

## Anti-War Groups Unite Against Israel's Assault on Gaza

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Leading organizations and activists in the anti-war movement have issued unified condemnation of the Israeli assault on Gaza that has left more than 750 killed, including numerous children, and thousands seriously injured. While U.S. politicians have nearly unanimously endorsed Israel's assault, abstaining from a successful UN resolution demanding a ceasefire, anti-war groups have taken swift action to pressure politicians to endorse a ceasefire.

Immediate responders to the Gaza crisis, ANSWER Coalition held numerous emergency protests across the U.S. December 28 - 31. Thousands marched in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Washington, DC, Ocala, Tampa, and Orlando, Florida; Chicago, Louisville, Kentucky; New Orleans, Boston, Ann Arbor and Dearborn, MI; Minneapolis, Albuquerque, NM; New York City, Cincinnati, Toledo, and Youngstown, OH; Portland, Sioux Falls, SD; Salt Lake City, and Seattle.

United for Peace and Justice also immediately urged its members to take action to stop Israel's attack on Gaza. Specifically, the organization is urging its members to participate in the activities of member group, The U.S. Campaign to End the Israel Occupation. A contingent from World Can't Wait and Veterans for Peace went so far as to bring their protest against the Gaza assault to President-elect Obama's vacation home in Honolulu.

Code Pink has also taken a strong stance against Israel's onslaught against the Palestinians issuing a petition titled "[Stop the Killing NOW!](#)" The International Action Center claims to have received 500,000 signers to its "[Stop the massacre in Gaza!](#)" petition. Other progressive organizations have joined in the effort: The Progressive secretary asked supporters to endorse its letter, "[Stop Palestinian massacres](#)"; Amnesty International urged constituents to sign on to their letter, "[Urge Secretary Rice to help end the civilian bloodshed!](#)" Credo issued the letter, "[We need a ceasefire now in Gaza](#)," and J Street issued the petition, "[Ceasefire Now!](#)"

Long one of the most vocal opponents of Israeli militarism amongst anti-war groups, the ANSWER Coalition will hold a national march, "Let Gaza Live: Stop the U.S./Israeli War Against the Palestinian People," near the White House in Washington, DC on Saturday, January 10. Voters for Peace, Code Pink, and prominent activists Cynthia McKinney, Howard Zinn, Cindy Sheehan have endorsed the march.

In addition to putting pressure on U.S. leaders to demand Israel end its assault, the protest marks an important instance of unity among anti-war groups which bodes well for the broader movement's future. Further, the protest and the cause appear to present a key opportunity for the movement to expand its alliances. Joining anti-war groups in endorsing the January 10 march are key Muslim and Palestinian organizations: Muslim American Society Freedom, Free Palestine Alliance, American Muslim Task Force, National Council of Arab Americans, Al-Awda - International Palestine Right to Return Coalition, CAIR (Council on American Islamic Relations), American Muslims for Palestine, American Muslim Alliance, U.S. Palestinian Community Network (USPCN).

### Backlash & Fortitude

A definite consequence of anti-war organizations' unanimity against Israel's Gaza assault will inevitably lead to a loss of some supporters. I have witnessed firsthand the immediate backlash of the anti-war movement's stance against Israel's invasion of Gaza. One-time supporters of organizations such as Code Pink have expressed outrage over support for the Palestinians and have begun asking to be removed from email lists. Other activists have begun to report of falling out with friends. I have personally had heated debates with family members.

Even key activists are likely to oppose this new phase of the movement. When I attempted to organize a South Florida protest against the Gaza assault I received criticism from a fellow organizer. A key activist who has organized actions for Code Pink in the area took issue with my praise of the anti-war movement for its unified "condemnation of Israel's murderous assault on Gaza." In direct response to this statement she wrote: "As peace activists I think it is counter productive to spend energy on laying blame and 'condemning' one side—in this situation there is plenty of blame on all sides and yet plenty of room to look for understanding as well." Ironically, the peace activist made this statement on precisely the same day the Associated Press reported that Israel had killed at least 30 Palestinians when it attacked a United Nation's school, acting as a shelter, twice in a few hours.

At this critical juncture the anti-war movement must not waiver. Our stand against the disproportionate and unjustified assault on the Palestinian people is grounded in the basic moral principle of universality - that we can no more freely destroy innocent people than our enemies - and the realization that Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory is as unjust as U.S. occupation of Iraq. The anti-war movement must maintain its ethical high ground by condemning all unjustifiable assaults on and killing of civilians.

