The war crimes in Gaza and Israel's crisis

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The *World Socialist Web Site* unequivocally condemns the one-sided slaughter being carried out by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) against Gaza. For 10 days, Israeli planes and artillery have rained missiles, bombs and shells on a population of 2 million Palestinians trapped by a merciless and unrelenting Israeli occupation and blockade in the narrow and impoverished coastal enclave.

At least 219 Palestinians have been killed, nearly half of them women and children, while thousands more have been wounded. Some 41,000 Gazans have been forced to flee their homes to makeshift shelters in UN-run schools, while Israel's tactics, including the toppling of entire high-rise buildings with "smart bombs," have terrorized the entire population.

Gaza's healthcare system is in a state of collapse, with bed space and medical supplies running out. Hospitals that were already overcrowded due to the COVID-19 pandemic now overflow with wounded, many of them suffering grievous injuries. A nurse told Al Jazeera that severed arms and legs were being piled up on a hospital bed.

Damage to infrastructure and the cutoff of fuel to the territory are expected to plunge all of Gaza into a blackout, cutting off power to homes as well as hospitals and clinics, its sewer system and desalinization plant. Those killed by Israeli bombs and shells will only be part of the death toll, as the destruction and disabling of healthcare facilities and basic infrastructure will raise the mortality rate for a long time to come.

It is not only Israel that is guilty of war crimes, but also its chief enabler, US imperialism. In the midst of the bombardment, it was reported the Democratic administration of President Joe Biden formally notified the US Congress on May 5 of a $735 million arms package for Israel that includes Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs), the very weapons used to turn Gaza's tallest buildings into rubble. The approval of this installment of the nearly $4 billion in aid that Washington provides Israel annually makes clear the direct complicity of the entire Democratic Party leadership in the crimes in Gaza.

Meanwhile, Washington has exercised its veto power three times in the course of a week to prevent the UN Security Council from issuing any statement criticizing Israel's actions.

The response of the Biden White House to the unfolding massacre in Gaza provides incontrovertible proof of its continuity with the Trump administration, but also with its predecessors under Barack Obama and George W. Bush, which similarly aided and abetted the Israel's wars waged in 2008-2009, 2012 and 2014, which together killed at least 3,500 Gazans, the overwhelming majority of them civilians.

Millions of working people and youth all over the world are justifiably outraged not only at Israel's war crimes, but also at their hypocritical justification by the likes of Biden and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who incessantly mouth the phrase "Israel has the right to defend itself." In practice, this means that an occupying power with one of the most advanced war machines in the world has the "right" to inflict unrestricted death and violence upon the occupied, a virtually defenseless population of refugees trapped in a huge ghetto of Israel's own making. On Monday, Biden joined this refrain with a meaningless expression, announced by a spokesperson, of his platonic support for a ceasefire with no date certain.

Overwhelming popular anger over the war crimes in Gaza has found expression in hundreds of protests that have taken place on every continent, save Antarctica. The support for Israeli aggression by the United States and the other imperialist powers notwithstanding, in the eyes of millions around the world, Israel is viewed as pariah, a state that has lost all moral and political legitimacy.

The attempts to brand these protests as anti-Semitic is being seen for what it is, a hamfisted attempt by Israel and its imperialist backers to quash any opposition to their crimes and a libel against millions of Jews all over the world who are shocked and revolted by the actions of the Zionist state.

Anger and protests, however, are not enough. What is required is a political perspective on what has produced these crimes and how they can be stopped.

The eruption of violence against Gaza is driven by the immense crisis and contradictions within Israeli society itself. Tel Aviv's decision to go to war was in the first instance an attempt to contain a spiraling political crisis, with the failure to form a viable government after four elections in two years and a prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who must remain in power to avoid being jailed on corruption charges.

Underlying this political crisis are intractable social contradictions. Israel remains, together with the US, among the most unequal of the OECD countries. According to the annual poverty report by the Israeli aid agency Latet, Israel's poverty rate jumped from 20.1 percent to 29.3 percent in 2020, while, with the greatest concentration of billionaires in the world, its richest 20 individuals have amassed a combined wealth of over $61 billion.

