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## ***From the Blockade of Leningrad to the Siege of Gaza: The Colonialist Mentality***

Yakov M. Rabkin, a Leningrad-born professor at the University of Montreal, evokes in this article the continuity of the colonialist mentality of the Western powers. Having consented to Israel's colonization of occupied Palestine, these countries with recent colonial experience are actively supporting this war of "native pacification" in Gaza.



"The hour of courage. Siege of Leningrad" by an unknown artist. Via [expresstorussia.com](http://expresstorussia.com)

On January 27, 80 years ago, people in the streets hugged each other and cried tears of joy. They were celebrating the end of a nearly 900-day siege that Soviet forces had just lifted

after fierce battles. Exactly one year later, the Red Army liberated Auschwitz. Even today, as you stroll along the main avenue of St. Petersburg (the original name given to Leningrad), Nevsky Prospect, you will notice a blue sign painted on a wall during the siege: "Citizens! This side of the street is more dangerous during shelling."The blockade was carried out by land and naval forces from Germany, Finland, Italy, Spain and Norway. The city was besieged three and a half months after the start of the war, on June 22, 1941, by an even larger coalition of Europe united under the swastika. Led by Germany, soldiers from twelve countries fought: Romania, Italy, Finland, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Denmark and Norway. Two million of them went to war against the Soviet Union as volunteers.



Screenshot. Civilians evacuate Leningrad, January 22, 1942. National World War II Museum Blog: Soviet soldiers escort a family to the evacuation Leningrad, 1942

The war against the USSR was very different from the one Germany had waged in Western Europe. It was a war of annihilation (Vernichtungskrieg). The Third Reich wanted a living space in the East (Lebensraum im Osten), but it didn't need the people who lived there. In fact, the war against the Soviet Union was a colonial war. Considered subhuman (Untermenschen), the Soviets were destined to be liquidated, starved, or reduced to slavery. Their lands were to be colonized by the "Aryans." To express his point of view in racial terms familiar to Europeans, Hitler referred to the Soviet population as "Asians."



Millions of Soviet civilians – Slavs, Jews, Gypsies (Roma) and others – were systematically executed. The scale surpassed the genocide that Germany had committed in southwestern Africa (present-day Namibia) between 1904 and 1908, when it just as systematically massacred the local Nama and Herero tribes. Of course, Germany was no exception: the other European colonial powers were not far behind.

The Nazi invaders summed up their goals clearly: *After the defeat of Soviet Russia, it makes no sense for this great urban center to continue to exist [...]. [...] Once the city is surrounded, demands for surrender negotiations will be rejected, because we cannot and should not solve the problem of resettling and feeding the population. In this war for our very existence, we can have no interest in retaining even a part of this large urban population.*

The Wehrmacht formulated its objectives quite clearly: *"... b) first we will blockade Leningrad (hermetically) and destroy the city, if possible with artillery and aircraft... d) The remains of the 'fortress garrison' will remain there during the winter. In spring we will enter the city... we will take everything that is left alive into Russia or we will take prisoners, we will raze Leningrad and hand over the area north of the Neva to Finland."*

"If St. Petersburg ceases to exist as an important city, the Neva would be the best frontier on the Karelian isthmus... Leningrad should be liquidated as a major city."

The last railway line linking the city to the rest of the Soviet Union was cut on August 30, 1941, and a week later the last road was blocked. The city was surrounded, food and fuel supplies ran out, and a bitter winter began. What little the Soviet government managed to

get to Leningrad was strictly rationed. At one point, the daily ration was reduced to 125 grams of bread made from both sawdust and flour. Those who did not even receive this ration were forced to eat cats, dogs and wallpaper paste, and there were some cases of cannibalism. Corpses filled the streets with people dying of hunger, disease, cold and bombings.

Leningrad, a city of 3.4 million people, lost more than a third of its population. It was the largest loss of life in a modern city. The former imperial capital, famous for its magnificent palaces, elegant gardens, and breathtaking views, was methodically bombed and bombed. More than 10,000 buildings were destroyed or damaged. This operation was part of the Soviet Union's demodernization campaign to bring it out of the modern era. Leningrad was to be razed to the ground precisely because it was an important center of science and engineering, the cradle of writers and ballet dancers, of famous universities and art museums. None of this was to survive in the Nazi plans.

Sadly, neither the sieges nor the colonial wars ended in 1945. Britain, France, and Holland fought brutal wars in their colonies in an attempt to "pacify the natives." Racism was official in the United States, another ally of the USSR in the fight against Nazism. Twelve years after the war, it took the U.S. 101st Airborne Division to desegregate a school in Little Rock, Arkansas. The values of tolerance that the West articulates today are recent and fragile. Explicit racism is no longer acceptable, but implicit racism is still very much present.

Human lives do not have the same value, neither in our media nor in our foreign policy. The deaths of three U.S. soldiers killed in Jordan a few days ago attract more media attention than hundreds of Palestinians killed every day. Harsh sanctions are imposed on Iran for its civilian nuclear enrichment program, while none are imposed on Israel for its military nuclear arsenal. Western powers continue to provide arms and political support to Israel as it imposes a siege on Gaza, where civilians are not only bombed and bombed, but deliberately starved and left to die by disease.

Yoav Galant, Israel's defense minister, was very clear when he said, "I have ordered the total siege of the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed."

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has found it plausible that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Unsurprisingly, Washington, which continues to supply ammunition to Israel, deemed the accusations of genocide against Israel "baseless." London, another arms supplier to Israel, considers them "completely unjustified." The

Netherlands supplies Israel with parts for the F-35 jets used against Gaza. After authorizing the export to Israel of some ten million euros for the manufacture of "bombs, torpedoes, rockets, missiles, other explosive devices and payloads," Paris asked the ICJ to verify whether Israel had genocidal intentions. It turns out that these are the same countries with a long history of racism and colonialism that are active accomplices in the violence that caused the deaths of nearly 27,000 Palestinians, including 18,000 women and children.



Screenshot. Siege of Gaza. Source: Arab Center Washington DC.

Germany, which committed two racist genocides in the 20th century, intervened at the ICJ as a third party on Israel's behalf. It "vehemently" rejects the accusation against Israel and multiplies its arms exports to that country tenfold. In addition, those same Western countries have just suspended funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. This decision was taken at the request of Israel, which has long campaigned for the abolition of this agency, which is essential to the very survival of the Palestinians. Based on accusations by its intelligence services, Israel accused some employees of the agency, which has more than 13,000 employees in Gaza, of collusion with Hamas. This blow comes at a time when Palestinians are facing a humanitarian catastrophe bordering on genocide.

Having consented to Israel's colonization of occupied Palestine, these countries with recent colonial experience are actively supporting this war of "native pacification" in Gaza.

The commemoration of the siege of Leningrad against the backdrop of the Gaza tragedy shows that the accusation that the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire levelled against the European in 1950 is still relevant today: "What does not forgive Hitler is not the crime

itself, the *crime against man*, it is not the humiliation of man himself, but the crime against the Bianco man, is the humiliation of the Bianco man, and the application in Europe of colonialist procedures which hitherto concerned only the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa." [[Speech on Colonialism](#), 1950/1955]

**Yakov M. Rabkin, 1-27-2024**

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