In the past, many peace groups and individuals have bemoaned the plurality of issues taken up at both local and national anti-war protests. Many have specifically taken issue with ANSWER's inclusion of the Palestinian struggle in protests principally aimed at ending war in Iraq. Both ANSWER's militancy and its prominent treatment of Palestinian freedom have made some in other movements uncomfortable. A thawing of the ice dividing our movement and its most capable organizations, however, may be occurring as all groups unite against Israel's Bush-backed assault on Gaza.

President-elect Barack Obama's complicit silence on Israel's destruction of the Palestinian people in Gaza offers a poignant teaching moment for our movement. The anti-war movement was co-opted and used to elect Barack Obama. Our movement was co-opted because it failed to more broadly define its objective to include a demand for a serious shift in U.S. foreign policy away from militarism and imperialism. Organizations such as MoveOn.org utilized anti-war energies to promote a monolithic vision of Ending War in Iraq, which its candidate, Obama, pledged to do. As a result, while continuing to phase out war in Iraq Obama has stated support for the Afghanistan campaign. Through air strikes this campaign has killed 47 civilians attending a wedding, including one bride in July, 90 civilians including 60 children in August, and 40 civilians and wounding 28 others who were attending a wedding party in November. Obama also supports air strikes in sovereign nations such as Pakistan without regard for international law. Such assaults have killed more than 200 people in 30 air strikes in Pakistan last year.

## Gaza

On January 3, the U.S. blocked the U.N Security Council from issuing a statement calling for a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. The U.S. opposed such a statement on grounds that Hamas would not stop attacking Israel. Meanwhile, Israel's assault including its recent invasion of Gaza has left more than half-a-thousand Palestinians dead. 28-year-old woman, Lubna Karam described her family's experience huddled in their Gaza City home as missiles rained down around them. The AP quotes her saying: "We keep hearing the sounds of airplanes and we don't know if we'll live until tomorrow or not." The AP also reported that "In the West Bank, Israeli troops shot and killed a 20-year-old Palestinian who was demonstrating against the Gaza offensive" (Associated Press, "Israeli Forces Bisect Gaza, Surround Biggest City," January 4 2009).

On January 8, the International Red Cross (ICRC) complained that Israel had impeded rescue workers and ambulances from reaching areas affected by their assault. In a rare public statement the ICRC reported that rescuers "found four small children next to their dead mothers in one of the houses. They were too weak to stand up on their own. One man was also found alive, too weak to stand up" (AP, "UN halts Gaza aid after Israel attack on workers").

The Los Angeles Times reports that people in Gaza feel great anguish over the international community's failure to halt Israel's attack. "The world knows we are running out of everything, and no one moves a finger," said Ahmed Dalloul, who was cooking over a trash fire on the balcony of his Gaza City apartment. "Let them feel what we feel. Let the whole silent, unfair world suffer as we suffer" ("Gaza City Residents Hunker Down, January 5, 2009).

Meanwhile, elite intellectuals such as David Makovsky, senior fellow and director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy contend that given Hamas' firing of rockets into Israel that the nation had no choice but to attack and then invade Gaza. In a January 5 appearance on the Diane Rhem show Makovsky drowned out the host's attempts to call into question Israel's pre-invasion imposition of a humanitarian crisis upon the people of Gaza. When the host brought up the question of proportionality and the fate of hundreds of innocent civilians Makovsky chastised Rhem asking what she would do if rockets were raining down over her head. The same week Sen. Bill Nelson (Florida) released a statement on Israel's assault on Gaza which asserted Israel's right to defend itself and, according to a Washington aid, literally did not mention one word about the Palestinian death toll and humanitarian crisis. According to elites within Israel and the U.S., Hamas is solely responsible for the current human rights disaster due to their commitment to violence.

