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# ISRAEL UNLEASHES A MASSACRE IN GAZA

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Beginning mid-day on Saturday, December 27, waves of U.S.-supplied Israeli warplanes suddenly appeared over the skies of the Palestinian territory of Gaza in broad daylight and unleashed a deadly barrage of bomb and missile attacks that continue as we go to press. This could not be taking place without the approval of the U.S., for whom Israel serves as an enforcer in the Middle East. The U.S.-supplied Israeli F-16 warplanes and Apache helicopters attacked all of Gaza's main towns, including Gaza City, Khan Younis and Rafah, striking more than 210 targets in the first 24 hours of what Israel threatens will be "war to the bitter end." Police stations—located in the middle of civilian areas—government offices, the Islamic University, and many other sites were hit. By Sunday, over 300 had been killed—including many civilians and an estimated 700 wounded. It was the most Palestinians killed in a single day in decades.

Eyewitnesses described scenes of terror from the skies, and the horror of seeing loved ones massacred. According to the Associated Press, Palestinian human rights groups said that 20 of the dead were children under 16 and 9 women: "The Palestinian Center for Human Rights said it was difficult to keep an exact count because of chaos at the hospitals, and difficulty in identifying dismembered bodies." The UN reported that seven teenage students at a UN vocational college for Palestinian refugees were killed waiting for a bus to take them home.

One Palestinian described the scene near the main security headquarters in Gaza when the air strikes began: "People were walking through the streets just like a normal day, children coming home from school. Suddenly, without any warning, the bombing started. We didn't even see the jets in the sky. That's why so many people were killed.... Suddenly people started to run, you saw people running to the ambulances, and the police running everywhere. People were crying. I saw some just sat on the ground against the wall."

Even the imperialist, pro-Israel *New York Times* was forced to note the "shocking quality to Saturday's attacks, which began in broad daylight as police cadets were graduating, women were shopping at the outdoor market, and children were emerging from school."

"The center of Gaza City was a scene of chaotic horror," the *New York Times* reported, "with rubble everywhere, sirens wailing, and women shrieking as dozens of mutilated bodies were laid out on the pavement and in the lobby of Shifa Hospital so that family members could identify them. The dead included civilians, including several construction workers and at least two children in school uniforms. By afternoon, shops were shuttered, funerals began and mourning tents were visible on nearly every major street of this densely populated city."

Al Jazeera (12/28) reported, "There are two strands of suffering—ordinary Palestinians who are not targeted in these attacks, and those that are. It is a very grim picture for ordinary civilians. They are suffering from fuel outages and a shortage of supplies. About 750,000 people who depend on food distribution by aid agencies have not been able to receive supplies because the agencies cannot operate due to the siege. For those immediately affected by the more than 24-hour bombardment, the picture is even more grim. They need special medical attention and supplies that the hospitals, doctors and medical officials say they simply don't have."

There are reports that Egyptian troops have fired upon Palestinians trying to escape the Israeli bombardment by crossing the southern border of Gaza into Egypt. The U.S.-dependent regime of Hosni Mubarak has been colluding with Israel to keep a tight lid on Palestinians in Gaza.

And there are indications that this horrific situation may get even worse. Israel is reportedly considering a ground invasion of Gaza and authorized calling up as many as 6,500 reserves. There are also reports of Israeli drones and aircraft penetrating Lebanese airspace, perhaps in preparation for an attack. All this could even set off a larger war in the region, with even much greater suffering for the people in the region.

## **U.S. and Israel Blame the Victims to Justify Crimes Against Humanity**

Israeli and U.S. government officials, as well as the U.S. media, claim that Israel's attack was provoked by rocket attacks by the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas (that controls Gaza) into Israel. The Bush regime called Hamas "thugs," blaming Hamas for provoking Israel and demanding it end its rocket attacks—while pointedly refusing to call on Israel to stop its assault.

During the campaign, Barack Obama said (of the small-scale Hamas attacks on Israel), "If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I'm going to do everything in my power to stop that." He made clear throughout the campaign, including in what can only be called a bloodthirsty speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), that he supported these same policies. It could well be the case that Israel timed this attack in such a way (before Obama was inaugurated) as to allow Obama to maintain the appearance of being "above the fray" while in fact being fully on board and supportive of this attack. His silence in face of this massacre speaks loudly indeed.

*Blaming the Palestinians for the massacre in Gaza turns reality completely upside down. It is a pretext, and justification for mass murder.*

Israel's latest attack is the continuation of over 60 years of violent efforts to crush the Palestinian people and break any resistance to Israeli designs—going back to Israel's founding in 1948 as a settler colonial state and an arm of Western imperialism in the Middle East.

