

Who is responsible for the violence in Israel and Gaza?

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The governments and media of all the imperialist countries have been mobilized for a massive propaganda operation to poison public opinion about the ongoing popular uprising against the Israeli occupation in Gaza and to justify the retaliatory decimation of Palestinians being prepared by Israel's far-right regime.

The tone was set by US President Joe Biden, who declared Saturday following a call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that his "support for Israel's security is rock solid and unwavering," condemning the "appalling assault against Israel by Hamas terrorists from Gaza." This was followed by what amounted to a roll call of the entire cast of characters that constitute the American political establishment, who lined up over the weekend to make appearances and issue statements denouncing "terrorists" and the "attack on Israel," while expressing their "horror" and "outrage" at reports of deaths among Israeli civilians.

Similar scenes played out in all the imperialist capitals, with Israel's national flag being projected onto public monuments. Any equivocation or wavering from this line was swiftly labeled as "antisemitism" or tantamount to "supporting terrorism."

There is no denying that, particularly in the opening hours of the breakout from Gaza, there have been significant casualties among Israeli civilians, many of whom doubtless bore no individual responsibility for the oppression of Palestinians. There is an element of tragedy in the fates of many such people, who simply found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Fighters from Gaza, hardened by a lifetime of atrocities under Israeli occupation and accepting that they would not return to Gaza alive, exacted their revenge on the first Israelis they found, including those who had staged a dance party on the outskirts of what amounts to a concentration camp.

But the question must be posed: Who bears ultimate responsibility for their deaths? Blame for these tragedies must be assigned where it belongs: In the first instance to the criminal Israeli apartheid regime and its US backers, together with the whole reactionary Zionist project of establishing an exclusivist Jewish state by expelling Palestinians and confining them to a constantly shrinking set of open-air prisons and ghettos.

The unanimous denunciations of the "terrorism" and "violence" of the uprising by the imperialist powers are hypocritical in the extreme. No official expressions of "horror" and "outrage" on a remotely similar scale have ever been made on behalf of the far more numerous victims of violence and terror among the

Palestinians.

While Biden's speechwriters offered his "prayers" Saturday for "all of the families who have been hurt by this violence," Biden is a war criminal himself and no stranger to violence. In 2003, he voted in the Senate for the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq, which resulted in over a million deaths.

Contrary to the upside-down official picture of events, according to which the Palestinians are the aggressors and the state of Israel is the victim, the oppression of the Palestinian masses by imperialism is an entirely one-sided conflict, in which for three-quarters of a century the Israeli government—armed to the teeth by the imperialist powers—has brutally put down all resistance. In the three-week 2008–09 aerial bombardment of Gaza, for example, which killed hundreds of people, Palestinian casualties exceeded Israeli casualties by a ratio of 100 to 1.

Palestinians in the West Bank have been reduced to living in hundreds of separate ghettos surrounded by hundreds more Israeli military checkpoints, while Gaza itself has been transformed into one giant open-air prison: the Gaza Strip, only a handful of miles wide and 25 miles long. At the mercy of the Israeli government for every necessity, more than 2 million Palestinians are confined in this open-air prison in some of the most densely populated and desperate conditions on earth. In this context, the uprising in Gaza that broke out over the weekend is more akin to a prison break than an "attack" and only the latest chapter in a long saga.

As the imperialist capitals resound with hypocritical denunciations of "violence" and "terrorism," a retaliatory onslaught to terrorize the population of Gaza is already unfolding.

Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has declared "a complete siege on Gaza," using language that fully exposes the character of his regime and its underlying ideology. "There will be no electricity, no food, no water, no fuel, everything will be closed," Gallant said. "We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly."

Former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, a candidate for the Republican presidential primary nomination, declared that the uprising was "not just an attack on Israel" but "an attack on America," directly demanding that Netanyahu "finish them." Netanyahu, for his part, declared ominously yesterday, "What we will do to our enemies in the next few days will echo for generations."

Behind all this ferocious imperialist hypocrisy is the fundamental class attitude of the oppressors to any resistance by the oppressed,

whether it is in Gaza or anywhere else. “We, the oppressors, are free to use force whenever we decide that it serves our interests,” they say. “We can bomb you indiscriminately, we can blockade and starve you, we can rob you and imprison you and kneel on your necks. But force is our monopoly and our sole prerogative. You, the oppressed, are not under any circumstances permitted to use force in response.” It is this class attitude that animates the repeated use of the word “terrorist” to describe anyone who takes up arms against the occupation.

