

Gaza Flotilla Attack: End Impunity for Israel Crimes!

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The far-right government of Benjamin Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman has demonstrated once more their ability to go even further than earlier Israeli governments in trampling international law and basic human decency under foot. Their murderous attack in international waters on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla is a new escalation of the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people. It must be met with a forceful escalation in the response from the solidarity movement and world public opinion.

Thanks to the Labour Party's presence in Netanyahu's extremist government, the whole Zionist political establishment is complicit in this fresh outrage. Labour defence minister Ehud Barak has declared that the government knowingly accepted the consequences of its act. Knowing, that is, that the world's governments would reflexively respond with mere words: some diplomatic communiqués, some tut-tutting at Israeli ambassadors. As usual. But this time it must be different. This time an outpouring of protest must force governments to move from words to deeds.

Already Barrack Obama and Ban Ki-mon have spoken of investigation. What is there of consequence to investigate? The Israeli government does not deny that it launched an illegal attack in international waters; it proclaims it. The Israeli army itself says *"that more than ten activists were killed.."* The Israeli military's own spokesperson claims no more than four Israeli injuries as extenuation for the slaughter. Al-Jazeera's correspondent on the lead boat reports that a white flag was raised, and yet the Israelis opened fire as they stormed it, without provocation. All this points to a deliberate resort, as in 2008-09, to "disproportionate force", certainly not a case of "self-defence".

The assault on the Freedom Flotilla was in fact a logical extension of the blockade of Gaza that the flotilla was protesting and challenging. Hardly a government on earth besides Israel's has a word to say in defence of this blockade, a blatant case of an illegal collective punishment of a civilian population. Yet hardly a government on earth lifts a finger to stop it. And the shamelessly cynical Israeli PR operation makes light of the blockade's effects, recommending a posh Gaza restaurant to journalists.

Surely that press statement's author remembers that posh restaurants remained in business in the Warsaw Ghetto as Jews were starving to death in the street outside! Not that there is mass starvation today in Gaza; arbitrary and capricious as the Israeli blockade is, it has so far been calibrated to avoid that degree of devastation. It has led only to widespread malnutrition; only to the traumatization of tens of thousands of children; only to mass unemployment that has left 80 per cent of the Strip's 1.5 million people dependent on relief; only to the helplessness of a population trying to live among the ruins left by the 2008-09 Israeli aggression, which they are denied any means of repairing; only to the deaths of 28 Palestinians waiting for permission to leave for urgently needed medical treatment.

The protests against the attack on the flotilla, coming on top of the blockade, are more than justified. The picket lines and demonstrations outside Israeli embassies and consulates should continue. But the protests must go further, targeting the governments in each of our countries that have made and are making Israeli outrages possible.

- In the United States, which under the Obama administration has remained Israel's main backer, protests must demand and secure an immediate halt to the \$3 billion in annual aid that funds the Israeli government's crimes.
- In the countries of the European Union, which only months ago decided on closer ties with Israel, protests must demand and secure immediate invocation of the human rights clause in the Israeli-EU free trade agreement, suspending the commercial privileges that give Israel an economic lifeline.
- In the Arab countries that maintain ties with Israel, the peoples' fury should frighten their governments into halting their complicity – and especially frighten the Egyptian government into ending its indispensable role in the criminal blockade of Gaza.
- In the Israeli state, where protests are also taking place, stepped-up resistance to the far-right government.
- Everywhere where the solidarity movement is not yet strong enough to compel governments to break in practice with the Israeli state, people should take matters into their own hands with massive boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaigns.

Finally, this new Israeli crime should lead to a new wave of discussion and reflection about the bankruptcy of the 'peace process' supposedly aimed at establishing a Palestinian mini-state in the 1967 territories alongside an intact Zionist Israel. Today the Israeli government is being 'punished' for its attack on the flotilla with yet another suspension of the anaemic process of indirect talks with the Palestinian Authority – a process that it obviously views as nothing more than an occasionally useful distraction from its work of establishing facts on the ground. Movements for peace and solidarity should now be spurred to more clarity and resolve about the need for an alternative, heading towards true peace, with full and unconditional Palestinian self-determination, the right of return for the 1948 refugees (who make up four-fifths of the Gaza Strip's population), the dismantling of the Zionist state, and a political solution in which the Palestinian and Israeli Jewish peoples can live together in full equality of rights.

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