

US rearms Israel as its war crimes mount in Gaza

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Washington's central responsibility for the escalating war crimes being committed by Israel against the people of Gaza was exposed yesterday when the Pentagon said it had, over the past week, resupplied the Israeli military with mortar rounds, grenades and other weapons from a US arms stockpile.

The announcement underlined the hypocrisy of the Obama administration's expressions of "concern" about the killing of Palestinian civilians, including hundreds of children, being conducted by the Zionist regime.

In reality, the United States, which arms and finances Israel to the tune of about \$3 billion a year, in military aid alone, is directly culpable for the blatant violations of international humanitarian law being committed by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).

The resupply of munitions came from a roughly \$1 billion cache of arms, known as War Reserves Stock Allies-Israel, which is intended for use by America in the event of a Middle East war but can also be transferred to Israel.

There is no doubt that the weapons supplied by the US government are being used to slaughter the residents of Gaza. The Pentagon's announcement came amid two new atrocities yesterday—the shelling of a UN-run school housing thousands of refugees, and the bombardment of a busy marketplace.

At least 20 Palestinians were killed and about 90 injured early on Wednesday, including UN workers, when Jabalia Elementary Girls School in Gaza City, which was sheltering 3,300 families, was hit by three artillery shells.

It was the second attack, and the sixth strike, on a UN school since Israel's military offensive in Gaza began on July 8. Last week, 15 people died and about 200 were wounded when another UN school, in Beit

Hanoun, was hit as the playground was filled with families awaiting evacuation.

At the Jabalia school, Fairfax Media reported: "Bloodied pillows and blankets—shredded—were scattered over the school's courtyard as shocked and traumatised families displaced from their homes and living in overcrowded conditions, waited to hear the fate of those injured."

Amna Zantit, cradling her eight-month-old son in her arms, as the boom of shells echoed in the distance and drones and F16s prowled overhead, told the reporter: "We came here because we thought it was safe ... For 1½ hours there was shelling all around the school ... it was the most terrifying night, death came very close to us."

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon accused the Israeli military of ignoring repeated communications on the location of the school. "I want to make it clear that the exact location of this elementary school has been communicated to the Israeli military authorities 17 times, as recently as last night, just a few hours before this attack," he said.

But the Israeli government knows that, with the backing of the US, it operates with impunity. By deliberately targeting UN schools, it is sending a chilling message: no one in Gaza is safe from "Operation Protective Edge." More than 200,000 Gazans are trapped in UN refuges because Israel warned them to leave entire neighbourhoods that it planned to bomb.

In another indication of Israeli intent, three air strikes killed 15 people and injured 150 in a market area on the outskirts of Shujaiyah. As smoke billowed from the initial air strike, witnesses said emergency services and civilians rushed to help the victims, only to be hit by a further two air strikes minutes later.

“The first shell hit, and people immediately started evacuating the wounded,” a resident, Abu Maysarah, told the AFP news agency. “They [the Israelis] saw them evacuating the wounded, and they struck them again.”

Cynically, the attack was carried out during a four-hour “humanitarian lull” announced by the IDF. It later said it had warned that “the humanitarian window will not apply to the areas in which IDF soldiers are currently operating,” including Shujaiyah, which was heavily bombed last week, killing scores of people.

The latest two atrocities occurred during a second night of saturation bombing that followed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s warning of a “protracted” military campaign.

Altogether, more than 108 Palestinians were killed yesterday, bringing the overall toll to at least 1,326 dead and 7,340 wounded. Human rights groups say 80 percent of the casualties are civilian and 31 percent are children. The Israeli military said it had targeted 75 sites since midnight, taking the total to 4,100. Among the overnight targets were five mosques.

Chris Gunness, spokesman for the UN Relief and Works Agency—which was originally established to assist Palestinian refugees displaced by the Israel military in 1948—said Gaza was facing a humanitarian crisis, with supplies of clean water and electricity at critically low levels, after the destruction of Gaza’s only power station and other essential civilian infrastructure.

Israeli claims, echoed by the US and Western governments and media, that its onslaught seeks to protect its citizens from rocket and tunnel attacks by Hamas, the governing party in Gaza, were further exposed on Tuesday. Economy Minister Naftali Bennett publicly insisted that the assault would continue until Hamas was overthrown.

Simply destroying Hamas’ tunnel network was not enough, Bennett said. “Hit Hamas without mercy. Day and night. On weekdays and holidays. Without respite and without rest. Until they are defeated.”

Popular revulsion is growing around the world, forcing some governments to issue diplomatic protests. Chile and Peru recalled their ambassadors to Israel. Chile’s foreign ministry said Israel’s military operations did not “respect fundamental norms of international humanitarian law.”

The Obama administration, however, while claiming to be “extremely concerned” about the killing of people in UN designated shelters, sought to justify the massacres by backing Israel in accusing Hamas of hiding weapons in UN facilities.

Marie Harf, the US State Department’s deputy spokeswoman, said she would not issue “blanket statements” that UN facilities should never be targeted.

Harf also described as “complete crap,” Israeli media reports that President Obama had asked Netanyahu for an “unconditional” cease-fire. The only cease-fires advocated by Obama and John Kerry, his secretary of state, have been calculated to legitimise Israel’s military escalation by rejecting, out of hand, Hamas calls for the lifting of Israel’s near-decade-old blockade of Gaza.

After restocking Israel’s arsenal, the Pentagon said further Israeli requests for US-manufactured ammunition were being processed. No details were given of the quantities or costs of ammunition already supplied or requested.

In addition, the US Senate Appropriations Committee added another \$225 million for Israel’s Iron Dome anti-missile system to a spending bill intended mainly to stop Central American children crossing the US-Mexico border.

To underscore the bipartisan support for Israel’s US-backed war, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution asserting “Israel’s right to defend itself against Hamas’ unrelenting and indiscriminate rocket assault into Israel and Israel’s right to destroy Hamas’ elaborate tunnel system into Israel’s territory.”

This gives carte blanche to the Netanyahu government’s actual war aims: to pulverise Gaza, terrorise its population and overturn its government.



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