

The massacre in Gaza and imperialist war policy

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May 14, 2018, the day the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) carried out the systematic massacre of over 60 unarmed men, women, and children, will live in infamy. For hours on end, Israeli forces fired thousands of rounds of live ammunition at unarmed Palestinian demonstrators, injuring more than 3,000 people and killing eight children, the youngest of whom was just eight months old.

As Palestinians buried their dead Tuesday, Israel continued its massacre, injuring scores and killing one. In the course of the past seven weeks, the IDF has shot approximately 6,000 people with live rounds and thousands more with rubber bullets and tear gas. Over that period, some 109 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli sharpshooters, who have been filmed cheering at every headshot.

Within the Israeli political establishment, the massacre has prompted not horrified self-reflection and inquiries into how a state supposedly founded in response to the Holocaust could carry out actions worthy of the Nazis, but rather the open language of genocide.

“The IDF has enough bullets for everyone,” said Avi Dichter, a chair of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in the Knesset, in response to the massacre.

Both the language and actions of Tel Aviv give the distinct impression that large sections of the Israeli state and military would not hesitate to implement, in the language of the 1930s, a “final solution” to the Palestinian question.

But the reaction of the imperialist powers, which have all issued statements supporting Israel’s “right to defend itself,” has internationalized this crime. By giving legitimacy to Israel’s massacre, the imperialist powers have made themselves complicit in it.

In a speech reminiscent of the shameless and blatant lying that characterized international relations in the Nazi period, US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley declared, “No country in this chamber would act with more restraint than Israel has.”

She painted the massacre as the fault of the Palestinians themselves, supposedly working in conjunction with Iran. “In recent days, Hamas terrorists, backed by Iran, have

incited attacks against Israeli security forces and infrastructure,” she said.

Haley’s statements, while particularly vile, were of a piece with the declarations of other imperialist governments. Without exception, every official statement included a variant of the phrase used by Israel’s murderous prime minister to justify the mowing down of unarmed Palestinian civilians: “Israel has the right to defend itself.”

The German Foreign Ministry, while expressing its “concern” about the use of live rounds against peaceful protesters, declared that “the right to peaceful protest” must “not be abused” by the Palestinian leaders, who, it implied, used the demonstrations as a pretext to “deploy violence.”

“Those who wield power in the Gaza Strip must renounce violence and the Palestinian Authority must once again be in control in Gaza,” the Foreign Ministry added.

UK Prime Minister Theresa May echoed these sentiments, declaring, “We are concerned that extremist elements” within Gaza “may be seeking to hijack peaceful protests to further their own objectives.”

French President Emanuel Macron, who went further in criticizing Israel’s actions than other leaders, reaffirmed his “commitment to the security of Israel.”

Within the United States, the entire political establishment lined up behind the Israeli massacre. Even as Israel was slaughtering protesters, Democratic Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer declared, “In a long overdue move, we have moved our embassy to Jerusalem... I sponsored legislation to do this two decades ago, and I applaud President Trump for doing it.”

Bernie Sanders, the leader of the supposed left wing of the Democratic Party, held a town hall discussion Monday on the Middle East featuring a panel of pro-war State Department figures.

Lara Friedman, a former US diplomat, declared that Hamas’s actions give Israel “a sometimes legitimate, sometimes not legitimate excuse to say this, all terrorism, this is an act of war, and under the laws of war we have the right to use lethal force against unarmed people, who are

near the fence, which if they were to damage that fence and breach it they could come into Israel and be a threat to us.”

Rather than denouncing such a statement as a monstrous justification for a horrible war crime, Sanders praised Friedman’s expertise on Israel, which he said she knows “upside down, sideways.”

The argument that the murder of Palestinian civilians was effectively a legitimate, if overly aggressive, form of self-defense on the part of the Israelis permeated both the reporting and commentary in the American press. In an article heavily promoted on Google News, the *Washington Post* declared “the protests appeared to have a more violent edge than in previous weeks. Some young men brought knives and fence cutters... Israeli snipers were determined not to allow a breach.”

The *New York Times*, in an editorial on the massacre, declared, “Israel has every right to defend its borders, including the boundary with Gaza.” It added, “Led too long by men who were corrupt or violent or both, the Palestinians have failed and failed again to make their own best efforts toward peace. Even now, Gazans are undermining their own cause by resorting to violence, rather than keeping their protests strictly peaceful.”

What utter hypocrisy! This is a newspaper that has justified war after war on the grounds that civilians either were, or might be, in danger. What has happened to the principle, used to justify countless regime-change operations, bombings and wars, of the “responsibility to protect” civilian life?

Seven years ago, the *New York Times* justified the US-backed regime-change operation in Libya on the grounds that, “Unless some way is found to stop him, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi of Libya will slaughter hundreds or even thousands of his own people in his desperation to hang on to power.”

The newspaper mustered all of its canned moral outrage, deploying a phalanx of columnists, including David Brooks and Nicholas Kristof, to make the case that the very threat of “hundreds” of civilian deaths justified a bombing campaign that ended up destroying an entire society. Where is their outrage over the massacre in Gaza?

There is no greater demonstration of the principle spelled out by Friedrich Engels that “morality has always been class morality.” The moral outrage of the *New York Times* is deployed only in the service of the interests of American imperialism.

Fifty-eight years ago, on March 21, 1960, the Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa, in which forces of the apartheid regime shot dead 69 unarmed demonstrators, was met with international outrage and revulsion. The event marked a turning point in the history of South Africa, setting in motion

a colossal radicalization of the masses throughout the African continent. It was the beginning of the end of the apartheid regime.

In that period, amid an upsurge of the masses, the oppressed countries of Africa, Asia and the Middle East were undergoing decolonization. Now, recolonization is the order of the day. All of the imperial powers are once again salivating over the carve-up of the Middle East. Israel forms the linchpin of the US-led offensive against Iran, and, as Haley argued, the defense of Israel’s war crimes in Gaza is inseparable from countering Iran’s “destabilizing presence” in the region.

There are more than tactical questions at stake. The wars involved in the neocolonial carve-up of the Middle East will be inseparable from mass murder, and even genocide. All of the imperialist powers can envision themselves, in the near future, carrying out similar massacres of restive and subject populations in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Marxists have always seen in foreign policy the concentrated expression of domestic class relations. The mass murder of unarmed Palestinians today will become the mass murder of striking American workers tomorrow.

After all, if Israel’s actions are justified, would not US forces deployed on the Mexican border be justified in opening fire on refugees walking toward US territory? Would the European border police not be justified in sinking boats of migrants fleeing to Europe?

The answer to both of these questions would obviously be “yes.” The universal defense of Israel’s actions makes clear that the imperialist powers have adopted the mass murder of unarmed civilians as a legitimate policy tool.



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