

Killing of 2 Israeli embassy staffers in D.C. seized on to slander opponents of Gaza genocide as antisemites and terrorists

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The shooting of Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, two young Israeli diplomatic staffers, in Washington D.C. by 30-year-old Elias Rodriguez on the night of May 21 has been seized upon to escalate the campaign to delegitimize all opposition to the genocide in Gaza.

The killing occurred under conditions in which Israel's ethnic cleansing and mass killing in Gaza is entering a bloody new stage, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu openly endorsing the "Trump plan" to kill or forcibly displace the entire population—more than 2 million before October 2023—and seize the territory for the benefit of American imperialism.

The *World Socialist Web Site* opposes individual acts of violence, and nothing progressive will come out of the shooting of Lischinsky and Milgrim. The Marxist movement has always stressed that individual violence cannot be a substitute for the conscious struggle to mobilize the working class in opposition to war, inequality and the attack on democratic rights, which is the only way to stop the Gaza genocide. Such actions are seized upon as a pretext to escalate police repression and further criminalize opposition to the genocide. With the killing of Lischinsky and Milgrim, this is already taking place.

Rodriguez has been charged with three federal offenses—murder of foreign officials, causing death with a firearm and discharge of a firearm during a crime of violence—as well as first-degree murder under D.C. law. Attorney General Pam Bondi has stated that she will seek the death penalty.

Lischinsky, 30, was an Israeli from a religiously mixed Jewish and Christian family who had been working at the Israeli Embassy in D.C. alongside Milgrim, 26, a Jewish American from Prairie Village, Kansas, for the past year and a half. Reports indicate that the two were dating and that Lischinsky was preparing to propose to Milgrim during an upcoming trip to Israel.

The Trump administration, the Israeli regime and the corporate media are using the killing of Lischinsky and Milgrim by Rodriguez to escalate the campaign to equate opposition to the genocide in Gaza with antisemitism. Protesters chanting "Free Palestine" are being portrayed as complicit in the murders. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar went so far as to blame the leaders of Britain, France and Canada for the shooting, accusing them of a "blood libel" for merely suggesting that Israel might ease its starvation blockade in Gaza.

As always, the response is characterized by staggering hypocrisy. The constant refrain from both Democrats and Republicans has been that "violence has no place in American politics"—ignoring the thousands of Gazans killed by bombs supplied by both the Biden and Trump administrations, and Trump's explicit endorsement of the

ethnic cleansing of Gaza.

The *Washington Post* editorial board declared unequivocally that Rodriguez was motivated by "virulent antisemitism." To sustain this sleight of hand, the *Post* refers to Israel's unrelenting genocide, which Rodriguez explicitly cited as the focus of his misguided rage, as merely a "forceful response" to " Hamas's barbaric attacks on Oct. 7, 2023."

Likewise, the *Wall Street Journal* blamed the killing on "antisemitism" and pointed the finger at campus protests against the Gaza genocide, protests that have included many Jewish students and been violently suppressed by police at the behest of both political parties.

Pushing for greater censorship and repression, the *Journal* added a McCarthyite twist, warning that "Soviet-style anti-Zionism," including opposition to Israel's existence and criticism of its supporters, "is corrosive to America" and "stirring up old dangers for Jews." It concluded by demanding that "Americans of all faiths and political views have a share of the responsibility to push back."

However, the facts of the shooting and Rodriguez's own statements make clear that it was not an antisemitic attack motivated by irrational hatred of Jews but a misguided and nihilistic act driven by opposition to the Israeli government and its genocide in Gaza. The ultimate responsibility lies with the Israeli government and the full backing it receives from the American political establishment for the mass slaughter of the Palestinian people.

The FBI affidavit declares Rodriguez "spontaneously stated on scene to MPD, 'I did it for Palestine, I did it for Gaza, I am unarmed,'" and that he was holding a red scarf identified as a "Kaffiyeh," the traditional Middle East headdress associated with the Palestinian people. Video taken by a bystander shows Rodriguez shouting, "Free, free Palestine!" as he was being taken into police custody.

The affidavit goes on to report that Rodriguez waived his Miranda rights to remain silent and continued speaking to police about his motivations, expressing admiration for the actions of Aaron Bushnell, the 25-year-old who self-immolated in front of the Israeli Embassy in D.C. last year in protest of the Gaza genocide.

