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African Union Must Intervene – Asylum Seekers Enlisted to Kill Palestinians in Gaza

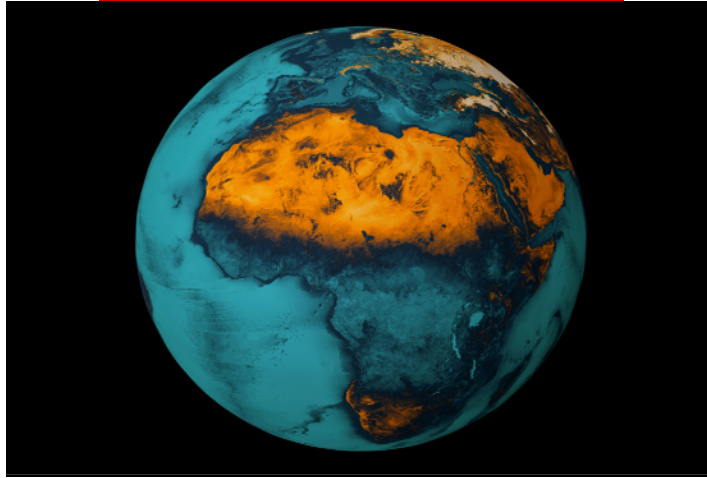


Image by Mohamed Nohassi.

If one is to visit the Mahal website, a pop-up reminder, reading ‘Apply online’, keeps appearing. It is as if the repeated beep is a reminder of the state of emergency, if not outright panic, in the Israeli military.

Mahal is one of several recruiting agencies that aim to entice mercenaries from all around the world to fight Israel’s dirty wars, in Gaza and on all fronts.

As soon as the Israeli war on Gaza was launched last October, rumors began circulating of a low turn-out among Israeli reserves. This was coupled with an unprecedented political crisis in Israel, where the military was insistent on the recruiting of Ultra-Orthodox Jews which, until recently, has been a taboo topic among Israeli politicians.

Even when the draft orders went out for thousands of Haredim in July, only a small fraction of the summoned men answered the call, according to Israeli media.

The crisis is yet to be resolved, and most likely will not be resolved as the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu continues to expand the war fronts. To understand the degree of Israel's military crisis, compare the hyped statements of Israeli officials at the start of the war, where they promised a total victory, to the latest statements.

Last July, for example, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that "the army needs 10,000 more soldiers immediately." The number 10,000 is particularly interesting when we consider an Israeli army revelation that at least 10,000 of its soldiers have been seriously or moderately wounded since the start of the war.

The number is likely to be much higher, based on media leaks and information provided by Israeli hospitals. Additionally, thousands of Israeli soldiers have been declared 'disabled' due to psychological trauma suffered during the war, according to Israel's defense ministry.

Thus the state of urgency in an army, which according to Israeli Major General Reserve Yitzhak Brik, has become "small and weak, with no surplus of forces".

So, where does Israel go from here? Instead of ending its war-turned-genocide in Gaza, Israel has decided to turn to the very people who have been told that they are the most unwanted elements of Israeli society: African refugee asylum seekers.

The Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported on September 15 that Israeli recruiters have been quietly working to enlist as many African asylum seekers as possible in the Israeli military.

To entice them, the recruiters are promising permanent residencies though, according to the paper, not a single African soldier is yet to receive the coveted documents.

"Defense officials (...) say the project is conducted in an organized manner, with the guidance of defense establishment legal advisers," the report said. The paper also confirmed that "the ethical considerations of recruiting asylum seekers have not been addressed".

By 'ethical considerations', both Haaretz and the cited defense officials are not referring to the killing of unarmed Palestinian civilians in Gaza at the hands of poor, desperate refugees from Africa, but to the rights of the asylum seekers themselves.

Israel is known to mistreat not only African asylum seekers but its own dark-skinned population as well.

This racism has manifested itself in the clearest ways against African asylum seekers, whose number is estimated to be around 30,000.

Thousands of Africans have already been deported from the country, not to be repatriated to their original homes but to other African countries, where human rights violations are widespread.

In 2018, Amnesty International said that the Israeli government is forcefully returning the refugees “to persecution or indefinite detention”. The group chastised Israel’s “ill-thought-out policies” and “reckless abandonment of responsibility”.

Expectedly, Israel’s mistreatment of its asylum seekers and refugees received muted responses from western governments and rights groups that often react strongly to reports of mass abuse or unlawful deportations of refugees anywhere else in the world.

And, as is often the case, failure to hold Israel accountable to international and humanitarian laws emboldens the latter to continue with its “ill-thought-out policies”.

Imagine the cruelty of using desperate refugees, who have no political or historical affiliations with the war in Palestine, to kill other refugees in displacement camps across Gaza.

In doing so, Israel has crossed every moral, ethical and legal boundary that governs state and army behavior during times of war. This, however, cannot mean that the international community is incapable of deterring these Israeli practices, through concrete actions and direct sanctions.

Many countries throughout Africa have already raised their voice in solidarity with Gaza and the Palestinian people. The bond between Africa and Palestine should now be strengthened by Israel’s utter disregard, not only for the lives of the Palestinians but for that of Africans as well.

The African Union should take the leadership on this issue, dissuading its citizens from joining the Israeli military under any circumstances, and pursuing the matter of recruiting African asylum seekers at the highest legal institutions.

While the moral stance taken by many African countries regarding the Israeli genocide in Gaza deserves the utmost respect, it is also incumbent on African governments to take an equally strong stance so that Israel ceases its practice of using Africans to kill and die in Gaza.

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