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19.10.2024

Israel's War on the World



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Each new week brings new calamities for people in the countries neighboring Israel, as its leaders try to bomb their way to the promised land of an ever-expanding Greater Israel.

In Gaza, Israel appears to be launching its “Generals’ Plan” to drive the most devastated and traumatized 2.2 million people in the world into the southern half of their open-air prison.

Under this plan, Israel would hand the northern half over to greedy developers and settlers who, after decades of U.S. encouragement, have become a dominant force in Israeli politics and society. The redoubled slaughter of those who cannot move or refuse to move south has already begun.

In Lebanon, millions are fleeing for their lives and thousands are being blown to pieces in a repeat of the first phase of the genocide in Gaza. For Israel’s leaders, every person killed or forced to flee and every demolished building in a neighboring country opens the way for future Israeli settlements. The people of Iran, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia ask themselves which of them will be next.

Israel is not only attacking its neighbors. It is at war with the entire world. Israel is especially threatened when the governments of the world come together at the United Nations and in international courts to try to enforce the rule of international law, under which Israel is legally bound by the same rules that all countries have signed up to in the UN Charter and the Geneva Conventions.

In July, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Israel's occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 1967 is illegal, and that it must withdraw its military forces and settlers from all those territories. In September, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution giving Israel one year to complete that withdrawal. If, as expected, Israel fails to comply, the UN Security Council or the General Assembly may take stronger measures, such as an international arms embargo, economic sanctions or even the use of force.

Now, amid the escalating violence of Israel's latest bombing and invasion of Lebanon, Israel is attacking the UNIFIL UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon, whose thankless job is to monitor and mitigate the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.

On October 10 and 11, Israeli forces fired on three UNIFIL positions in Lebanon. At least five peacekeepers were injured. UNIFIL also accused Israeli soldiers of deliberately firing at and disabling the monitoring cameras at its headquarters, before two Israeli tanks later drove through and destroyed its gates. On October 15th, an Israeli tank fired at a UNIFIL watchtower in what it described as "direct and apparently deliberate fire on a UNIFIL position." Deliberately targeting UN missions is a war crime.

This is far from the first time the soldiers of UNIFIL have come under attack by Israel. Since UNIFIL took up its positions in southern Lebanon in 1978, Israel has killed blue-helmeted UN peacekeepers from Ireland, Norway, Nepal, France, Finland, Austria and China.

The South Lebanon Army, Israel's Christian militia proxy in Lebanon from 1984 to 2000, killed many more, and other Palestinian and Lebanese groups have also killed peacekeepers. Three hundred and thirty-seven UN peacekeepers from all over the world have given their lives trying to keep the peace in southern Lebanon, which is sovereign Lebanese territory and should not be subject to repeated invasions by Israel in the first place. UNIFIL has the worst death toll of any of the 52 peacekeeping missions conducted by the UN around the world since 1948.

Fifty countries currently contribute to the 10,000-strong UNIFIL peacekeeping mission, anchored by battalions from France, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Nepal and Spain. All those governments have strongly and unanimously condemned Israel's latest attacks,

and insisted that “such actions must stop immediately and should be adequately investigated.”

Israel’s assault on UN agencies is not confined to attacking its peacekeepers in Lebanon. The even more vulnerable, unarmed, civilian agency, UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency), is under even more vicious assault by Israel in Gaza. In the past year alone, Israel has killed a horrifying number of UNRWA workers, about 230, as it has bombed and fired at UNRWA schools, warehouses, aid convoys and UN personnel.

UNRWA was created in 1949 by the UN General Assembly to provide relief to some 700,000 Palestinian refugees after the 1948 “Nakba,” or catastrophe. The Zionist militias that later became the Israeli army violently expelled over 700,000 Palestinians from their homes and homeland, ignoring the UN partition plan and seizing by force much of the land the UN plan had allocated to form a Palestinian state.

When the UN recognized all that Zionist-occupied territory as the new state of Israel in 1949, Israel’s most aggressive and racist leaders concluded that they could get away with making and remaking their own borders by force, and that the world would not lift a finger to stop them. Emboldened by its growing military and diplomatic alliance with the United States, Israel has only expanded its territorial ambitions.

Netanyahu now brazenly stands before the whole world and displays maps of a Greater Israel that includes all the land it illegally occupies, while Israelis openly talk of annexing parts of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Dismantling UNRWA has been a long-standing Israeli goal. In 2017, Netanyahu accused the agency of inciting anti-Israeli sentiment. He blamed UNRWA for “perpetuating the Palestinian refugee problem” instead of solving it and called for it to be eliminated.

After October 7, 2023, Israel accused 12 of UNRWA’s 13,000 staff of being involved in Hamas’s attack on Israel. UNRWA immediately suspended those workers, and many countries suspended their funding of UNRWA. Since a UN report found that Israeli authorities had not provided “any supporting evidence” to back up their allegations, every country that funds UNRWA has restored its funding, with the sole exception of the United States.

Israel’s assault on the refugee agency has only continued. There are now three anti-UNRWA bills in the Israeli Knesset: one to ban the organization from operating in Israel; another to strip UNRWA’s staff of legal protections afforded to UN workers under Israeli law; and a third that would brand the agency as a terrorist organization. In addition, Israeli members of

parliament are proposing legislation to confiscate UNRWA's headquarters in Jerusalem and use the land for new settlements.

UN Secretary General Guterres warned that, if these bills become law and UNRWA is unable to deliver aid to the people of Gaza, "it would be a catastrophe in what is already an unmitigated disaster."

Israel's relationship with the UN and the rest of the world is at a breaking point. When Netanyahu addressed the General Assembly in New York in September, he called the UN a "swamp of antisemitic bile." But the UN is not an alien body from another planet. It is simply the nations of the world coming together to try to solve our most serious common problems, including the endless crisis that Israel is causing for its neighbors and, increasingly, for the whole world.

Now Israel wants to ban the secretary general of the UN from even entering the country. On October 1st, Israel invaded Lebanon, and Iran launched 180 missiles at Israel, in response to a whole series of Israeli attacks and assassinations. Secretary General Antonio Guterres put out a statement deploring the "broadening conflict in the Middle East," but did not specifically mention Iran. Israel responded by declaring the UN Secretary General *persona non grata* in Israel, a new low in relations between Israel and UN officials.

Over the years, the U.S. has partnered with Israel in its attacks on the UN, using its veto in the Security Council 40 times to obstruct the world's efforts to force Israel to comply with international law.

American obstruction offers no solution to this crisis. It can only fuel it, as the violence and chaos grows and spreads and the United States' unconditional support for Israel gradually draws it into a more direct role in the conflict.

The rest of the world is looking on in horror, and many world leaders are making sincere efforts to activate the collective mechanisms of the UN system. These mechanisms were built, with American leadership, after the Second World War ended in 1945, so that the world would "never again" be consumed by world war and genocide.

A US arms embargo against Israel and an end to U.S. obstruction in the UN Security Council could tip the political balance of power in favor of the world's collective efforts to resolve the crisis.

Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J. S. Davies are the authors of *War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict*, available from OR Books in November 2022.

OCTOBER 18, 2024