Solidarity with the people of Gaza!

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For the third time in six years Israel is engaged in indiscriminate bombing of the Gaza Strip, this time backed by tanks, infantry and artillery. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have already killed over five hundred people, injured thousands, displaced and made homeless tens of thousands more.

The working class and anti-imperialist movement worldwide must unite, as it did in 2009, to condemn this savagery, to demand its immediate cessation and to demand that our rulers break their complicity with Israel, the key factor that enables the Zionist state to repeat its atrocities, time and again, with total impunity.

Gaza has a total area of just 365 square kilometers, within which, 1.82 million people are crammed, making it one of the most densely inhabited places on earth. In 2008-9, in 22 days of horror, the IDF killed between 1,200 and 1,400 Palestinians. Its bombs demolished tens of thousands of homes and 15 of Gaza's 27 hospitals. After this, a tight blockade did all it could to strangle life in the tiny territory. In March 2012, a further Israeli bombing onslaught saw 77 Gazans killed, mainly civilians.

As before, the western media, even those parts of it that cannot totally ignore the horrors being visited on Palestinian civilians, repeat the Israeli and American narrative of self-justification: Hamas is a ?terrorist organisation?, pledged to the destruction of Israel, which fires rockets into Israel. ?Hiding behind civilians?, it uses the population as a ?human shield?, forcing Israel?s army to kill unarmed and defenceless civilians. However, since the army sends text messages telling them to evacuate their homes just before the bomb hits, their deaths are Hamas?s responsibility, or maybe their own.

So brazen and cynical are these excuses that they refute themselves to millions of people worldwide. But millions of people do not provide the billions of dollars in aid and trade that sustain the racist settler state. A few billionaires in North America and western Europe, and a handful of imperialist states, prop it up and cover it with their high-tech weaponry. If these taps were tuned off, the state of Israel would collapse in months.

A bit more effective in confusing public opinion around the world is the accusation that Hamas is an avatar of ?Islamic terrorism?. In fact, Hamas is a movement with thousands of cadres, which provides aid and services to almost 2 million people, is inextricable from the population from which it is recruited and from which it draws its support, just like any political party in the West ? or, indeed, in Israel. In fact, its roots are far deeper since it is seen as an expression of the legitimate resistance to Israeli persecution.

Pretext

The sequence of events preceding Israel?s latest campaign, which have formed part of the pretext for it, began on 12 June with the kidnap and murder of three young settlers from the Gush Etzion settlement in the southern West Bank.

A three-week search, used by Israel to arrest hundreds of Palestinians, including many Palestinian former prisoners who had been released in the 2009 ceasefire agreement, led to the discovery of the bodies on 30 June.

The evidence, however, is that the Israeli authorities already knew of their deaths shortly after their disappearance, and tried to suppress this knowledge while the search was ongoing, the better to use it to suppress political opposition to the
The following day, as the funerals were taking place, Israel struck at 34 locations in the Gaza Strip, breaching a ceasefire that had held since the last major Israeli operation in 2012. Within the first nine days of this assault, the Israeli air force had by its own admission dropped 400 tonnes of explosives.

The day after that, on 2 July, the world awoke to the news of the revenge kidnapping and murder of 16-year-old Palestinian boy Mohammed Abu Khdeir, who had been beaten and set on fire.

A West Bank settler had struck 9 year old Sanabel Al-Tous with his car the previous day, leaving her lying on the ground with multiple fractures. This is normal life in the occupied West Bank, where settlers frequently target Palestinian children with their vehicles, and where there are 200 attacks by settlers on Palestinians every year.

On 6 July, in Haifa, an Israeli ran over Anwar Satel (55) from Jaffa and Zahi Abu Hamed (44) from Qalqilya in the West Bank. Numerous other assaults and kidnapping attempts were also reported across the country.

It would be a mistake, however, to regard what is happening now as being the result of some spontaneous "cycle of violence", or even an Israeli overreaction to the deaths of three settlers. The Netanyahu government seized on the deaths as a pretext for renewing the war on Hamas. Their actions have a political context and motive.

Hamas and Fatah

Hamas, acting from a position of weakness, had been moving towards an agreement with Mahmoud Abbas's collaborationist Palestinian Authority, PA, aimed at ending the conflict with Abbas's Fatah movement. This conflict began with Hamas's victory in the January 2006 PA parliamentary elections, and culminated in the division of the PA-ruled regions between Fatah and Hamas in June 2007, when the Gaza-based Hamas PA prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh, successfully prevented an attempted coup by forces loyal to the Ramallah-based Fatah PA president, Mahmoud Abbas. This defeat caused dismay in Washington as well as in Israel and led both to declare an implacable struggle against Hamas.

