past month, Pompeo responded briefly: "We do believe the Israelis have the right to defend themselves, and we're fully supportive of that."

The supposed acts of self defense endorsed by Pompeo have involved the repeated use of live ammunition, tear gas and rubber-encased steel bullets by Israeli troops against tens of thousands of unarmed civilian protesters. Since March 30, these attacks have killed 45 people, five of them children, and injured close to 7,000, including 3,500 from live ammunition, shrapnel or rubber bullets, according to Gaza health officials.

In contrast, no Israeli soldiers have been seriously injured in any of the protests.

Pompeo was speaking only three days after the most recent bloodletting on April 27, when Israeli troops stationed in heavily-fortified positions opened fire on crowds of thousands of protesters, killing four. Three of those killed, all in their twenties, died that day: 21-year-old Mohammad al-Maqeed, 22-year-old Khalil Na'im Atallah and 29-year-old Abdel-Salam Baker.

The last to die was a 14-year-old boy, Azzam Hilal Oueida, who was shot in the head by an Israeli soldier on Friday. He was rushed to a Gaza hospital but died the next day. Another 178 people were injured from

gunshot wounds, and many remain in critical condition. (See "Israel again opens fire on Gaza protesters, killing three and wounding hundreds")

A report published Sunday by the *Washington Post* noted the disproportionately high number of protesters who had been shot in the knees and legs by Israeli snipers. Omar Shakir, the Israeli-Palestine director at Human Rights Watch in New York, told the *Post*, "The deployment of snipers, careful planning and significant number of injuries to the lower limbs does reflect an apparent policy to target [those] limbs."

Gaza health officials have reported that 17 Palestinians have had to have their legs amputated after being shot in the knee or lower leg. In at least three cases, Israeli authorities reportedly denied the victims transfers to West Bank hospitals that may have saved their limbs.

The killing and maiming of protesters is part of a deliberate strategy by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud government to terrorize the Palestinian population in the occupied territories and suppress mass opposition among the 1.9 million men, women and children confined in Gaza, the world's largest open-air prison, in inhumane conditions.

The "March of Return" protests are being held to demand what is recognized as the right of the Palestinians under international law, to be able to return to their historical homeland. They have been organized in the lead-up to May 15, which marks the 70th anniversary of Israel's founding in 1948 through a program of expulsions and ethnic cleansing of three quarters of a million Palestinians. The Israeli ruling elite views the return of expelled Palestinians as an existential threat to the Zionist state it presides over.

Pompeo's statements on Monday underscore the unanimous support within the American corporate elite,

its military-intelligence apparatus and both its parties, Democrat and Republican, for the policies of the key US ally in the Middle East. In particular, they expose once again the hollow and fundamentally pro-war character of the Democratic Party's opposition to the Trump administration, which centers on claims that he is "soft" on Moscow and demands for stepped-up confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

Last week, the Democrats provided the crucial vote in the Senate to ensure the confirmation of Pompeo, a war hawk, defender of torture and advocate for unlimited spying on the American population, who has publicly called for the execution of Edward Snowden and advocated war against both North Korea and Iran.

The Democrats ferociously pursue Trump over his alleged sexual misdemeanors and supposed pro-Russian bias, but stand united with his bombing of Syria, attacks on immigrants and workers, and threats of war. They have raised no significant opposition to the administration's support for Israel's ongoing slaughter of Palestinian protesters.

Pompeo's statements are part of the Trump administration's turn toward a more aggressive strategy and build-up for war against Iran in alliance with Israel. The day before he solidarized himself with the Israeli government's terrorization of an entire population, he declared from Saudi Arabia that Iran was the "the greatest sponsor of terrorism in the world."

Trump has supported the Israeli government's jettisoning of the so-called "two-state solution," which had long been rendered a political fiction by two decades of uninterrupted expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. In December, Trump announced that the US would formally recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital—despite Palestinian claims upon the city as their own capital—and move its embassy there.

On Monday, Pompeo refused to endorse the "two-stage solution," declaring that "the parties will ultimately make the decision about what the right resolution is." His department did not request a meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority government which has been recognized by US imperialism and functioned as a local police force against the population in the occupied territories on behalf of Israel and the US.

Saudi Arabia, which is aligned with an Israeli-US

military build-up against its regional rival Iran, is also supporting the Israeli government's repression. Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman declared in a closed-door meeting in New York last month, "It is about time the Palestinians take the proposals and agree to come to the negotiations table or shut up and stop complaining."

In line with the bipartisan support for the suppression of the Gaza protests, the US media has remained largely silent on the latest killings. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* follow each massacre with news reports buried low down on their online edition, and then quickly drop the issue.

Following last Friday's killings, the *Times* published an article entitled "Plan to storm fence gets bloody preview in Gaza," which justified the Israeli military's actions as the reaction to a Palestinian population that had "conjured up the idea of swarming across the barrier."

The *Times* and other corporate media have given wall-to-wall coverage to the CIA's staged "chemical weapons attack" in Douma on April 7, providing the necessary lies to justify an illegal bombing of Syria by the US, France and Britain. But when it comes to the killing of Palestinians, the well-paid editors and columnists shrug their shoulders and move on.



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