The unsustainability of such a social divide has been laid bare by the revolt of Palestinian citizens of Israel, triggered initially by the violent police storming of the al-Aqsa Mosque and increasingly aggressive acts of "ethnic cleansing" in East Jerusalem. Israeli Palestinians, who make up 20 percent of the country's population,

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joined Tuesday in general strike with Palestinians in the occupied territories to protest the assault on Gaza and against Israel's apartheid-style "race laws" that condemn them to less than second-class citizenship. Workers shut down shops, schools and construction sites and stayed away from their jobs across the country.

While Israel's ruling camarilla, representing the interests of its billionaire ruling class, seeks a base of support through the promotion of militarism and anti-Arab hatred, unleashing fascist-Zionist gangs on the streets, there is broad hostility to the government and its crimes within the working class and sympathy for the Palestinians. This found expression Sunday in a demonstration by Jewish and Israeli Palestinian healthcare workers outside Haifa's Rambam hospital calling for unity, which in embryonic form expresses the drive by the working class to come together in a struggle against their joint oppressor.

Seventy-three years after the founding of the state of Israel and 55 years after the expansionist Six-Day War, the Israeli ruling class and its vast military apparatus have been unable to crush Palestinian resistance, which is inextricably tied to the immense internal contradictions of Israeli society as a whole. In response, the government behaves as if it has lost its head, lashing out with violence that can only deepen its crisis.

Israel finds itself at the end of its road. The entire Zionist project—a reactionary perspective of carving out a sectarian Jewish capitalist state in the Middle East through the dispossession of the Palestinian people—has manifestly failed. While Zionist ideology justified this state as a safe haven for Jews in the wake of the Holocaust, the Israeli government institutes race laws and carries out violent crimes that more and more resemble those of the Nazis.

The emergence of mass opposition among Israeli Arabs and the Jewish working class to the crimes of the Israeli state further underscores the utter unviability of the Zionist project. As the efforts over decades to drive a wedge between Palestinian and Jewish workers break down, raising the prospect of a working-class revolt, Israel is incapable of surviving except through the resort to totalitarian dictatorship.

Israel's crisis is bound up with the breakdown of the entire nation-state system of the Middle East created through the formation of nominally independent states based on the borders drawn by the former colonial powers. The venal Arab bourgeoisie has dropped its charade of supporting the Palestinians and its promotion of the chimera of a "two-state solution" as it seeks to defend its own rule against rising social opposition by drawing closer to Israel and imperialism. A decade after the bloody suppression of the Egyptian Revolution, all of the states bordering Israel—Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Egypt itself—are wracked by internal conflict, while the broader Middle East has been devastated by US wars.

Hamas, the dominant political force in Gaza, is likewise incapable of offering any progressive alternative. Like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), it is wedded to the so-called two-state solution, that would maintain Gaza and the West Bank as Palestinian ghettos under the thumb of Zionist state. Under conditions where a rebellion is developing inside Israel itself, Hamas is incapable of making any appeal to the Israeli Arab population, let alone the Jewish working class.

General Mark Milley, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, warned Monday that there could be "broader destabilization" and "a whole series of negative consequences if the fighting continues" in Gaza. The fear, clearly, is that the events in Israel and the occupied territories can trigger revolutionary upheavals throughout the region, while also posing the threat of a far wider war, in the first instance against Iran.

These alternatives, war and revolution, are posed not only in the Middle East, but on a world scale. In the face of a global pandemic that has claimed 3.5 million lives, the imperialist powers are conducting a massive military buildup in preparation for global war.

The same pandemic has provoked social opposition in the working class and a worldwide escalation of the class struggle that is paving the way to social revolution.

Therein lies the road forward for the working masses of the entire Middle East. The central question is that of overcoming the crisis of perspective and leadership.

The dead end of bourgeois nationalism, from Nasserism to the PLO, has thoroughly vindicated Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution. It established that in the imperialist epoch, the realization of the basic tasks of liberation from imperialist oppression in the oppressed countries cannot be resolved under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie, which is thoroughly tied to and dependent upon imperialism. They can be achieved only through the independent political intervention of the working class on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.

The military assault on Gaza and the growing revolt within Israel itself pose with utmost urgency the struggle to unite the working class, Arab, Jewish and Iranian, across all national and sectarian divides, in a common struggle for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East as part of the fight to put an end to capitalism all over the world.

The vital task of mobilizing the working class on the basis of this program depends upon the building of a new revolutionary leadership, organized as sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in every country.

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