

# The Twin Tragedies of the Gaza War

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## Statement of the U.S. Marxist-Humanists

Israel's war on Gaza killed 1300 Palestinians, over 400 of them children. Its military has committed war crimes on a vast scale. These included indiscriminate shelling and air strikes against a civilian population of 1.4 million people with nowhere to flee. The Israeli armed forces deliberately targeted schools, hospitals, mosques, and United Nations agencies. Israeli forces also used white phosphorus shells in civilian areas, another war crime. In what amounts to a macabre battlefield "experiment," they additionally used a horrific new weapon, the Dense Inert Metal Explosive (DIME), which slices up people within a small radius. DIME is likely to be banned under the Geneva Convention.

The deafening silence of the U.S. was heard throughout the Arab and Muslim world. At first Barack Obama used the excuse that he was not yet president to remain silent. But he has remained equally silent on the atrocities in Gaza since taking office, as has his government. The Western European powers have spoken up a bit more, but taken no action. All of these powers are nervous about the effects of this war on the oil lifeline for global capital. The fact that these powers seek simultaneously to support Israel -- and the Arab oil kingdoms like Saudi Arabia -- constitutes one of the deepest contradictions in the global political-economic order. This was evident at the Davos economic summit, when Turkey lashed out at the fact that Israel was allowed to state its case for war without time for rebuttal.

Tragically, this criminal war has led to an outburst of the rankest militarism and jingoism inside Israel itself, choking off the peace movement and crushing the left. Although the war was launched under a government that included the Labor Party, which hoped opportunistically to gain votes in the February elections, in fact Labor saw its vote share decline once again. Rightist parties have triumphed, including the neo-fascist Yisrael Beiteinu, whose platform calls for the expulsion of Arab citizens of Israel who do not sign a loyalty oath to the Zionist state. Those parts of the Israeli population most supportive of peace and the end of the occupation have emerged from this process weakened and demoralized. This sense of demoralization has been heightened by the fact that even leftist forces like the Meretz party opportunistically supported this war.

The stated aim of the war was to stop the harassing but ineffectual rocket attacks launched by the Hamas movement into Israel from Gaza. The unstated aim -- but one often leaked to the press by Israeli officials -- was to crush Hamas or at least, in true imperialist fashion, to "teach them a lesson." Instead, and this is the second tragedy of this war, Hamas and other fundamentalist, rejectionist currents have emerged from this war with stronger support than before. Within the Palestinian national liberation movement, such forces remain ascendant, with the more secular Palestinian Authority left on the sidelines and falsely but effectively accused by Hamas of collaboration with Israel. Although Hamas has modified some of its earlier policies, whether on gender or on Israel's right to exist, it remains a basically reactionary movement, with an agenda far removed from that of any genuinely leftist currents.

Although the recent war has undermined them, more secular and leftist voices still probably constitute the majority within the Palestinian national liberation movement. Among them is Marwan Barghouti, a resistance leader still sitting inside an Israeli prison, or Sari Nusseibeh, a leading opponent of the occupation who has also issued strong criticisms of narrow forms of Palestinian nationalism.

The war has also given succor to the reactionary regime in Tehran, allowing it to engage in a new orgy of repression, this time of feminist and peace activists protesting Israel's war on Gaza but who do not toe the government's line. The regime has even claimed that these critics are agents of Israel!

We support the present worldwide efforts – both inside and outside Israel -- to protest Israel's war, its continuing occupation of Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories, and its failure to negotiate seriously the establishment of a Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders. We also support the efforts to isolate the Israeli regime and its military machine, as seen in the recent decision of Hampshire College to divest from six firms that fuel that machine, a decision shaped by years of student activism on that campus. (Hampshire was the first U.S. campus to also divest from firms doing business with South Africa.) At the same time, however, we oppose those forms of opposition to Israel that drift into anti-Semitism.

In addition, we support the Palestinian national liberation movement, especially those sectors that embrace socialist, feminist, and secular politics. We are therefore critical of the reactionary politics of Hamas and similar movements, while recognizing that the authoritarianism and corruption of the Palestinian Authority has opened the way for Hamas. We support those forces in the Palestinian territories, in Israel, and in the region that put forward socialist, democratic, and feminist politics.

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