

The moral bankruptcy of US policy in Palestine

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Among the many memories I have of growing up in Tehran are of my elementary school days in Naji's class. On one occasion, she assigned a poem by the celebrated 13th century Iranian poet and mystic, Saadi Shirazi. Our class was asked to write our reflections on Saadi's poem from his book, the Gulistan (flower land). Little did I know then of the relevance of his poem to our world today; he wrote (in translation):

*"Human beings are members of a whole,
In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,
Other members uneasy will remain.
If you have no sympathy for human pain,
The name of human you cannot retain."*

Saadi's poem, which speaks to our common humanity, graces the entrance to the United Nations building in New York. His words are more poignant than ever as the world bears witness to the inhumanity of the "war" being waged in the Gaza Strip by the US-backed Israeli regime. Israel's slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza has exposed the glaring need for moral leadership from Washington and a change in policy toward Palestine and Israel.

It will be impossible to return to the status quo that existed before Hamas commandos broke free from their Israeli-constructed prison on 7 October.

Returning to "normal" won't work, because "normal" was the problem. For over 55 years, the United States has invested monetarily, militarily and morally in a morally bankrupt Israeli regime. Its unwavering support for it has created disorder and chaos in the Middle East.

The Palestinian fight for survival and quest for freedom and self-determination can no longer be suppressed and ignored; accords between Persian Gulf Arab dictatorships and apartheid Israel cannot go forward and Israel cannot continue to be given free rein to brutalize Palestinians and annex all of Palestine. The political landscape Washington has envisioned for the region, with Israel as its anchor, has been shattered by the devastation Israel has created in Gaza under the false flag of security. Joe Biden, who promised if elected president to "restore the soul of America," showed no shame when he resumed "business as usual" with the anti-Palestinian, supremacist far-right regime that Benjamin Netanyahu had assembled to become prime minister in December 2022. In doing so, Biden helped mainstream Netanyahu's regime and signaled America's continued support regardless of its racist ideology.

With his embrace of Prime Minister Netanyahu in Tel Aviv on 18 October, Biden has given his, and thereby America's, imprimatur to Israel to carpet bomb, conquer and carve up Gaza. The administration further implicated the United States in genocide by its veto on December 8 of a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza after more than

two months of destruction. This is the second time the United States has been the only opposing vote on such a resolution.

Ironically, in an October 20 letter to the US House of Representatives requesting funds for the war in Ukraine, the White House stated that the United States must send an unmistakable message that in the 21st century, "a dictator cannot conquer or carve up his neighbors' territory." In the 21st century, Russia may not, but Israel is allowed.

While the administration urges Israeli leaders to minimize civilian harm, it has provided them with thousands of weapons, including 15,000 bombs – over 5,000 with 2,000 pound warheads – 57,000 artillery shells and 2,000-pound bunker bombs to drop on the people of Gaza.

Israel has dropped more than 22,000 US-supplied bombs on Gaza in the first month and a half of the "war." Additionally, with Palestinian deaths at more than 20,000 and a reported 49,500 injured, on December 9, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, invoking emergency powers, approved the transfer of nearly 14,000 high explosive tank rounds to Israel at an estimated cost of \$106.5 million. In addition to bypassing Congress to supply the munitions, the administration has neglected continual assessments of whether Israel has been committing war crimes in Gaza.

Israel learned long ago that it could carry out its destructive policies, as it is doing today, with little fuss or repercussions from Washington. Its future immunity from punitive action was firmly established on June 8, 1967, during the Six-Day War.

On that date, off the Sinai coast, Israeli fighter jets and torpedo boats ferociously attacked the USS Liberty, killing 34 American servicemen and

wounding 171. Although the vessel was in international waters and flying a highly visible American flag, it was deliberately assaulted. Two Navy fighters who were on their way to help were ordered by then-Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to stand down, because in his words "President Johnson is not going to go to war or embarrass an American ally over a few sailors."

In his 1979 book, *Assault on the Liberty: The True Story of the Israeli Attack on an American Intelligence Ship*, Lt. Commander James M. Ennis, Jr., who survived the attack, stated that the cover-up and efforts to protect Israel began immediately. He recounted that a total news blackout was quickly imposed and surviving crew members were threatened with court martial, prison or worse if they ever repeated what happened. Interviewed in 1983, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Chief of Naval Operations (1967-70) and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1970-74), stated, "I've never seen a President – I don't care who he is – stand up to them [Israelis]. It just boggles the mind.... If the American people understood what a grip those people [Israelis] have on our government, they would rise up in arms."