While this argument goes virtually unchallenged in the mainstream media the anti-war movement must unify as a

singular voice in the wilderness denouncing such intellectually impoverished justifications for the collective punishment of the Palestinian people. The most basic understanding of ethics highlights the hypocrisy of those who decry Hamas' rocket attacks and their having taken the lives of 10 Israelis while defending Israel's killing of at least 100 civilians, injuring of thousands, and destruction of Palestinian homes and community. In Practical Ethics philosopher Peter Singer writes that the fundamental characteristic of ethics is that it "takes a universal point of view" (11). A variation of John Rawls theory, Singer writes that upon accepting the notion that ethical judgments must be made blind to one's sex, age, gender, race, nationality or overall status, he accepts "that my own interests cannot, simply because they are my interests, count more than the interests of anyone else. Thus my very natural concern that my own interests be looked after must, when I think ethically, be extended to the interests of others" (12). In short, ethical reasoning requires one to operate from the standpoint of the "impartial spectator or ideal observer...." (11). The question then is, are we prepared to accept the justification of the killing of more than a hundred innocent lives, including numerous children, in response to rocket attacks which have taken less than a dozen lives in two years?

In his work, *The Intellectual* Steve Fuller discusses Ted Honderich's controversial work *After the Terror* which called into question the double standard of condemning Palestinian terrorist attacks while legitimizing similar acts carried out by Israeli. According to Fuller, we can not continue to sanction certain kinds of terrorism as legitimate, while systematically rejected another variety of terrorism if we wish to be intellectually honest (Fuller 12-13). This is precisely the point made by Noam Chomsky in *Failed States* (2006). He writes that Hamas is indeed "radical, extremist, and violent" not to mention a "serious threat to peace and a just political settlement." However, he argues that that U.S. and Israeli policy toward Palestinians is equally destructive (261).

In reality, the Israel-Palestinian conflict is not unlike the situation in Iraq: it's all about empire. In both instances human rights and concern over human security takes a back seat to militaristic strategic posturing. To realize this, the anti-war movement must understand the role Israel plays in bolstering U.S. militarism. In *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (2003), Noam Chomsky writes that in 1948 the Joint Chiefs of Staff assessed that Israel's military capabilities offered "the US means 'to gain strategic advantage in the Middle East' to offset Britain's declining role" (163). Ten years later a coup of the British-backed government in Iraq left the U.S. scrambling to ensure Middle Eastern dominance to ensure its control over oil. "A memorandum for the National Security Council advised that 'if we choose to combat radical Arab nationalism and to hold Persian Gulf oil by force if necessary, a logical corollary would be to support Israel as the only strong pro-West power left in the Near East,' along with the peripheral powers, Turkey and Iran.'" (164).

The time has come for our movement to officially announce what has been an often unspoken agenda of bringing an end to U.S. militarism/imperialism. It is not enough to drawdown U.S. forces in Iraq. Those of us committed to peace and justice must demand a withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, an end to U.S. subversion of democracy around the world including Latin America, and a renunciation of the militaristic hubris which presumes the right to fire missiles where ever and whenever we please. As we move further into this new phase of the contemporary anti-war movement we should draw on the anti-imperialist legacies left to us by American icons such as Mark Twain and Albert Einstein.

Well known for his wit and skeptical attitude toward religion, Mark Twain was an outspoken opponent of war and U.S. imperialism. Twain was the vice president of the American Anti-Imperialist League, founded in 1898, from 1901 until his death in 1910. The group sought to rally opposition to the annexation of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines in particular. According to Jim Zwick, author of *Confront Imperialism: Essays on Mark Twain and the Anti-Imperialist League*, Twain and his fellow anti-imperialists actively protested the U.S. military's use of torture such as water boarding more than one hundred years before the reign of the Bush administration.

For his part, Einstein participated in the [League against Imperialism](#) which criticized U.S. imperialist policy in Latin America among others. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King also emphatically denounced U.S. militarism. He wrote: "This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, or injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

Our movement has no borders. Our battle is not merely against the war in Iraq or even the war in Afghanistan. As

detailed in Voters for Peace's letter to Barack Obama, signed by many in the movement including myself, "The anti-war movement believes the time is now to end the emphasis on militarism in U.S. relations with other nations and to set a goal of ending war in the 21st century." This is our goal, ending war in this century. In order to achieve this objective the letter urges that the U.S. 1) make a complete withdrawal from Iraq and 2) Afghanistan, 3) stop attacks inside Pakistan, 4) dramatically reduce the size of the military budget, 5) close the more than 800 U.S. military bases around the world, 6) help create a viable Palestinian state, 7) close Guantanamo Bay and other "black sites," 8) respect the Posse Comitatus Act prohibiting the use of military domestically, and bring the National Guard home, 9) unilaterally reduce our nuclear arsenal, and 10) "stop using the threat of military force in its negotiations with other countries."

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