

Canada's government and opposition trumpet Israel's "right" to wage endless war in Gaza

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Canada's political establishment has given its full support to the Israeli state's bloody onslaught against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip.

Canada's minority Conservative government has been amongst the most strident state supporters of the assault on Gaza. Since Israel launched its attack on Gaza two weeks ago, ministers in Stephen Harper's government have repeatedly echoed the cynical pronouncements emanating from Washington and Tel Aviv. This has included arguing against an "immediate ceasefire," laying all blame for the conflict and for the large number of civilians killed by Israeli air strikes and artillery barrages on Hamas, and otherwise apologizing for Israeli war crimes.

The new leader of Canada's official opposition Liberals, Michael Ignatieff, has followed suit, denouncing Hamas, which won Palestinian Authority elections in 2006, as a "terrorist organization" and asserting Israel's right to kill scores of Palestinians daily until Hamas cedes to its demands.

A day after the aerial bombardment of the densely populated Palestinian enclave began on December 26, Lawrence Cannon, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, gave full support to the attack. "Israel has a clear right to defend itself against the continued rocket attacks by Palestinian militant groups which have deliberately targeted civilians," said Cannon. "First and foremost those rocket attacks must stop."

As the carnage visited upon the Palestinians in Gaza escalated with the advent of the Israeli ground invasion, statements emanating from the Canadian Foreign Office were among the most supportive of all Israel's allies.

When 42 people, many of them women, children and the elderly, were killed and 55 wounded January 6 in an Israeli barrage on a clearly-marked United Nations-run school in the Jabaliya refugee camp, Peter Kent, the minister of state for Foreign Affairs—Cannon's deputy—told the Globe and Mail, "Hamas bears a terrible responsibility for this and for the wider deepening humanitarian tragedy. The burden of responsibility is on Hamas to stop its terrorist rocketing of Israel."

Parroting the line of an Israeli Defence Force (IDF) spokesperson on the incident, Kent, a former news anchor for the Global television network, ignored unequivocal UN reports from the refugee camp that only civilians were in the school at the time of the attack. Said Kent, "We really don't have complete details yet, other than the fact we know that Hamas has made a habit of using civilians and civilian infrastructure as shields for their terrorist activities, and that would seem to be the case again today."

According to the BBC, 770 Palestinians, including hundreds of civilians, have so far died in the fighting and thousands more have been injured. Severe food and medicine shortages affect the entire Gaza population and the lack of potable water and sewage disposal capabilities has raised the spectre of disease. There have been 14 Israeli fatalities, almost all of them IDF personnel.

When asked about the disproportionate use of force—Israel, thanks to US patronage, has one of the world’s best-equipped and powerful militaries—and the huge difference in casualty rates, Kent responded that “numbers are a mug’s game in this sort of situation.”

The Conservative government has echoed the line of the Bush administration and the Israeli government in regard to entreaties from European Union leaders for a ceasefire: Unless any ceasefire agreement is “durable,” the IDF had every right to continue its attack, declares Ottawa. In the parlance of diplomatic double-speak, “durable” means only when all IDF objectives in its Gaza invasion have been attained.

The callous indifference of the Canadian government to the plight of the people of Gaza is underlined by its failure to take timely action to evacuate Canadian citizens from the tiny, war-torn enclave. Only after the US and five other countries succeeded in getting their nationals out of Gaza on January 2 did Canadian government officials even contact the Israeli government to discuss the evacuation of Canadian passport-holders.

“I don’t know of the relationship of those timings,” said Kent in answer to criticism of the government’s failure to provide timely assistance to the Canadians, all or almost all of them of Palestinian ethnic origin, trapped in Gaza as it was being pummelled by Israel with the support of Canada’s government.

On Thursday, i.e. six days after the original evacuation, 48 Canadian citizens were able to leave Gaza in a deal worked out with Israel. Several others were reportedly too scared to report to an International Committee of the Red Cross rallying-point because of constant Israeli bombing.

