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BY M. REZA BEHNAM

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Democracy vs. Hypocrisy: US in Palestine



Photo by Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona

For generations to come, 7 October will be memorialized on Palestinian calendars as the first day of their liberation.

For Palestinians living in Gaza, blockaded by Israel for 16 years, every day began and ended in a large open-air prison. For them, the act of resistance that began on that day was the point of no return—there would be no more indignities, humiliation, occupation and siege.

For generations of Americans, President Joe Biden's bear-hug of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv on 18 October 2023, will be chronicled as the day the United States gave its blessing to Israel's genocide in Gaza.

For Israelis, who trusted that their fortress built on stolen Palestinian land was secure, 7 October was a rude awakening, a day that forced them to confront an invented country built on fantasies and falsehoods.

Until the Hamas-led attack, Israel had silenced or distorted Palestinian history.

It cleverly employed mythology and religious theology to justify its existence. Most Americans and Israelis have, consequently, come to know Israel through the false prism of manufactured doctrines of chosenness, biblical land entitlement; flowering in the desert fables; land without a people; and, of course, the oft-repeated canard, “the only democracy in the Middle East.”

It is these and other ingrained ahistorical narratives, relentless propaganda and hypocrisy that gave birth to 7 October. After more than a century of settler-colonial violence and state terror, Palestinians have refused to throw up their hands, wave the white flag of surrender, and say to foreign plunderers take the rest of my land, farm, olive orchard and home, and make me forever a subjugated captive in my own land.

Palestinians have refused to surrender their four thousand year-old recorded history. (Nur Masalha, *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History*. Zed Books Ltd, 2018; and Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Gaza: A History*. Oxford University Press, 2014)

The Zionist goal from 1948 to the present has been to crush the deeply-rooted natural bond that Palestinians have to the land. To entice Jewish colonizers to their settler-colonial state, they manufactured an ersatz mythologized attachment to Palestine.

Despite the fact that Israel has one of the largest most advanced militaries in the world, is armed with nuclear weapons, is protected by the United States, most of Europe and has subsumed effete regional Arab oligarchs into alliances, Tel Aviv has portrayed Palestinians as a threat.

That Israel has promulgated and reinforced the perception of Palestinians as evil and a threat, has primed its Jewish citizens to comfortably carry out and support genocide in Gaza. A January 2024 Tel Aviv University poll revealed that Ninety-four percent of Israelis think that their military is using either an appropriate amount or not enough force in Gaza.

Like their Israeli partners, the United States continues to act as if there is no price to pay for deception. The Biden administration has tied itself in knots trying to find ways to save face and prevent its regional proxy from becoming an irredeemable pariah in the world.

Washington has drawn on obfuscation and hypocrisy to shore up its domestic and global image. While blocking international calls for a permanent cease fire, the United States has cynically asked Tel Aviv to kill fewer civilians. While claiming concern about the

humanitarian disaster, it has prolonged the war by providing Israel with the bombs, artillery shells, drone/satellite surveillance to target and kill Palestinians. While supporting Israel's inhumane blockade, it dropped inconsequential amounts of food from the air. While saying it seeks no wider regional war, it attacks Ansarallah (known in the U.S. as Houthis) in Yemen, and supports Israeli attacks in Lebanon, Syria and Iran.

After doing business with Netanyahu for over 16 years, Washington knows how ruthless he can be. In an apparent effort to arrest the erosion of Biden's worsening image at home and abroad, the administration has shown signs of a willingness to distance itself from the prime minister.

Senate Majority leader, Chuck Schumer (D-NY), unveiled what appears to be the administration's nascent strategy. During his 14 March speech on the floor of the Senate, Schumer, the highest ranking elected Jewish official in the United States, criticized the leadership of Netanyahu and his far-right coalition and called for new Israeli elections. Schumer's speech was laden with references to Netanyahu as an obstacle to peace and a threat to Israel's security.

Placing the blame for the evils of the war solely onto Netanyahu seems to be the strategy taking shape in Washington. The administration appears to believe that with Netanyahu gone, Israel will be exonerated and the country will rise anew out of the ashes of Gaza. And with more "amenable" leaders in place, Israel and the United States can return to hegemonic business as usual.

Biden may be pulling back from the defiant prime minister, but he remains, wedded to saving Israel. For the United States to abandon its military fortress in the Middle East has been virtually unthinkable. During a recent MSNBC interview (10 March 2024), Biden said "I'm never going to leave Israel." Noticeably absent was the same steadfastness for Netanyahu.