So the proposed unity agreement, signed by Haniyeh in Gaza on 23 April this year, calling for a Palestinian unity government within five weeks, to be followed by presidential and parliamentary elections within six months, was the signal for Israel to do all it could to disrupt it and for its masters in Washington to prepare to give Israel total cover for whatever it did.

Mustafa Barghouti of the Ramallah-based Palestinian National Initiative played a major role in negotiating this agreement, and it is probably no coincidence that the Israeli army ransacked his offices and stole computers from them on the fourth day of their search for the three missing settlers.

This agreement was, and remains, far more threatening to Israel than any of Hamas's rockets, which are made largely ineffective by Israel's Iron Dome system. The Hamas-Fatah conflict, after all, had its roots in Israel's determination to ensure that Hamas could not become a legitimate and recognised participant in any future peace negotiations, no matter how cosmetic and fruitless the negotiations themselves were.

As the major Palestinian party that had stood openly for armed resistance to Israel during the Second Intifada of 2000 to 2005, and that had pioneered the use of "suicide bombings" against Israeli military and civilian targets, Hamas could not be allowed the "reward" of a place at the negotiating table, no matter how strong its popular support; Israel always reserves to itself the right to decide who shall represent the Palestinians and the USA always supports its choice.

The Hamas-led PA government that took office in March 2006 was therefore deprived of international recognition from all the major Western states and their Arab allies, subjected to sanctions, including the stripping of the foreign aid contributions that constituted most of its budget, and was forced to watch helplessly as Israeli forces arrested a third of...
its parliament.

Since that time, economic sanctions have been followed by a murderous siege, that in the infamous words of former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon?s legal adviser, Dov Weissglass, would ?put the Palestinians on a diet?.

Hamas?s political and diplomatic isolation was intended to send a message to the Palestinians and to the Arab world: only a Palestinian leadership that had accepted that its role was to repress the legitimate national aspirations of its own people would be considered a ?partner for peace?; for ?peace? read ?surrender?. In fact, Israel has no interest in any sort of peace settlement, or not one that any Palestinian government could ever agree to.

What it wants is to continue its occupation and ongoing theft of Palestinian land. Meanwhile, the US and EU (amiably supported by Putin?s Russia) every few years provide cover for this with the charade of another peace initiative.

The two state illusion

In August 2004, the same Dov Weissglass described his master?s strategy of military disengagement from Gaza as the ?formaldehyde that's necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians?.

Against the advocates of the increasingly discredited ?two state solution?, still peddled by the official labour movement in the West, we argue that recent events and countless others, point to the inescapable conclusion that Israel will never allow any Palestinian state enjoying any degree of genuine sovereignty or political or economic viability to be formed in any part of the historic homeland of the Palestinian people.

Israel?s own character as a state built on colonisation, a project as yet uncompleted, according to the Zionist ideology effectively excludes this outcome. Israel continually adds egregious new demands every time a new peace deal is rumoured.

In March, Netanyahu addressed Abbas with the demand that "the Palestinians must abandon the fantasy of flooding Israel with refugees? and be prepared to ?recognise Israel as a Jewish state". Thus, the Palestinians are offered ?peace? on the basis of abandoning the right of return for the refugees driven off their land by repeated waves of Zionist settlers. And what would recognition of a ?Jewish state? mean for Israel?s non-Jewish citizens?

Any contiguous sovereign Palestinian state with its own armed forces would close off the expansion of Jewish settlements, a process that today provides Israel with a safety valve for its own internal class, ethnic and religious contradictions. It would also undermine the Zionist ideology that is used to justify not only the continuing theft of land in the 1967 Occupied Territories, but the very foundation of the state itself, with its mass expulsion and dispossession of between 750,000 and 900,000 Palestinians between 1947 and 1950.

Far from being a realistic short-term goal that might provide the Palestinians with a breathing space, ?two states? is simply a mirage towards which they have been led by Abbas and Fatah whilst Israel carried on with their national extinction. But Israel?s actions have inflamed the hatred of millions of people worldwide who increasingly recognise it as a racist state, waging a terror war for the destruction the Palestinian people.

That state must be utterly destroyed and replaced with a socialist Palestine; a land for Arabic and Hebrew speakers, for Muslims, Jews and Christians to live and work in. It must be a secular state with no privileges for, or discrimination against, any part of its population.

Such a solution will be part of a liberation of the entire Middle East from outside imperialist powers and from the corrupt monarchies and military dictatorships that infest it today. And the only social force that can lead this struggle is the working class of the region: the goal it needs to aim for is the creation of workers? states, and their unification in a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.