

US and Europe line up behind Israel over Gaza rocket attacks

By Jean Shaoul
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Washington and its European allies have condemned Hamas, the bourgeois Islamist group that governs Gaza, for firing 100 homemade rockets into southern Israel on Tuesday.

Nikki Haley, President Donald Trump's UN envoy, denounced the UN Security Council for equivocating over denouncing this ineffectual response to Israel's killing of over a hundred Palestinian protesters.

The US called an emergency session of the council seeking a statement of condemnation. Britain, France and the UN "unequivocally condemned" the rocket attacks, but Kuwait, a non-permanent member, instead urged "international protection" for the Palestinian people.

Israel shot down many of the rockets with its Iron Dome rocket interceptor system, others landed in empty areas and farmland, causing no damage. One hit a kindergarten playground before the school opened.

On Sunday, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said that it had struck a Hamas target near Khan Yunis in southern Gaza with tank fire, killing three Palestinians, including two members of the Al-Quds Brigades, the military arm of Islamic Jihad. Israeli fighter jets attacked two Hamas targets in southern Gaza Strip. This was the immediate cause of the rocket attacks.

Israel responded with 65 air strikes on Tuesday and pre-dawn Wednesday, aimed at what an IDF spokesperson said were a drone facility, rocket manufacturing plant, advanced naval weaponry, military compounds, training camps, weapons factories and a cross-border tunnel under construction. It was the biggest military attack on Gaza since 2014.

It remains to be seen whether Israel launches a full-scale assault on Gaza. But to the extent that a ceasefire, initiated by Hamas, appears to be holding, it is bound up with Israel's efforts to reach an agreement

with Russia over the withdrawal of Iranian military advisors and Shi'ite forces from southern Syria near the Golan Heights. Israel has illegally occupied the area since the 1967 war, and it remains a strategic interest that is of far greater importance to Tel Aviv than Gaza.

The armed wings of Hamas and Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the rockets, saying it was in response to Israel's slaughter of unarmed Palestinians in Gaza during the protests held under the banner of the Great March of Return that started on March 30.

A Hamas spokesman said that the attacks were a "natural response to Israeli crimes," with an Islamic Jihad spokesman saying, "The blood of our people is not cheap."

The Palestinians were demanding their right of return to the homes and villages from which they were expelled 70 years ago in what Palestinians refer to as the Naqba, or catastrophe. Some 726,000 Palestinians were driven from their land through a systematic campaign of terrorism and intimidation, a gigantic act of "ethnic cleansing" to establish a Jewish state based on race and religion.

The march, conceived by activists unaffiliated to Hamas, won the backing of several Gaza-based Palestinian groups. Hamas, which has largely refrained from launching rockets on Israel since Israel's 2014 war on Gaza, took control of the march, forbidding any attempt to breach the security fence with Israel or any other actions that could be interpreted as an attack on Israel.

Despite this, during the nine weeks of protests that have continued after the anniversary of the Naqba, the IDF unleashed live bullets, tear gas and rubber bullets against unarmed protesters, who posed no threat to Israel or its border fence. Around 120 Palestinians were killed—including 12 children, two journalists and a

paramedic, and 12,600 injured. There was not one Israeli casualty in the corresponding period.

Earlier this month, Hamas reportedly appealed for a long-term truce with Israel, in effect renouncing their own policy of resistance to Israel's occupation, and an end to the 11-year blockade so that it can carry out reconstruction work in the tiny enclave. Israel rejected this out of hand.

Haley infamously blocked a UN Security Council resolution in April condemning Israel for firing on unarmed protesters, declaring, "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.

This was despite the fact that none of the international media coverage, which downplayed Israel's criminality, reported any danger or threat to Israeli forces along the border fence.

All the other imperialist governments issued statements in a similar vein that included some variant of the phrase used by Israel's murderous prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, to justify the mowing down of unarmed Palestinian civilians: "Israel has the right to defend itself."

Despite some hand-wringing, not one of these governments, so fond of launching military interventions in the name of humanitarianism when it suits their own geo-strategic interests, condemned Israel or proposed any sanctions against it.

While the mainstream media responded with wall-to-wall coverage to the CIA's staged "chemical weapons attack" in Douma on April 7, to provide the requisite lies to justify the illegal bombing of Syria by the US, France and Britain, it pays little attention to the crimes of the Israeli government against the Palestinians.

The media has said even less about the Israel Navy's act of piracy in stopping a flotilla of Palestinian boats that set sail from Gaza to Cyprus on Tuesday to draw attention to the desperate lack of medical facilities in Gaza and protest the Israeli-Egyptian blockade that has prevented the Palestinians from accessing health care. The boats were carrying 22 Palestinians activists, students and patients in need of medical treatment.

The navy fired on one of the boats that crossed the blockade line—six nautical miles off the coast—and

stopped the rest of the flotilla from crossing before towing them to the Ashdod naval base.

The launch of the flotilla marked the eighth anniversary of the attack by Israeli commandos on the Mavi Marmara, part of the Turkish-sponsored Gaza Freedom Flotilla, which killed nine people, eight of them Turkish.

Thanks to the 12-year-long joint Israeli-Egyptian blockade of the tiny enclave, the Palestinians in Gaza face death by a thousand cuts. Deprived by Israel of fuel and access to clean water and sanitation, Gaza has become almost uninhabitable. Many are destitute. Forty-six percent of the population are without work, while some 65 percent live on \$1.90 or less a day. Conditions are nothing short of atrocious.

Gaza's hospitals have long faced a severe shortage of medical supplies and consumables. According to a World Health Organisation report last February, Gaza had run out of 42 percent of drugs and 23 percent of needed disposables.

The crisis in health care has intensified since the start of the Great March. With Israel refusing exit permits for medical treatment to Palestinians who took part in the March of Return protests for all but "exceptional humanitarian cases," the injured wait on trolleys for hours, if not days, for surgery, with no painkillers except Ibuprofen, while losing blood. Patients who would normally be hospitalised for weeks are sent home within days, only to face severe infections and possibly amputations.

Gaza's Ministry of Health has issued desperate pleas urging medical and international organisations to provide the hospitals and clinics with much-needed medical supplies.

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