Even as they left, the evacuees were given a gruesome demonstration of the wanton slaughter being carried out by the Israeli military. According to news reports, the evacuation was held up for hours after the Canadians witnessed the death of a UN relief worker, who had been shot by Israeli forces while moving wheat on a forklift truck. The Israeli military had been fully informed by the UN of its relief effort.

Israel’s actions have caused a growing international outcry, with even the UN and International Committee of the Red Cross issuing increasingly forceful denunciations of Israel for targeting civilians and creating a humanitarian disaster.

None of this, however, fazes Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff, a purported expert in human rights and international law. Speaking in Halifax on Thursday, Ignatieff reaffirmed his and his party’s support for the Israeli assault on Gaza: “Canada has to support the right of a democratic country to defend itself. Israel has been attacked from Gaza, not just last year, but for almost 10 years.”

Ignatieff denounced Hamas as a terrorist organization, blithely ignoring the dispossession of the Palestinian people and the state terrorism practiced by Israel, as well as the electoral mandate Hamas has received from the Palestinians of Gaza.

“ Hamas,” he declared, “ is a terrorist organization and Canada can’t touch Hamas with a 10-foot pole.”

Ignatieff justified Israel continuing to kill scores of Palestinians on a daily basis. Canada, he said, should stand ready to provide humanitarian relief to the people of Gaza, but only after Hamas has ceded to Israel’s demands for “ security.”

Canada’s nominal left-wing party, the New Democratic Party or NDP, has remained all but silent on the Israeli blitzkrieg in Gaza. On Dec. 29 it issued a brief statement, which made a pro forma appeal for an end to all hostilities and failed to condemn the Israeli attack on Gaza. The NDP, it should be recalled, recently repudiated its demand for the immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan in the hopes of forming a coalition government with the big business Liberals.

Like the Conservatives and Liberals, the editorial pages of most of Canada’s major dailies have echoed the war propaganda of the Israeli government and endorsed Israel’s war aims. Time and again, the Canadian press has asserted that Hamas broke a truce with Israel—no matter that Israel twice violated the truce by staging bloody strikes on Gaza in November and had long failed to implement pledges to ease a devastating economic blockade against the tiny Palestinian enclave.

The reaction of Canada’s media is typified by an editorial published in Tuesday’s Globe and Mail and titled “ Israel in Gaza: Measured action on the ground.” Canada’s ostensible newspaper of record asserts that Israel has a “ right” to wage unending war, irrespective of the cost to Palestinian lives, declaring “ If the Israeli Defence Forces have to return again and again, to suppress new supplies of rockets, so be it.”

Especially heinous was the Globe’s dismissal of the mounting number of Palestinian corpses—men, women, and children. “ It is true,” said the Globe, “ that many more Palestinians than Israeli civilians have been killed in the current conflict. But the government of Israel, like that of any other nation-state, is above all answerable for the safety of its own people ...”

The three-year-old Harper Conservative government has shifted Canada’s foreign policy sharply right, parroting the stances of the Bush administration on one issue after another. This is especially true in respect to the dispossession of the Palestinian people and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Harper government fully supported the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, declaring Hezbollah “ responsible” for the vast civilian casualties caused by Israeli bombs and tanks. Harper went so far as to provide alibis for the Israeli Defence Force when it targeted a UN observation post for attack and killed a Canadian Armed Forces’ officer.

The Conservatives boast that theirs was the first government in the world to announce a cut-off of aid to the Palestinian Authority after Hamas came to power in 2006.

The Harper government has championed war as an instrument of state policy. It has significantly expanded the plans of the previous Liberal government to rearm and increase the size of Canada’s armed forces. With the help of the Liberals, it has extended Canada’s leading role in the Afghan war for a further 5 years to the end of 2011. And in the summer of 2006 and again today it has enthusiastically supported Israeli invasions aimed at

perpetuating the subjugation of the Palestinian people—invasions in which the Israeli Defence Forces have committed numerous war crimes, even according to the narrow definitions of great-power international law.

The unconditional support of the Liberal Party and the Canadian corporate media for the Israeli assault on Gaza demonstrates that the embrace of militarism and imperialism is not limited to the Conservatives and the self-avowed political right. It is the new consensus of the Canadian elite.

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