

From Germany, With Hypocrisy: Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier visits the Gaza Strip

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Image: Germany's Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, center, talks during a press conference at fishermen's port in Gaza City, northern Gaza Strip, Monday, June 1, 2015. (Photo: AP Photo/Dawod Abu Elkas)

On Monday last, Germany's foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier visited the Gaza Strip and "expressed harsh criticism", as German media outlets put it, after witnessing the destruction of Israel's last attack in summer 2014. "Life in Gaza is unbearable", Steinmeier said, adding that the status quo is unsustainable. After hearing such news, one might think that this politician is a bold truth teller and critic of the occupation, a remarkable role for a German Secretary of State. But a closer look shows that Steinmeier has behaved with just as much hypocrisy as many other European politicians who support Israel without reservation. In fact, he may be an even greater enabler of apartheid than any of his peers.

The German foreign minister entered Gaza with the permission the Israeli government. His trip to Gaza was planned during his Israel visit, whose main purpose was to meet the new right-wing government. That Netanyahu's coalition is the most extreme and openly pro-settler government in Israel's history was completely ignored by Steinmeier. Netanyahu decided who Steinmeier was allowed to meet inside Gaza and whom he wasn't. That meant zero meetings with anyone affiliated with the government of Gaza, which is controlled by Hamas. This practice is nothing new. Since Operation Protective Edge, in which more than 2.000 Palestinians have been killed, Western statesmen from Norway, Ireland and Spain, have visited the Gaza Strip on the Israeli condition that they would meet no one from Hamas. None protested the onerous, decidedly anti-diplomatic conditions imposed on them by Gaza's occupier.

According to Steinmeier, Hamas is the main party to blame for the whole disaster consuming Gaza. For that reason, he demanded heightened security for Israel while demanding that Hamas stop firing rockets. Steinmeier conveyed the impression that both actors, Israel and occupied Gaza, are of equal strength and as responsible for the situation, while ignoring the hundreds of Israeli ceasefire violations over the past 9 months. As the massacre in Gaza unfolded, Steinmeier was one of those who publicly worried about people at Tel Aviv beach. During a meeting of foreign ministers at the end of July 2014, Steinmeier issued support for the Israeli aggression and pined about the empty beaches in Israel. In response, Turkey's Ahmet Davutoglu became outraged and pointed out that in Gaza, the beaches were not empty but the streets were full of dead children.

It is relevant to note that many people were killed in Gaza by German weapons gifted to Israel at a deep discount as part of the overall package of German reparations for the

Holocaust.

While in Gaza, Steinmeier even neglected to mention the Kilani family whose members were exterminated in an airstrike on a civilian home during Israel's assault last summer. Ibrahim Kilani and his family happened to be citizens of Germany. An engineer by trade, Ibrahim Kilani lived in Siegen for many years before he decided to return to Gaza. In fact, Kilani's first wife and his other children still live in Germany. Until today, not a single representative of the German government has taken responsibility or issued a single statement of regret about this entire family of Germans wasted by a guided Israeli missile. "It seems that my family was outlawed", is what Ramsis, Ibrahim's son, told me.

German weapons kill Palestinians again and again, and the discounted weapons keep flowing into Israeli hands. Palestinians with German citizenship can be murdered in Gaza without any recourse. They are like ghosts who never existed. To even broach this topic in respectable German society is impossible and opens critics up to accusations of anti-Semitism and "Holocaust minimizing." Calling the Gaza Strip what it is — the world's biggest ghetto — is considered a "Holocaust comparison." . The same goes for those who talk about the apartheid. Intellectuals like Ilan Pappé or Noam Chomsky, who use this term regularly, would never be able to publish a piece in most of Germany's daily or weekly newspapers.

It is true, as Steinmeier said, that the status quo must end. But in the reactionary political atmosphere that produced figures like him, the German government might be the last entity to support this goal.

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