The United States has invested heavily in Israel's existence and security for over seven decades. In exchange for that investment, Tel Aviv has been expected to give America's interests overriding importance.

In spite of Biden's rhetoric about Israel's indiscriminate bombing causing massive civilian casualties, U.S. arms arrive there on a near daily basis. Since 7 October, the White House has covertly approved over 100 smaller weapons bundles that fall under the \$25 million threshold for notifying Congress about the transfers. No limits have been placed on how U.S. weapons are to be used. Biden has also deployed a so-called "tiger team" of experts within the Pentagon to facilitate the weapons transfers.

Current aid comes on top of decades of military and defense support for Israel, which has made its military one of the most technologically advanced in the world. Israel is currently using U.S. F-35 Joint Strike fighter jets (50 purchased with U.S. funds) in its airstrikes on Gaza.

According to a March 2023 report by the Congressional Research Service, since the Second World War, the United States has provided Israel \$158 billion in military assistance and missile defense. American foreign military financing currently represents approximately 16 percent of Israel's defense budget.

As of 19 March, Israel has killed and wounded over 105,000 (31,819 killed; 73,934 wounded), buried thousands under tons of rubble and ravaged an already devastated small strip of land the size of Delaware. According to the a non-governmental organization, Humanity and Inclusion, advocacy director, Anne Hery, Israel has been dropping an estimated 500 bombs a day on Gaza.

Since it withdrew in 2005, Israel has launched five military assaults on Gaza. The remnants of war—munitions that failed to explode or that were programmed to explode later, known as unexploded ordnance—continue to pose a lethal and lingering danger. In addition to the contamination caused by daily shelling, unknown numbers of lethal unexploded ordnance are scattered throughout the ruins and territory of Gaza.

An official of the U.N. Environment Program said recently that it could take between three and 12 years just to clear the debris and explosive remnants from Gaza, some 23 million tons.

Biden, in March 2024, finally decided to assert some authority. He announced that unless Israel produced a “credible and executable” plan to protect the 1.5 million Palestinians in Rafah, a land invasion of that besieged city would be his “red line.”

The president's statement cynically reflects a willingness to accept a ground invasion if Israel can create the impression of protecting civilians.

Meanwhile, Israel has not stopped bombing Rafah. The Israeli daily, Haaretz, reported on 13 March, for example, that at least one United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) staff member was killed and 22 wounded after Israel hit a food distribution center in Rafah.

Israel's war on Gaza has cast light on the toxic relationship between Washington and Tel Aviv; a 56-year long “special relationship” that has prepared the way for the normalization of war crimes and genocide.

In light of his Gaza policy, Biden's vision of a democratic future, which he outlined in the State of the Union on 7 March 2024, and at other events, is seriously flawed.

In his March speech, for example, Biden claimed that life has taught him to “embrace freedom and democracy.” When Netanyahu and his extremist coalition took office in December 2022, Biden sent the prime minister a congratulatory note, and when asked if he had concerns about the new government, he said he would judge it based on “policies, not personalities.”

During the 2020 presidential campaign, candidate Biden claimed that he wanted to restore the “soul of the nation,” to defend democracy from extremism. He has expressed the same in his 2024 campaign. While denouncing extremism at home, he has worked with extremists and neo-Nazis in Tel Aviv.

The administration is having a difficult time explaining how the nation’s soul can be resurrected by providing weapons used to slaughter a trapped civilian population; by suspending funding to UNRWA, and by supporting an Israeli regime that is using starvation as a bargaining chip and tool of war.

Biden’s policies, like those of his predecessors, are steeped in Cold War imperialism and militarism, in a particular devotion to Israel and illiteracy regarding the Middle East.

The administration’s “bear-hug” strategy toward Israel has exposed the hypocrisy and callousness that has been the hallmark of American policy in the region. The U.S.-backed Israeli war on Gaza has left a whole new generation of children orphaned and traumatized. Between 24,000 to 25,000 Palestinian children have lost parents and extended family members.

Washington, however, shows no sign of abandoning Israel. After so much suffering, the United States, in its hubris, continues to act as if Israel can be integrated into the region, that Arab rulers will pay no price for normalizing relations, and that it has the right to determine the future for the Palestinian people.

What is taking place in Gaza and Occupied Palestine is the lamentable failure of U.S. foreign policy that has, over the years, encouraged hypocrisy, bias, distortion, disinformation, misinformation and lies in behalf of Israel. It will have profound regional and global implications for years to come.

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