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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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19.12.2024

The Moral Shame of U.S. Foreign Policy



Image by Israel Palacio.

“A new study has found that almost half of children in Gaza wish to die, as a result of the trauma they have been forced to endure. Every single supplier of arms to Israel has blood on its hands—and the world will never forgive them.”

—Jeremy Corbyn, MP (Dec. 12, 2024)

The election of former President Donald Trump to another term as U.S. president has been cause for profound despair among millions of Democratic voters. Certainly anyone who cares about human and democratic rights can only feel dismay about the return of this notorious megalomaniac to the White House.

But worse than the election results is another deflating reality. Neither major party candidate represented a challenge to U.S. complicity in Israel’s horrific war on the people and land of Gaza. The presidential election proved to be a choice between two electable candidates, manifestly different on the surface, yet neither of whom was capable of taking a principled stand against the worst crime imaginable—genocide.

Consider that reality for a moment. While the Democratic candidate Kamala Harris campaigned as the defender of democracy, our only hope against the fascist predations of Republican Trump, the current vice president refused to consider even the slightest change in course from the Biden administration's staunch support for Israel's genocidal war on Gaza. In fact, for more than a year the supply of U.S. weapons has enabled Israel to carry out one of the most concentrated and deadly military assaults on a population in modern times.

Is what the Israeli military (IDF) doing in Gaza under the auspices of the Biden administration somehow less of a fascist horror show than the threat of Trump's dystopian vision for the United States? What kind of democracy was it exactly that the Harris campaign stood for, if it excluded the most basic right of the Palestinian people not to be annihilated?

Ultimately, the Harris campaign was nothing more than a glossy marketing machine, a high-paid commercial for more of the same old war and Wall Street politics. Months of nationwide campus and street protests for a permanent Gaza ceasefire and the growing unpopularity of the U.S. role as Israel's chief arms supplier, resonated little in the end with the Harris campaign's supposedly savvy advisors. Better instead to highlight the support of anti-Trump Republicans like Liz Cheney than allow a Palestinian-American campaign supporter even five minutes at the Democratic convention to speak about the plight of Gaza. Better to demonstrate loyalty to President Biden, a leader whose legacy is now forever stained in the blood of the Palestinian people.

As for Trump and the GOP, this is a party of unabashed cheerleaders for genocide, who embrace Israel's depraved war without any moral reservations. With near unanimity this past July GOP members repeatedly stood and cheered Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's bellicose address to a joint session of Congress. It was an indelible display of shameless idolatry for a mass murderer, as Netanyahu denounced American ceasefire protestors as "useful idiots" and otherwise sought to justify his war crimes.

Notably, the decision to welcome Netanyahu to Congress was a bipartisan one, an invitation whose political optics were so bad several dozen Congressional Democrats chose to boycott the address. One who did not was Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), who with quiet dignity sat through Netanyahu's remarks displaying a sign with the words "war criminal" and "Guilty of Genocide" written on either side. "It is utterly disgraceful that leaders from both parties have invited him to address Congress," said Tlaib. "He should be arrested and sent to the International Criminal Court [ICC]."

How Many People Have to Die?

Since Tlaib's protest the ICC has issued formal arrest warrants for the Israeli prime minister and former defense minister Gallant, along with Hamas leader Ibrahim Al-Masri. Doggedly loyal to the Zionist state, Biden called the ICC decision to seek the Israeli leaders arrests "outrageous."

What is wrong with Biden? How many people have to be bombed, shot, slaughtered, and starved, their homes, schools, hospitals, and shelters destroyed, before he says enough? Biden's outrage at the ICC decision is driven by his claim that there is no equivalence between Israel and Hamas. Actually, in terms of sheer killing power he is right. According to *ALJazeera's* live tracker of war data, the death toll in the Israel-Gaza war (Oct. 7, 2023 to Dec. 15, 2024) stands at 45,976 Palestinians and 1,139 Israelis killed.

Unbearably, the Israeli military (IDF) has also killed 17,492 children in Gaza. Another 106,759 people have been injured and more than 11,000 are missing. In the Occupied West Bank, at least 812 people, including 169 children, have been killed and another 6,250 injured over the past year by Israeli police, military, and settlers.

Further, the IDF has killed 3,823 people in Lebanon (Oct. 8, 2023 to Nov. 27, 2024), according to Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor. Another 15,859 residents of Lebanon are reported injured as a result of Israeli military action. The IDF has also partially or completely destroyed over 100,000 housing units across Lebanon.

No matter. For Netanyahu's supporters in the U.S. political establishment, no lessons are ever learned nor red lines crossed, even as Israel's war rage continues unabated. Instead, the Senate majority recently voted to approve another \$20 billion in weapons sales to Israel. Only 19 senators (all Democrats except for Vermont independent Bernie Sanders) voted no.

