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USA

Genocide and Beyond

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP601- February 2025 -

Publication date: Monday 24 February 2025

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The sadistic savagery of the U.S.-enabled Israeli genocide, and Donald Trump's executive coup-in-progress in the United States, intersect at Trump's proclamation of intent to take over, "develop" and ethnically cleanse Gaza of its two million Palestinian residents.

Such pronouncements may have been previously unimaginable, but no longer. As divorced from reality as Trump's Gaza fantasy is, we must not see that corner of the world as a mere local crime scene: It epitomizes what's become the normalized collapse of what was thought to be a secure, "rule-based" global system, along with a looming explosion in U.S. domestic politics. We will attempt here to explore the interconnections.

The colossal scale of Gaza's destruction, the reality of perhaps ten thousand unrecovered bodies under the debris, the annihilation of the health care system, the targeted killings of 200 or more Gaza journalists — all these are only pieces of the picture of the Israeli state's attempt to pulverize an entire society beyond hope of reconstruction.

And yet, despite everything — January 27 saw hundreds of thousands of Palestinians returning to northern Gaza, seeking to rebuild shattered homes, families and communities out of almost nothing. It's criminal for anyone to fantasize that Gaza or Palestine have "won" this hideous war, but the mass return to the area that the Netanyahu government openly intended to depopulate shows that Israel hasn't "won" either.

The people of Gaza, even amidst the rubble, have reclaimed their agency to make clear that no Arab regime, no matter how corrupt or servile to U.S. imperialism, could afford to indulge Israel's ultimate ethnic-cleansing fantasy.

During Phase One of the fragile ceasefire that may never see Phase Two, the release of some of the Israeli captives held hostage by the military wing of Hamas or other factions, and freedom for a few hundred among tens of thousands of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, was of course welcome. This can't hide the magnitude of the Gaza horror, or the fact that an unknown number of the hostages have died in Israeli air strikes or building demolitions. Nor are we justifying the fact that on an incomparably smaller scale, the Hamas-led attack on October 7, 2023 committed murderous crimes against civilians.

Right now, might the European Union be prepared to punish Israel over its blatant ceasefire violations and threat to renew the assault on Gaza that Netanyahu promised, with all its catastrophic consequences? And will Israeli society — despite the revenge lust that has consumed much of it since the October 7 attack — continue to support a government that would sacrifice the remaining hostages' lives to satisfy its ambitions of conquest?

Without knowing any of that, it is possible to reflect on some lessons of the past and present. How could what passes for "the international community" allow the annihilation of Gaza to happen in broad daylight? A stunning juxtaposition of events on January 27 may help to highlight this tragic question.

Then and Now

The march of half a million Palestinians returning to what remains of northern Gaza happened to coincide with the ceremonies on the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp complex in Nazi-occupied Poland.

Watching these events side by side was overpowering, not least as Auschwitz survivors in their 90s spoke of their fears that “it could happen again” in a world of rising nationalist and racist hatreds. It’s an invitation, even a commandment, to face why it is indeed happening again when it’s so much more visible and preventable.

Regarding the Nazi holocaust, historian Arno J. Mayer wrote his book *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* to explore the world’s relative indifference to the genocide as it became known. What about today? It’s not that genocidal crimes should be measured against each other in terms of their scale, or the meaningless question of which is “worse” — but one can compare how global powers responded or failed to respond in their respective times.

The Nazi holocaust occurred in the context of an all-consuming world war that for many countries posed the question of physical survival. Second and related, as the Verso Books publisher’s summary observes:

“Mayer demonstrates that, while the Nazis’ anti-Semitism was always virulent, it did not become genocidal until well into the Second World War, when the failure of their massive, all-or-nothing campaign against Russia triggered the Final Solution.”

The real extent of the Nazi exterminationist campaign had begun to emerge around late 1942, and only by 1943 was it becoming widely known. (The early mass slaughters in Nazi-occupied eastern territories were mostly under the radar.) Furthermore, whatever the Allied powers knew and when, there was effectively no way to stop it — despite some wishful thinking, for example, that they “could have bombed the rail lines to the death camps,” which were at the outer limit of the air capacity of the time — except by defeating Nazi Germany in the war.

Antisemitism of course played a role in why there was not great wartime concern over the fate of the Jews of Europe. But this would become a much bigger factor after the war, when the great Western democracies mostly closed their doors to desperate holocaust survivors, leaving masses of Jewish refugees nowhere to go — except to Palestine where the Zionist movement needed them to come, setting the stage for what became the 76-year, and continuing, Palestinian catastrophe.

Unlike the World War II Nazi genocide, the Israeli-U.S. Gaza assault has happened in the open, “the first live-streamed genocide” as it’s been accurately described. The only way not to see it is by deliberately choosing not to look.

Further, halting this genocide could not have been simpler: Only with the massive continuous supply of U.S. weapons could the Israeli military sustain the pace of the war beyond a few weeks. A “Stop” order from Washington at any time would have suspended the slaughter.

It’s not that this would have resolved the fundamental issues of occupation and ethnic cleansing that preceded and led to October 7 — issues that the war in any case has only made worse — but tens of thousands of Palestinian lives and hundreds of thousands gravely wounded, several hundred Israeli soldiers, and dozens of hostages, would not have been needlessly lost.

