

Americans Should Act to End Violence Against Gaza

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Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip was predictable, if not preventable. Israel's crimes against the Palestinians simply could not take place on such a massive scale were it not for US support. The American people, therefore, have a responsibility to act and pressure their government to end its financial, military, and diplomatic support for Israeli violations of international law — a necessary first step towards any viable and sustainable peace.

Israel's bombardment of Gaza has long been in the planning, and the purpose is to terrorize the Arab population in the hopes that they will revolt against the Hamas leadership and to punish them further for electing them. The siege Gaza has remained under since Israel withdrew its military from the Strip in 2006 has had the same intended purpose.

A comparable policy was implemented by the US against Iraq. The sanctions were intended to further the goal of regime change. The means by which this goal was pursued was to punish the Iraqi people, to deny them food and medical supplies. By United Nations estimates, more than a million Iraqis died as a result. More than half a million of those victims were children.

In the end, although then US ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright publicly said that the "price" of half a million dead children was "worth it", the sanctions served only to strengthen the control of Saddam Hussein's regime over the people by making them totally dependent upon the regime for their very survival.

When it became clear that the genocidal sanctions were not sustainable due to overwhelming global opposition, the military option came to be seen as the only option for implementing regime change.

The chokehold Israel has maintained upon the population of Gaza has not had its desired effect. And Israel has realized that its siege of Gaza might also not be sustainable, given the ever-increasing global outrage. Israel's use of force against Gaza was only a matter of time, and the cease-fire was understood from the beginning not to be an effort at a sustained, long-term peace, but to provide political cover for the planned military operation.

Prior to the Egyptian-brokered cease-fire, Israel had announced its intention to wage full-scale military operations against Gaza. The cease-fire did not end those plans, but were a means to that end. It was clear from the beginning that Israel intended to do everything in its power to ensure that the cease-fire was unsustainable in order to provoke Hamas into acting in a way that would provide Israel with a perceived *casus belli* to punish Gaza violently for continuing to have the leadership of elected Hamas officials.

Israel violated the cease-fire from the start. According to the UN, Israeli soldiers on numerous occasions fired upon Gaza farmers trying to work their land near the border. An 82 year old man was injured in one such incident on June 27. In another shooting incident, a Palestinian woman was wounded.

The Israeli Defense Force openly announced that it would fire upon any Palestinian entering into what it declared was a "special security zone" within Gaza; essentially a declaration of the intention to continually violate the cease-fire with impunity by firing at farmers and other Palestinians attempting to reach their own land.

Israel also threatened a full-scale invasion if the cease-fire was violated by the Palestinians.

At the same time, Israel stepped up its operations against in the West Bank. On June 24, for example, Israel killed a member of Islamic Jihad, an act for which the group retaliated by launching several rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza.

Hamas in fact responded by appealing to Islamic Jihad and other groups to desist and to observe the cease-fire. "We expect everyone to respect the agreement so that the Palestinian people achieve what they look for, an end to this suffering and breaking the siege," Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh told reporters.

Although the Israeli leadership knew these attacks were carried out by other groups, who were not a party to the cease-fire, it declared that it would hold Hamas responsible for all such attacks.

At the same time, Israel closed off the border, allowing only minimal humanitarian supplies through. Hamas has declared since the beginning that this was itself a violation of the cease-fire.

As I wrote in June, Israel's actions seemed "designed to bring about a hostile response which would give Israel a casus belli to invade Gaza.

"In the event of any such invasion, Israel will claim that it had exhausted diplomacy. Israel has made sure that the cease-fire is unsustainable. But it is beneficial as it would be used as political cover for future military action.

"Coupled with Israel's agreement to a prisoner exchange with Hezbollah, the New York Times calls this 'Israel's Diplomatic Offensive'. The exchange is Israel's effort to wrap-up its 2006 war with Hezbollah before engaging in another war. The 'Diplomatic Offensive' will more likely than not be followed in coming months by a military offensive."

The only thing that surprised me about Israel's bombardment of Gaza was how long it took, on account of Hamas abiding by the cease-fire and not giving Israel the excuse it was looking for to terrorize Gaza residents in an extreme form of collective punishment.

None of this violence could occur without the massive support Israel receives from the US. And the US propaganda machine has been in high gear since the bombs started falling attempting to portray Israel as the victim. Although sporadic rocket attacks had occurred during the cease-fire, no Israelis were killed. Two Israelis have been killed since the end of the cease-fire in rocket attacks launched in retaliation for the Israeli bombardment.

The Palestinian death toll, on the other hand, is rapidly climbing towards 400.

Yet the New York Times and other major corporate news outlets have virtually wiped the Israeli violation of the cease-fire last month from history. On November 4, an Israeli airstrike in the Gaza Strip killed five Palestinians and wounded several others. The thinly veiled pretext for the attack was that Hamas was digging a tunnel which would be used to cross the border and capture Israeli soldiers.

But whether this tunnel actually existed or not hasn't been made clear. And even if it was, such tunnels are used by the people of Gaza to smuggle in much needed supplies, like food, fuel, medicine, and other essentials Israel has denied them. In the end, this pretext bears a striking resemblance to the Bush doctrine of loosely-defined prevention (not preemption), a doctrine that has no legitimacy under international law.

But this Israeli violation of the cease-fire is being wiped from memory. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared that Hamas was solely responsible for violating the cease-fire and bringing about its end. The New York Times in current reports either finds that violation unfit for print or references it in couched language, such as by saying simply that the truce "began to unravel in early November", as though this unraveling were some strange phenomenon with no known causal factors.

One must wonder whether the language in such reports would be so vague had Hamas been the party to initiate hostilities in violation of the truce agreement.

US-made bombs are being used by Israel to kill Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The American people have a responsibility, therefore, in stepping up and taking action to help ensure an end to the current violence. US financial, military, and diplomatic support for Israel's violations of international law and terrorizing of the Palestinian people will continue unless there is massive public pressure brought to bear upon both the outgoing Bush administration and the incoming Obama administration.

Bringing an end to US support for criminal violence in the region would be an important first step towards a viable and sustainable peace.

To send a message to your representatives in Congress and the Bush White House to take action to end the violence against the people of Gaza, you may use this convenient form at Just Foreign Policy. From there, you may also click a link to send your message to President-elect Obama.

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