In late November, the United States also vetoed a new U.N. Security Council resolution calling for an immediate, permanent ceasefire in Gaza and release of remaining Israeli hostages. This was the fourth time the U.S. has vetoed a Gaza ceasefire resolution! The U.S. ambassador claimed the resolution didn't adequately link a ceasefire to the necessity of releasing hostages, a concern rejected by every other member nation of the Security Council. What was it again Harris said during her campaign about the White House working tirelessly for a Gaza ceasefire?

Why is the United States still Israel's key ally? In January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in response to the case brought by South Africa issued a preliminary determination that Israel's actions in Gaza constituted "plausible" genocide. In a newly released report. Amnesty International has also concluded that Israel has and is continuing to commit genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. "Israel has unleashed hell and destruction on

Palestinians in Gaza brazenly, continuously and with total impunity,” states the Amnesty report.

But nothing has changed since the ICJ warning to Israel. In modern politics, murdering thousands of children and other innocents in an obliterating campaign of state-sponsored terrorism is just business as usual, one more geo-political “controversy” for our esteemed leaders to do nothing about.

Gaza and Trump’s Victory

The Biden administration’s complicity in Israel’s war differs from the incoming Trump administration only in the latter’s unabashed embrace of Israel’s war crimes. Consider only Trump’s selection for the next U.S. ambassador to Israel: former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, a man who believes there is no such person as a Palestinian.

Trump himself now says there will be “hell to pay” if the Israeli hostages still in Gaza are not released prior to his January inauguration. You have to wonder what hell he is referring to that has not already occurred. With his usual fidelity to reality, Trump further ignores Netanyahu’s repeated obstruction of efforts to negotiate the release of hostages held in Gaza, to the upset of other Israeli leaders and public.

All this does not bode well for a peaceful and just future in the region. When the October 7 Hamas raids into southern Israel occurred, leading to hundreds of deaths and 254 people taken hostage, President Biden and others described the assault as “unprovoked.” It was a revealing response, a reflection of just how little Western leaders care about the modern history of Israel’s oppression of the indigenous Palestinian population. News flash to Biden: History did not begin on October 7.

Of course, to defend the basic human rights of the Palestinian people, including just the right to survive, does not constitute a political endorsement of Hamas, or any particular leadership or group. If any individual or group has committed atrocities against innocent civilians, those responsible should be held legally accountable. But isn’t it necessary to try to understand the deeper historic roots of the violence, to see beyond the layers of Western and Zionist propaganda designed to obscure Israel’s long occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people and their lands. All this began long before Hamas even existed.

It’s obvious Israel’s far-right leaders do not view the Palestinian people as human beings who deserve justice, as a people with whom they should live in peace. In fact, Israel’s destruction of Gaza over the past 14 months represents less an *aberration* than an *acceleration* of the Zionist state’s historic relationship since 1948 with the Palestinian people, which is one of oppressor and oppressed.

The Failure of the Democrats

The guiding lights of the Democratic Party were apparently confident enough voters wouldn't care that the Harris campaign remained full on with the politics of "Genocide Joe." It was a poor gamble. The dramatic fall in voter turn-out for the Democratic candidate proved decisive to Trump's victory, which he won over Harris by only 1.6% of the popular vote. The unwillingness of Harris to campaign as an antiwar candidate, to even appear to separate herself from Biden's demoralizing fealty to Israel, did nothing to get out the vote. Many people understandably draw a moral line at supporting genocide.

The White House was not unaware of how unpopular its support for Israel had become. In June a CBS News Poll showed 61% of Americans opposed to sending U.S. weapons to Israel. Among Democrats and people under 30 years of age, 77% were in opposition to continued arms deliveries to Israel. Prior to the Democratic Party convention, one poll showed approximately one-third of U.S. voters in Arizona, Georgia, and Pennsylvania more likely to vote for Harris if she agreed to stop arming Israel, or if an Israel-Hamas ceasefire was achieved before election day. Yet the Harris-Walz campaign remained opposed to an arms embargo, which ultimately rendered all their ceasefire rhetoric empty theatrics.

The latter was no doubt what was involved in the Biden administration's 30-day ultimatum to Israel three weeks before the election to improve Gaza's access to humanitarian aid or risk delivery of future arms supplies. Not surprisingly, post-election the U.S. State Department announced, much to the disbelief of some members of Congress and several international aid groups, that Israel had made "limited progress" toward improving delivery of humanitarian aid, and thus was not in violation of U.S. law.

There's a pattern here. In May, the Biden administration had even acknowledged Israel's use of U.S. arms likely violated international humanitarian law, but claimed it lacked confirmatory evidence. It was at this time that the administration paused delivery of a shipment of 500-pound and 2,000-pound bombs, as the Israeli military threatened to assault densely populated Rafah in southern Gaza. A military offensive there was supposedly a "red line" for the Biden administration. But it was one Netanyahu ignored as the IDF soon swept through central Rafah and air strikes hit people sheltering in tents.

