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U.S. Complicity in Israel's Deadly Actions in Gaza

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On November 18, an Israeli air force pilot flying a U.S.-made F-16 fighter jet fired a missile at the four-story home of the al-Dalu family in Gaza City, killing ten members of the family and two from the al-Muzannar family next door.

An on-site investigation conducted by Human Rights Watch concluded that the attack was a "clear violation of the laws of war" and demanded that those "responsible for deliberately or recklessly committing a serious violation of the laws of war should be prosecuted for war crimes."

Israel's bombing of the al-Dalu home was the single deadliest attack in an eight-day offensive last month against the blockaded and occupied Palestinian Gaza Strip that killed at least 160 Palestinians, of whom 105 were civilians and 34 children, according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights.

Two weeks ago, on International Human Rights Day, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that the United States works to advance "the universal freedoms enshrined" in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which includes the "right to life, liberty and security of person." "When governments seek to deny these liberties through repressive laws and blunt force," she intoned, "we stand against this oppression and with people around the world as they defend their rights."

Yet, when it comes to U.S. policy toward Palestinians, this rhetoric rings hollow. The United States arms Israel to the teeth, fails to uphold U.S. human rights laws when Israel uses U.S. weapons to commit abuses of Palestinians and, up to this point, has thrown around its diplomatic heft in international forums to shield Israel from the war crimes prosecutions advocated for by Human Rights Watch and others.

Israel's recent killing of members of the al-Dalu and al-Muzannar families is a tragic reminder of why 15 leading church figures sent Congress a letter in October arguing that "unconditional U.S. military assistance to Israel" plays a role in "sustaining the conflict and undermining the long-term security interests of both Israelis and Palestinians." These church leaders urged Congress to hold hearings into Israel's violations of the Arms Export Control Act, which limits the use of U.S. weapons to "internal security" and "legitimate self-defense," and to examine Israel's eligibility for any form of U.S. assistance, given that the Foreign Assistance Act prohibits U.S. aid to countries that engage in a consistent pattern of human rights violations.

Such a reevaluation of U.S. military aid to Israel, which is scheduled to amount to \$30 billion from 2009 to 2018, is desperately needed. Israel is by far and away the largest recipient of U.S. taxpayer-funded military aid and it is patently obvious that these U.S. weapons are being used by Israel to commit systematic human rights abuses against Palestinians. For example, the fighter jet whose missile devastated the al-Dalu and al-Muzannar families very well may have been one of the 93 F-16D fighter jets, valued at \$2.5 billion, which U.S. taxpayers financed and transferred to Israel in the previous decade.

However, far from examining Israel's misuse of U.S. weapons in its most recent attack on Gaza, much less holding it accountable, the Obama administration is moving forward with a proposed weapons deal that would replenish Israel's arsenal. While Clinton offered platitudes about standing against aggression on International Human Rights Day, the Pentagon was busy that same day notifying Congress that it hopes to ship to Israel 6,900 Joint Direct Attack Munitions tail kits, which "convert free-fall bombs into satellite-guided ordnance," and more than 10,000 bombs to accompany them.

On previous occasions when the international community attempted to hold Israel accountable for its war crimes -- most notably with the "Goldstone Report" issued after Israel's "Operation Cast Lead" killed more than 1,400 Palestinians in 2008 and 2009, and after Israel killed nine humanitarian activists in international waters who were attempting to deliver goods to Gaza in 2010 -- heavy-handed U.S. diplomatic pressure and its threatened Security Council veto prevented effective action being taken.

But now that the United Nations General Assembly has voted to make Palestine a "non-member observer state," potentially clearing the way for it to join the International Criminal Court (ICC), Israel may no longer be able to rely on U.S. protection. And as long as the United States refuses to hold Israel accountable for committing human rights abuses of Palestinians with U.S. weapons and keeps the spigot of weapons open, Palestinians should seek redress at the ICC for Israel's war crimes. Due to ongoing U.S. funding for Israel's oppression of Palestinians, it is the only route for families such as the al-Dalu and al-Muzannar to take to receive a modicum of justice.