Underscoring the degree of hypocrisy involved, it is worth pointing out that in a *New York Times* article in August of last year, “Behind Enemy Lines, Ukrainians Tell Russians ‘You Are Never Safe,’” correspondent Andrew Kramer celebrated the work of Ukrainian terror squads carrying out assassinations with car bombs behind Russian lines: “They sneak down darkened alleys to set explosives. They identify Russian targets for Ukrainian artillery and long-range rockets provided by the United States. They blow up rail lines and assassinate officials they consider collaborators with the Russians.” Such methods are permissible to proxies of American imperialism, just not to those resisting its proxies.

In 1831, a slave uprising led by Nat Turner took place in Southampton County, Virginia. The escaped slaves used knives, hatchets and clubs to massacre dozens of white men, women and children. The rebellion was put down with even more extreme savagery, with roving militias and mobs murdering black people on sight regardless of whether they were involved in the rebellion. Turner’s body was flayed and his skin was turned into souvenir purses.

Any objective historian, with the benefit of hindsight, would place the blame for the terrific violence of such uprisings not on the slaves, but on the slave system itself, with all its colossal inhumanity. To denounce the Turner uprising on the grounds that it was “violent” would be hypocritical and ahistorical and would amount to an indirect apology for slavery.

“A slave-owner who through cunning and violence shackles a slave in chains, and a slave who through cunning or violence breaks the chains,” Leon Trotsky wrote in 1938, are not “equals before a court of morality!”

For his part, in his second inaugural address in the midst of the Civil War, Lincoln expressed the idea that the tremendous violence with which the country was afflicted was the inevitable historical reckoning for the institution of slavery, which required that “every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword.”

By the same token, the repression now being carried out by the Israeli government against the population of Gaza is not fundamentally different from that used by Britain against the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, by France in the Algerian War of Independence, against South Africans struggling against the apartheid regime, or for that matter by the US military against the popular resistance to its occupation of Iraq. As always, the political elites among the oppressors denounce armed resistance as terrorism and then proceed to carry out merciless retribution a thousand times more destructive.

In one rare deviation from the propaganda deluge, Palestinian National Initiative leader Mustafa Barghouti was interviewed by

Fareed Zakaria on CNN yesterday, in which he was permitted to make the point that armed resistance is the inevitable result of the refusal of the government of Israel to recognize any other form of opposition by Palestinians as legitimate: “If we struggle in a military form, we are terrorists. If we struggle in a non-violent way, we are described as violent. If we even resist with words, we are described as provocateurs.”

Indeed, in 2018–2019, there were mass protests in Gaza under the banner of the Great March of Return, demanding the right to return to the homes from which Palestinians were driven during the 1948–49 and 1967 wars. The Israeli military responded to these protests by gunning down Palestinian protesters as they approached the walls and fences that enclose them within the Gaza Strip. At least 223 Palestinians were killed, over 9,200 were injured, and hardly any of those personalities now preaching morality to the Palestinians batted an eyelash.

There is, in fact, deep opposition in the working class within Israel itself to the criminal Netanyahu regime, which will be seen as the principal instigator of this new bloody eruption of violence. This opposition has already been expressed in mass protests and a general strike earlier this year in opposition to the regime’s efforts to grant itself unchallengeable and legally unreviewable powers.

But the violent form taken by the uprising in Gaza is not unrelated to the absence of a genuine and principled left-wing and socialist leadership within Israel itself. In the mass protests earlier this year, the self-proclaimed leaders remained defenders of the Zionist state and scrupulously avoided any turn towards the struggles of the Palestinian masses, who would have been natural allies.

The massive propaganda campaign now underway to browbeat the population into accepting the official line reflects a fear that hundreds of millions of people around the world will not be inclined to accept that line, including within the US and Israel itself. Spontaneous demonstrations in support of the Palestinian uprising have already taken place around the world.

However great may be the challenges and obstacles to implementing this strategy, the only path to a peaceful future and the only way to settle accounts with the Zionist regime is through the unity of Israeli and Palestinian workers, who together must oppose the bloody onslaught against Gaza, bring down Netanyahu’s regime and join together in the struggle for a unified socialist society.



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