For the White House all this constituted only an "uptick" in military action, not the "full-scale" assault on Rafah their floating red line was intended to oppose. Tellingly, the United States decided in July to resume shipments of 500-pound bombs to Israel. Apparently, U.S. officials were no longer concerned about the threat to the population from the 65-foot blast radius of 500-pound bombs, compared to the 115-foot radius of 2,000-pound bombs.

That's par for the course for the Biden State Department, with the exception of the several department staff who resigned their positions in protest of the administration's complicity in Israeli war crimes. Otherwise neither Biden, Harris, nor Trump have wanted to end, reduce, or put any meaningful conditions whatsoever on arms deliveries to Israel.

Time for New Mass Movement Politics

Certainly there are multiple factors at play in Trump's election victory. The pressures of the inflationary state of the economy, combined with historic wage stagnation and growing wealth inequality, are obviously factors. But it's more than that. Trump also cynically manipulated base appeals to racism. His demonizing rhetoric about migrant floods "poisoning the blood of America" were classic divide-and-conquer politics, a tactic long used by capitalist elites to redirect working-class discontent away from their rule and power. These racist appeals were persuasive to many of the Trump faithful.

But perhaps Trump also won just because he was not in office. A vote for Trump was likely perceived by many as somehow just shaking up the system. The operative word here is somehow. In Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Bronx congressional district, for example, Trump won 33% of the vote, an 11-point improvement from 2020. Yet the left progressive Ocasio-Cortez also won a decisive victory, returning to Congress for a fourth term with 68.9% of the vote. A minority of others also cast protest votes for Green Party candidate Jill Stein or independent Cornel West, both of whom campaigned on antiwar platforms in solidarity with Palestine.

Tellingly, the CEO of Blackrock, Larry Fink, who oversees the investment firm's management of \$11.5 trillion in assets, downplayed the election's significance for Wall Street investors. "I'm tired of hearing this is the biggest election in your lifetime," Fink remarked in October at a securities industry event. "The reality is over time it doesn't matter." In other words, as long as capital accumulation proceeds unimpeded, as long as the billionaires and corporate elites continue to profit and prosper, any Democratic or Republican administration is fine.

The prospect of another four years with Trump in the White House is bleak. But Trump and his entourage of power-hungry hustlers, grifters, far-right ideologues and other low-flying opportunists are hardly invincible. They can be defeated.

Of course, those who oppose the warmongers and right-wing authoritarians will surely face many challenges in the new year. But perhaps we should despair less and organize more.

From Democratic Socialists of America to Jewish Voice for Peace, the activism of the United Auto Workers and other labor ranks, to the organizers for women's reproductive rights and

the human rights of migrants, the voices who continue to speak up for humanity are many. We need to continue to mobilize these voices for the cause of peace with new resonance and power. We need political action not beholden to the Washington status quo or enfeebled Democratic electoral politics, but movement politics that embraces the larger anti-capitalist vision of what Dr. King once described as the “radical reconstruction of society itself.”

People are tired of endless wars. However justified Ukrainian resistance to Russia’s military aggression, the Russia-Ukraine war also just grinds on, costing tens of billions in U.S. military aid with no prospects for a fair negotiated settlement. For the Biden administration, the war appears to be more about strategically weakening Russia and providing a bonanza for arms manufacturers than defending democratic Ukrainian sovereignty.

In October 2023, the Deputy Speaker of the Knesset in Israel, Nissim Vaturi, said: “Now we all have one common goal — erasing the Gaza Strip from the face of the earth.” Other Israeli leaders have expressed similar genocidal aspirations. To the shame of the world, this nightmare story has continued unabated for more than a year.

A new study conducted by the Community Training Centre for Crisis Management (CTCCM) with support from the War Child Alliance finds deep psychological trauma now prevalent among the children of Gaza. Surrounded by death, destruction, and displacement, their homes, schools and communities destroyed by IDF air strikes and military assaults, 96% of the most vulnerable children in Gaza live with the feeling of imminent death. With loved ones often dead or wounded, nearly half of the children also describe just wishing to die.

Why is U.S. foreign policy committed to support a rogue Israeli state led by unrepentant war criminals? We should recognize the essential justice of the vision of a democratic, secular Palestine, based on respect for the human rights of all people, not an exclusionary and violent Zionist settler-colonial project armed to excess by Western imperialism. The pretense of civilized, democratic Israel has now fallen away to reveal the ignominy of an oppressor state in all its furious depravity. Tragically, this failed state is leading Gaza to obliteration and ruin. The whole world needs to rise up against this terrible imperial violence and the social system that creates it.

DECEMBER 18, 2024

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