This step-by-step campaign of ethnic cleansing began with violently driving some 750,000 Palestinians from their lands during the 1947-48 Arab-Israeli war; the destruction of hundreds of conquered Palestinian villages; the military conquest of the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 war; the illegal colonialization of these "occupied territories" afterward, coupled with a steady assault on Palestinian economy and society. Israel claimed each assault was simply a response to Palestinian "terror," or refusal to make peace; while each Israeli assault furthered its strategic objectives of destroying Palestine.

Most of Gaza's 1.5 million Palestinians were forced from their homes in other parts of Palestine during the establishment of Israel. From 1967 until 2005, Israel militarily occupied Gaza. After ending the occupation, Israel kept complete control of this desert strip's land, sea and air borders. Israel sent armored bulldozers to destroy Gaza's fruit orchards, blockaded the fishing port, cut off supplies to factories and other businesses, and forbid most Gaza

residents the right to work elsewhere or even leave. Gaza today is a humanitarian crisis, its population living in prison-like conditions.

Hamas—which governs Gaza—is not about liberating Palestine as a secular state free of imperialist domination; it represents forces that would restructure the oppressive relations that enslave the people of Palestine within an Islamic theocratic framework.

Hamas has repeatedly proposed long-term truces with Israel and offered to negotiate a permanent truce in order to lift the siege of Gaza. A truce was finally agreed upon in June 2008, under which Hamas agreed to stop missile attacks, and Israel was supposed to end its blockade of Gaza. According to the pro-Israel *New York Times*, Hamas was "largely successful" in stopping the launches of the Qassam missiles, some of which are carried out by groups other than Hamas. But Israel refused to ease its blockade. Then, on November 4, Israel launched an attack that killed six Palestinians. The next day, it sealed all Gaza's borders, intensifying what had already been a horrific situation for the people.

Israel's siege has turned Gaza into the world's largest open-air concentration camp—its impoverished inhabitants are being starved and subject to indescribable suffering. 80% live below the poverty line. About 97% of factories and workshops cannot operate. Gaza's industrial zone is completely closed. Unemployment is about 50%. In 2006 Israel bombed Gaza's only power plant, making Gaza dependent on power supplies from Israel and Egypt. Fresh drinking water is often not available for days at a time. Irregular power means that sewage treatment plants cannot function and that raw sewage gets dumped into the Mediterranean. Medicines are in short supply, and Israeli bans on travel mean that Palestinians seeking advanced medical care that is not available in Gaza are left to die. (For more on the state of Gaza under siege, see the article from A World to Win News Service, "Gaza: Tottering on the Brink," in *Revolution* #150, available online at revcom.us)

In light of all this, the claims by Israel and the U.S. that the current bloody invasion is a "response" to small-scale and largely ineffective rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza are obscene. They are like the method the U.S. used to justify the genocide of Native Americans by settlers and the military: according to the official narrative, that story "began" with claims of the first Native American scalping of some settler family or soldier—and then anything goes to "respond" to what is declared an atrocity. What came before—what provoked the scalping, the genocidal lies and brutality visited upon the indigenous peoples, and America's actual agenda of forcible conquest and colonialization—all this is ignored and covered up.

Even by its own terms, Israel's longstanding policies of near-starvation, and the current massive reign of death from the air are violations of international law—serving as "collective punishment" against the entire population of Gaza. This collective punishment of all Gaza residents is contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention and is illegal under international law. Article 55 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, for example, states that "to the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate."

## **Mass Opposition Needed Here, and Now!**

Israel has served as U.S. imperialism's unsinkable aircraft carrier and regional enforcer in the Middle East for decades, and the U.S. has been Israel's staunchest backer, providing it with billions of dollars a year in aid. And, with the "war on terror"—in reality a war for empire—Israel's strategic relationship with the U.S. has become even more pivotal.

According to the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, in addition to supplying the F16 fighter jets and the missiles used in Israel's recent attack, the U.S. transferred more than \$200 million worth of spare parts for Israel's fleet of F16's between 2001-2006. "In July 2008, the United States gave Israel 186 million gallons of JP-8 aviation jet fuel. Last year, the United States signed a \$1.3 billion contract with Raytheon to transfer to Israel thousands of

TOW, Hellfire, and 'bunker buster' missiles." And according to U.S. government officials, the U.S. was fully informed ahead of time of Israeli plans and apparently gave them a green light.

In short, Israel's massacre and its ongoing crimes against the people of Gaza could not have happened without U.S. support—and people living in the U.S. have the responsibility to oppose the crimes of "our" government. Protests have erupted across the Middle East, and there have also been protests (with more planned) in the U.S. and Europe.

There needs to be massive, visible political opposition to the U.S.-sponsored assault on Gaza, here, and now. Silence and acquiescence to these crimes in any form is complicity. The world needs to see that within the U.S., there are people who are not going along with the crimes being sponsored by their government.