After 36 years of foot-dragging, in 2003, an Independent Commission of Inquiry, chaired by Admiral Moorer, concluded that Israel had committed an act of war against the United States, and that the initial official US Navy Court of Inquiry was a "cover-up without precedent in American naval history."

George Ball, Undersecretary of State and US Ambassador to the United Nations in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, astutely understood the consequences of Washington's failure to act, when he later wrote:

"The ultimate lesson of the Liberty

attack had far more import for Israel than the US, [because] Israel's leaders concluded that...if America's leaders did not have the courage to punish Israel for the murder of American citizens,...then their American friends would let them get away with almost anything."

And America has.

George Ball's words are especially significant and relevant today. The question for US officials is what price they are willing to pay, domestically and internationally, to continue guaranteeing Israel's exemption from sanctions and international law.

Israel has shifted its brutal bombing attack into southern Gaza. Their goal appears to be to kill as many Palestinians as they can, forcing the rest into Northern Sinai.

A leaked document from the Israeli Intelligence Ministry explicitly states that the Israeli regime's desired outcome of the "war" is the transfer of all Palestinians from Gaza. It also points out the necessity of enlisting the United States in the process.

While Palestinians are struggling to stay alive under Israeli bombing, Biden administration officials, have been working to engineer the future of Gaza, demonstrating as it has in the past America's insular approach to the region.

Biden, Blinken and Brett McGurk, a senior official in Biden's Security Council, and the man chosen to lead the planning process for post-governance in Gaza, continue in the colonial mindset of Sykes-Picot – the imperious belief that external powers, in this case, the United States not Britain and France, have the right to decide the future for Palestinians.

Ironically, McGurk served as senior Director for Iraq during the Bush administration. As lead negotiator from 2005 to 2009, he played a key role in restructuring Iraq; policies

which eventually led to the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and to the chaos that has followed.

Since mid-October, McGurk and his team have been meeting with Palestinian Authority, Israeli and Arab representatives to plan for an "acceptable" Gaza, without Hamas. They envision a "revitalized" or "reformed" Palestinian Authority – opaque terms signifying a US-Israeli controlled PA – to ultimately take over Gaza.

The Biden administration has again raised the specter of the two-state solution in its "planning" for Gaza. For 56 years, Washington and Tel Aviv have used the mythical two-state solution to ensure that the Palestinians never realize their rights.

Biden has supported Israel's objective of eliminating Hamas; seen by Washington as an obstacle to their misguided two-state solution strategy. Administration officials have assumed that Hamas will be defeated, knowing full well that it cannot be destroyed without razing all of Gaza, which Washington seems willing to see happen.

Creating a Palestinian state made up of non-contiguous Bantustans – which was the core of past US-Israeli "peace" proposals – is not the solution. There is only one resolution to the historical injustices that Palestinians have endured for over 75 years. It is the complete dismantling of the Israeli apartheid regime and creation of a real democracy, with full equal rights and privileges for all. Israel is a dangerous and destabilizing force in the Middle East. It was formed in war and has lived and survived by perpetual warfare since its "declaration of independence" in 1948.

Militarism and war are embedded in and have shaped Israel's political culture. Without a constitution to establish fixed borders, it has been able to continue its ruthless "settler" colonial project in Occupied Palestine, Syrian Golan Heights, and in southern Lebanon from 1982, until expelled by Lebanon's Hezbollah in 2000.

The United States has had no qualms in financing and shielding a militaristic Israel. American dollars are the sinew of Israel's occupation and wars. And in Gaza today, without US support, Israel would be fighting a war of survival on two or three fronts.

Gaza has concentrated our attention, like it or not, on who we are as a people. In service to Israel, the United States has mortgaged the country's moral and ethical values. Its politicians have instead become dependent on florid and empty human rights rhetoric.

The Biden administration has forfeited America's political and moral standing on the world stage when it threw its full weight behind Israel's genocidal war against the Palestinian people. It is doubtful that America's international image and stature can be restored until we come to understand and act upon the words of the poet written centuries ago – all humans are members of a whole, of one soul and the pain of one is the pain of all.

This is a lightly revised version of an article that first appeared in the Palestine Chronicle.