Keep in mind too that unlike the 1940s when there was general unconcern (with heroic exceptions) for the fate of Jews, today there is overwhelming global popular sympathy for Palestinian lives and freedom.

By and large the world’s elites either don’t care, or align with what the critical historian Ilan Pappé calls “Global Israel” — spearheaded by U.S. imperial power and Christian Zionism — but among the people the tide is with “Global Palestine.” (Professor Pappé’s new book on Lobbying for Zionism in the United States and Britain is reviewed

elsewhere in this issue of *Against the Current*.)

All this is why we must continue to insist that the Gaza genocide is the permanent record of Joe Biden's presidency. Nothing else comes close, and nothing is more pathetic than the question of whether Gaza "tarnishes his legacy." Gaza is Biden's legacy, and nothing can "tarnish" or varnish it — including the lunatic acts of his successor in the White House, who promised to end the disaster and instead is expanding it. What was Biden's war is now Trump's.

As for the most ominous comparison, go back to the observation from Arno Mayer that the Nazis' vicious antisemitism became fully genocidal with "the failure of their massive, all-or-nothing campaign against Russia." The comparison is not exact, but we see today the failure of a "massive, all-or-nothing campaign" by the Israeli state against Palestinian society, whose people refuse to capitulate despite the indescribable destruction inflicted on them.

That points to the chilling potential for Israel's endless war against Palestine to become literally exterminationist in the coming period. Equally, it shows how much is at stake for the movement globally and especially for that in the United States in defense of Palestinian rights and freedom. We must also fight for the defense of basic rights of speech, dissent and organizing here in the United States, which the Trump gang and the Zionist lobby intend to destroy.

Irreparable Harms

The irreparable harm that's been done in Gaza only begins with the "official" documented 47,000 deaths — grotesquely undercounted — close to half of whom are children. The loss of limbs, the profound psychological and physical trauma, the destruction of education and health care, and more, will affect the next two generations at a minimum. And the rampage of military and settler pogroms are sweeping through the occupied West Bank shows what the entire Palestinian population is confronting.

The particularly brutal impact on women in Gaza is a huge story in itself, which we briefly discuss elsewhere in this issue of *Against the Current*. As for the effects on Israeli society, it suffices here to point out how soldiers have filmed themselves, and posted on social media, committing war crimes for their own and friends' amusement. Add to this the evidence of mass execution sites in Gaza, about which we'll be learning more in coming months.

Even as Israel has become an international human rights blot, Israeli soldiers' open glee in displaying their crimes is an indicator of where much of that society is heading, and the poison that will feed back into its polarized politics. Antiwar activists in Israel concede that progressive forces there are unable to bring change from within, and that international action is required to prevent the resumption of all-out — and as we've suggested, potentially exterminationist — war.

The Home Front

If Gaza shows us what "the rule-based international order" ultimately amounted to, it really can't be seen separately from the wreckage of what were supposedly impregnable safeguards in the U.S. political structure.

Donald Trump and Elon Musk's intentions to destroy constitutional protections and institutional barriers against presidential dictatorship and the destruction of labor, racial justice, gender rights and any other obstacles to unrestrained corporate greed, show as little concern for the "security" of people's lives in the United States as they have for Gaza.

Trump's promises to bring down grocery costs won't be kept anytime soon, or ever. (Have you checked the price of

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eggs lately?) For the lives of U.S. working-class families and communities, the rhetoric about the “new golden age of prosperity” will be soon enough be shown for the fraud it is.

Two points stand out about the Trump-Musk agenda and the blizzard of overreaching executive orders. First, it’s a war against the majority of the U.S. population, even though most folks don’t yet recognize that reality. It’s about more than arbitrarily slashing the federal work force, as damaging as those cuts will be for essential services, freezing Congressionally-approved spending on programs, denying transgender medical care, or targeting prosecutors for doing their jobs investigating the January 6 Capitol riot. These are chaotic, but systematic elements of an emerging program of austerity along with authoritarian presidential rule.

Second, the transactional and corrupt character of this administration is amazingly open. New York mayor Eric Adams is being shielded from prosecution, in exchange for his collaboration with Trump’s mass-deportation program. Ukraine is about to be thrown under Putin’s tanks, with U.S. aid to depend on the supply of Ukraine’s vital minerals to the United States. Private prisons, the Trump family and cronies, and uber-billionaire Musk himself will be gorging at the trough of contracts while basic government services are gutted.

Why much of the U.S. capitalist class is opting for Trump’s virulent economic nationalism, trade wars against allies as much as against strategic adversaries (China), and destruction of basic government functions, requires a deeper analysis than is possible here. How far the rampage will go, the effects on the global and U.S. economy, the outcome of rulings in the courts and whether Trump might defy them, and what happens in Congressional budget battles — all are also open questions.

We do know that our movements, above all the struggles for immigrant communities, gender rights and justice for Palestine, are in the crosshairs. The bits of good news include the rapid-response networks forming in cities across the country against deportations, and the beginning of the fightback by federal workers and their unions.

The current U.S. administration is both a center of the anti-democratic global white-nationalist far right and an Amen Corner for Israel’s more extreme factions. It’s clear that domestic as well international popular pressure on our own imperialist government is now even more urgent, not just for the survival of Palestine but ultimately for our own.

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