

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY RAMZY BAROUD

01.02.2024

Europe Exposed: Is the EU a Direct Partner in the Israeli Genocide in Gaza?



Image by Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona.

Europe stayed silent when Israel began pounding the besieged Gaza Strip with the kind of ferocity that could only lead to a genocide. In fact, Europe remained silent when the word ‘genocide’ quickly replaced the earlier reference to the ‘Israel-Hamas war’, starting on October 7.

Those familiar with Europe’s political discourse and action regarding Israel and Palestine, must already realize that most European governments have always been on the side of Israel.

However, if this is entirely true, what can we make of the latest comments by the Foreign Policy Chief of the European Union, Josep Borrell, when he seemed to lash out at Israel on January 23, accusing it of “seeding hate for generations”?

During a joint press conference in Brussels with Egypt's Foreign Minister, Sameh Shoukry and EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Oliver Varhelyi, Borrell said that "Israel cannot have the veto right to the self-determination of the Palestinian people."

But is Borrell being genuine?

Borrell's frustration with Tel Aviv stems from the realization that Israel does not take Europe seriously. He is right. Tel Aviv never truly saw Brussels as a strong and relevant political actor in comparison to Washington, or even London.

Recent months have further exposed this unequal relationship.

Soon after the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation, European leaders – starting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and French President Emmanuel Macron – flocked to Tel Aviv to, in the words of Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, reiterate that "Israel has every right to defend itself".

But European support exceeded that of language or political gestures. It also arrived in the form of military and intelligence support.

"As of Nov. 2, the German government has approved the export of close to 303 million euros' (\$323 million) worth of defense equipment to Israel," Reuters reported, comparing the large sum to the 32 million euros' worth of defense exports that were approved by Berlin in all of 2022. This is just one example.

While the Americans did not shy away from assuming the role of partner in the Gaza war, the EU's position seemed dishonest and, at best, morally inconsistent. For example, an enthusiastic Macron wanted to establish an anti-ISIS-like military coalition to target Hamas, though leaders of Spain and Belgium jointly called for a permanent ceasefire during a press conference at the Egyptian Rafah border on November 24.

Borrell initially approached the genocidal war from an entirely pro-Israeli perspective. "I am not a lawyer," he said when asked in an interview last November whether Israel is committing war crimes in Gaza. A minute later, he asserted that Hamas' Al-Aqsa Flood Operation was undoubtedly a war crime.

This is not a simple case of Western double-standards. Israel sees Europe as a lackey, though Europe, collectively, carries significant economic weight, which, only in the case of Israel, it refuses to translate into political leverage. Until Brussels learns to resolve this dichotomy, it will continue with this kind of bizarre foreign policy.

One reason why Israel sees Europe as an inferior political actor compared to Washington, is because the Europeans have linked much of their foreign policy agenda to the US which, in turn, is motivated by Tel Aviv's agenda and interests.

This is how it works. When Macron joined Biden in unconditionally supporting Israel in the beginning of the war, Netanyahu remarked that he was “highly appreciative” of the French position. But when, on November 11, Macron dared criticize Israel’s killing of women and babies in Gaza, Netanyahu immediately lashed out, accusing Macron of making “a serious mistake factually and morally”.

Slowly, Europe began developing a somewhat stronger position on Gaza, though certainly not strong enough to demand an end to the war or threaten consequences if the war does not end. On January 22, the EU held a ministerial meeting, inviting Israel’s Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz and Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki to attend.

The conference was a feeble European attempt to signal the EU’s readiness to assert itself as a relevant political actor in the Middle East. The truth, however, is that the EU was motivated by other factors, including a greenlight from the Biden Administration, which, as of late has grown more frustrated with Netanyahu for refusing to engage in Washington’s discourse about future visions and the two-state solution.

Also, the regional instability, whether in the Red Sea or in Lebanon, itself a result of the war, continues to pose a direct risk to Europe’s economic and strategic interests in the region.

Europe’s relationship with the Middle East is, in some ways, different to that of Washington. While the US is always ready to reinvent its geopolitical priorities, Europe is indefinitely bound by the rules of physical proximity to the Middle East – its vital geography, its resources, and its people.

Europe knows this. Borrell, who devised the maxim that “Europe is a garden”, “the rest of the world is a jungle”, and the “jungle could invade the garden”, also understands that the instability of the Middle East could endanger his precious ‘garden’, even when the war is over.

This is why Borrell was keen on the EU’s ministerial meeting. But instead of engaging in serious talks, the meeting further highlighted Europe’s irrelevance, at least in the eyes of Israel.

Katz had come to the meeting to present plans for an artificial island off the coast of Gaza – likely to displace Palestinians from the Strip, “concepts that had nothing to do with the peace talks,” Borrell said.

Other top EU “diplomats said the videos were part of (old) ideas presented by Katz in a previous role,” and that they “surprised” everyone in the room.

But the EU diplomats should not be surprised, after all their governments are the ones who have empowered Israel and disempowered Palestinians over the years. Even now many of them continue to champion Israel's mass killings in Gaza as Tel Aviv's right to self defense.

If Borrell truly wishes to develop a political backbone, he should fully back international law, and advocate for the use of the EU's massive economic leverage to put pressure on Israel to end its war and military occupation of Palestine.

Failing to do so, gives great credibility to the claim that Brussels, just like Washington, is a direct partner in the Israeli war on the Palestinian people.

Ramzy Baroud is a journalist and the Editor of The Palestine Chronicle. He is the author of five books. His latest is "These Chains Will Be Broken: Palestinian Stories of Struggle and Defiance in Israeli Prisons" (Clarity Press, Atlanta). Dr. Baroud is a Non-resident Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA), Istanbul Zaim University (IZU). His website is www.ramzybaroud.net

CounterPunch 31.01.2024