Since Israel launched its genocidal operation against Gaza in October 2023—which has killed over 55,000 Palestinians, including thousands of women and children, and leveled much of the densely populated enclave where 2 million once lived—millions across the United States and internationally have protested peacefully, hoping that moral appeals would sway the ruling class overseeing the

slaughter. Rodriguez was among them, having participated in pro-Palestinian demonstrations in his hometown of Chicago as recently as 2023.

Rodriguez graduated from the University of Illinois Chicago with a bachelor's degree in English and was working as an administrative specialist for the American Osteopathic Information Association, a trade group for osteopaths. He previously served as an oral history researcher and production coordinator at The HistoryMakers, a Chicago-based African American history archive.

Through family connections, Rodriguez had some experience with the Democratic Party. His father, Eric Rodriguez, an Iraq War veteran, attended Donald Trump's joint address to Congress as a guest of Illinois Democratic Representative Jesús "Chuy" García, representing veterans' concerns and opposition to Trump's attacks on the federal workforce. Elias Rodriguez also had a one-time association with the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), participating in an October 2017 protest in Chicago organized by the group against the police murder of Laquan McDonald and Amazon's proposed plans for a second headquarters in the city.

The PSL has distanced itself from any association with Rodriguez, writing on X Thursday morning:

We reject any attempt to associate the PSL with the DC shooting. Elias Rodriguez is not a member of the PSL. He had a brief association with one branch of the PSL that ended in 2017. We know of no contact with him in over 7 years. We have nothing to do with this shooting and do not support it.

A manifesto justifying the attack posted on an X account linked to Rodriguez and publicized by journalist Ken Klippenstein points to the deeply demoralized political psychology motivating his attack. Under the headline, "Escalate For Gaza, Bring The War Home," Rodriguez justified his attack as an "armed demonstration" of "theater and spectacle," writing:

Those of us against the genocide take satisfaction in arguing that the perpetrators and abettors have forfeited their humanity. I sympathize with this viewpoint and understand its value in soothing the psyche which cannot bear to accept the atrocities it witnesses, even mediated through the screen. But inhumanity has long since shown itself to be shockingly common, mundane, prosaically human. A perpetrator may then be a loving parent, a filial child, a generous and charitable friend, an amiable stranger, capable of moral strength at times when it suits him and sometimes even when it does not, and yet be a monster all the same.

This manifesto is remarkably similar to the recent column of journalist Chris Hedges, who sees only more death and destruction on the horizon due to "the feral qualities that lie latent in all humans ... It is a testament to our hypocrisy, cruelty and racism," transferring blame for the Gaza genocide from the fascistic Zionist Israeli regime and US imperialism to all of humanity.

As David North explained, in Hedges' view, the Gaza genocide has proven the futility of any hope in the possibility of human progress, a

deeply demoralized outlook, which also underlay Hedges' endorsement of Bushnell's needless and tragic self-immolation as a legitimate protest against the Gaza genocide. These politically disoriented conceptions lead to politically disoriented acts.

In contrast to Hedges' hopeless outlook, North noted:

To blame humanity in general for the genocide is to obfuscate the specific responsibility of the imperialist leaders and the system they represent for the crimes committed against the people of Gaza. However incorrect his politics, Chris Hedges himself bears no responsibility whatsoever for the genocide. He is a politically disoriented journalist who is overwhelmed by the ongoing atrocities. But Netanyahu and his cohorts, and their imperialist enablers, are mass murderers. This is not a minor difference.

Hedges claims that mankind is entering a "New Dark Age," from which there is no escape. In reality, mankind is entering a new era of revolutionary struggle. The imperialist-backed Gaza genocide has been met by protests involving millions across the globe. The crimes of imperialism—the desperate attempt of the ruling class to resolve its crisis through fascism and war—is setting into motion a mass movement against capitalism. The historic task of this era is to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership by building the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

There is no shortage of opposition and anger over the crimes of imperialism, of which the Gaza genocide is currently the most acute, but absent a political leadership guided by a socialist perspective for workers' power, that anger will continue to find dead ends, whether through the tragically misguided actions of demoralized individuals or in the dead end of the Democratic Party.

Workers and young people must break free from the grip of bourgeois politics and turn their moral outrage into a conscious political perspective aimed not at any one individual but at the entire capitalist system, the root of inequality and war. This requires studying the history of the socialist movement and drawing its key lessons.



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