

Israel's massacre at sea

3 June 2010

The Israeli military's killing of nine civilians and wounding of scores more on a ship carrying humanitarian supplies in international waters was an act of cold-blooded murder and a war crime.

For millions of people around the world, this military assault on an aid convoy carrying wheelchairs, cement, water purification systems, children's toys and notebook paper to Gaza—all items barred by Israel's blockade of the occupied territory—epitomizes the role played by Israel, as well as that of its US sponsor, in global affairs.

As always in the aftermath of such atrocities, the Israeli government has blamed its victims. In a televised speech Wednesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the aid convoy as a “flotilla of terror supporters” and praised the slaughter on the high seas as an act of self-defense by besieged Israeli commandos.

Those who engaged in self-defense were the passengers on the ship, and they had every right to do so. The fact that nine of them were killed, while the Israel Defense Force (IDF) commandos suffered not a single fatality, is evidence as to who was the aggressor.

This is a regular pattern. The massacre in the Mediterranean comes just a year and a half after Operation Cast Lead, the far greater slaughter that the Israeli regime unleashed against the suffering people of Gaza. Claiming then as now to act in “self defense,” in December 2008 and January 2009 Israel rained bombs, missiles and tank and automatic weapons fire upon Gaza, killing over 1,400 Palestinians, the overwhelming majority of them unarmed men, women and children. This one-sided war by one of the world's most powerful military machines against a relatively defenseless civilian population claimed just 13 Israeli lives, all but three of them soldiers.

The aid convoy was a response to the barbaric blockade that has subjected an entire population of 1.5 million people in Gaza to hunger, disease and misery.

Since the tightening of the blockade in 2007, according to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the number of Gazan refugees living in abject poverty has tripled.

The UN reported at the end of 2009 that “insufficient food and medicine is reaching Gazans, producing a further deterioration of the mental and physical health of the entire civilian population since Israel launched Operation Cast Lead against the territory.” Among the starkest expressions of Israel's deliberate starvation of an entire population was a finding by the Food and Agriculture Organization last year that 65 percent of babies between the ages of nine and 12 months suffer from anemia.

Israel is able to carry out this kind of medieval siege as well as piracy and murder not merely because of its own military might, but thanks to the unwavering patronage and funding of Washington. This latest mass killing has only underscored that—as with so much else—the advent of the Obama administration has effected no significant change in US policy.

While issuing a hypocritical expression of “deep regret at the loss of life,” the Obama administration is doing everything it can to assure that Israel bears neither blame nor consequences for these killings. It quashed any criticism of Israel's action at the UN Security Council and has implicitly adopted the Zionist state's justification for the massacre.

Israel's criminality and Washington's role as its unconditional enabler both have a long history. It is worth recalling another Israeli attack on a vessel in international waters that took place 43 years ago. In that attack, 34 sailors aboard the USS Liberty were killed by Israeli napalm, missiles and machine-gun fire, while another 171 were wounded—the worst casualties suffered by the US Navy in a hostile action since World War II.

An intelligence ship, the Liberty was attacked off the Sinai Peninsula on June 8, 1967 in the midst of the

Six-Day War. While Israel called it a tragic “mistake,” ample evidence emerged that the Zionist state attacked the ship because it wanted to stop Washington from listening in to its communications. Intercepts flatly contradicted Tel Aviv’s claim that it was acting in self-defense and revealed that Israel wanted to conceal evidence of its aggressive intentions as it moved to seize Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights, all of which remain under illegal occupation to this day.

Much of the criticism of this week’s attack on the aid convoy, including within Israel itself, has treated it as a “botched” operation, an excessive use of force and a public relations fiasco. But this is not a matter of a government losing its head. The Netanyahu regime’s policies are directed to a definite socio-political base, composed of religious extremists, right-wing settlers and the most politically reactionary layers within Israeli society. Its orientation is personified by the fascistic background and ideology of its foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman.

Deeply reactionary and in deep political crisis, the Israeli government is driven more and more to act as a global pyromaniac, threatening renewed wars against Syria and Lebanon and, according to a report in the London *Times* this week, sending submarines armed with nuclear missiles to the waters off Iran.

The unconditional support and approximately \$3 billion in annual aid to Israel bestowed by Washington—and continued under Obama—pose a mortal danger to people across the globe.

This is not a matter merely of a single outlaw regime, but of a general descent of world affairs into a state of criminality and the disintegration of any semblance of international law, with Israel’s main patron setting the pattern.

The Obama administration continues two wars of aggression initiated under Bush and has maintained intact a police state apparatus of unlawful detentions, rendition and torture. It has now earned the ignominious designation as the number one practitioner of “targeted killings”—assassinations—through CIA drone attacks that have killed “many hundreds of people” in Pakistan, according to a United Nations report released Wednesday. The report condemned Washington for claiming a “license to kill without accountability.”

The behavior of the US and other governments as if

they were the state incarnation of Murder Inc., acts of state terrorism and piracy like that committed by Israel this week, and the constant threats of new aggression have created a global climate that bears ever closer resemblance to the conditions that prevailed on the eve of the Second World War.

These developments are driven by the mortal crisis of world capitalism and will not be reversed by either protests or pacifism. Only by uniting the working class, including both Jewish and Arab workers in the Middle East, in a common struggle to put an end to the profit system can a new global conflagration be prevented.

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