

The War Against Iraq --- Making the Connections to Israel's Occupation of Palestine ---

In 1991, with an agreed cease-fire in Iraq, the United States put itself in a position to facilitate a “peace process” for Palestinians and Israelis. The Oslo Accords were signed between the Israeli Government and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993. However, Israel did not end its occupation. On the contrary, with US acquiescence, it doubled the number of settlers in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem between 1993 and 2000. In September 2000, the Palestinians launched a second *Intifada* (uprising) against the occupation, and today the US is set on invading Iraq, whose population has suffered under economic sanctions for 13 years. To focus separately on either Iraq or the Palestinian struggle is to overlook clear connections to US foreign policy, which is premised on control of oil resources, unwavering support for Israel, and “stability” in the region. An effective peace and justice movement must address these links given the grave consequences of such policies in terms of human suffering in Palestine and Iraq, as well as in Israel itself. _

US Interests in the Middle East

- Iraq holds the second largest oil reserve in the world. The US economy is based on ready and cheap access to oil, a dependency that underlines and defines much of US Middle East policy.
- The Middle East is viewed as a growth market for the sale of US goods, and several US companies are poised to cash in on the prospect of rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure.
- The US Government claims that “regime change” in Iraq would facilitate democracy in the Middle East. However, the US supports several non-democratic countries in this and other regions to ensure its stable access to resources.

United Nations Resolutions

- The US government accuses Iraq of violating U.N. resolutions and attempts to justify waging war on this basis. Yet Israel is in violation of 86 UN resolutions, including those related to occupation, protection of refugee populations, and settlements. The US has the power – by simply cutting off military aid – to hold Israel accountable for these violations but chooses to ignore them instead.
- The US has consistently used its veto power to prevent further resolutions that might end the occupation or provide protection for the Palestinians until the occupation is ended.
- The Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands is the final legacy of a culture of Western colonialism, when European countries dominated the peoples and resources of Africa, Asia and Latin America. A US occupation of Iraq would be seen as neocolonialism in the Middle East and beyond.
- If international law is not applied, desperate peoples take the law into their own hands, engaging in violent resistance against the occupier. This is happening today in Israeli-occupied territory; it is beginning to happen to US troops and civilians in the Middle East and other regions.

Mass Expulsion

- Palestinians – as well as peace-loving Israelis – fear that Israel will use the cover of a war against Iraq to expel massive numbers of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories, as well as from Israel proper.
- The Israeli cabinet now includes representatives of parties that openly favor “transfer” – a euphemism for ethnic cleansing. Israelis currently discuss the subject in the media and at public seminars and conferences.
- The practice of “transfer” is not new. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from their homes in 1948 and 1967, and Israel has yet to fulfill their right to return. Small-scale deportations have continued until the present day. A “quiet expulsion” is under way: thousands of Palestinians have left Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem to escape economic hardship and political uncertainty.
- The US has rejected requests by Jordan to publicly commit that it will not tolerate mass expulsions of Palestinians.

Expense to Local Populations

- US-supported Israeli policies toward the Palestinians over the past 55 years are responsible for creating over 3.5 million Palestinian refugees, the largest and oldest refugee population in the world today.
- US-led military actions against Iraq during the first Gulf War created over 1 million Iraqi refugees.
- Unarmed, non-combatant civilians (men, women, and children) constitute the majority of those killed during military operations that claim to target the “perpetrators of terrorism” in both Palestine and Iraq.
- Children constitute one-third of all Iraqis who have died as a result of the sanctions and US bombing.
- Children constitute one-third of Palestinians killed as a result of Israeli occupation.
- Both the US and Israel are signatories to the Geneva Conventions and other international laws that protect the rights of populations under occupation and the Palestinian right to self-determination, which has been consistently violated.
- Sanctions and regular bombings by US and British forces have left Iraq with a devastated civilian infrastructure, which will be exacerbated by a US invasion.
- Similarly, Palestinians are alienated from their land and Israeli occupation forces have systematically destroyed their infrastructure and institutions.

Expense to People in the US

- A US military invasion and occupation of Iraq is estimated to cost around \$100 billion, for which US taxpayers will be responsible.

- The US annually gives \$4 billion in tax-funded aid to Israel even as it expands its illegal settlements in occupied territories. Israel receives more US aid than the entire continent of Africa.
- US support of Israeli policies and intervention in Iraq diverts government attention and funds from domestic programs, such as hunger, homelessness, public education, employment, and healthcare. There are currently 70 to 80 million people living below the poverty line in the United States.
- A culture of war, militarism, and violence harms all people living in the US.

“War on Terrorism”

- The US government launched the “War on Terrorism” after the attacks of September 11th without clearly defining this war’s objectives, stating a timeline for their attainment, or explaining how a military/security response can overcome the factors perceived to underlie “global terrorism.” This ambiguity is used to justify militarism at home and abroad.
- The Israeli government points to the example of U.S. policies on “terrorism” to justify its collective punishment of the Palestinians under its occupation to achieve the “security needs” of the Israeli people.

Middle East Program/Peacebuilding Unit

March, 2003