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Profiles in Cowardice

Obama and Kerry's Israel-Can-Do-No-Wrong Policy

by KEVIN ALEXANDER GRAY

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If one does a web search of a then Illinois state senator Barack Obama and the late Columbia University Professor Edward Said, he or she will come across a photo of Obama, his wife Michelle, Said and his wife Mariam all sitting together at a May 1998 Arab community event in Chicago at which Said gave the keynote speech. Before Obama became president there was some hope he at least saw the Palestinian people as full human beings. Yet that dinner was perhaps the apex of his solidarity with the Palestinian cause in his political career.

President Obama has been a coward in regards to the plight of the Palestinian people every since.

On the campaign trail at a 2007 conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Obama declared himself a “Zionist.”

As Israeli bombs dropped on Gaza around the time of his first inauguration killing at least 1,133 Palestinians, including 346 children and 105 women and injuring at least 5,200, Obama response was: “If somebody shot rockets at my house where my two daughters were sleeping at night, I’d do everything in my power to stop them.”

He didn't say what he'd do if his two daughters were living under an occupation and blockade and were being shelled by one of the most powerful armies in the world.

So now, here we are today.

While he now calls for a cease-fire, Obama essentially gave Israel a green light to invade Gaza, claiming that every country has a right to defend itself.

"There's no country on Earth that can be expected to live under a daily barrage of rockets," Obama said.

He didn't say that there is no people on Earth that can be expected to live under occupation forever.

After three week the Israeli assault on Gaza has seen the Palestinian death toll top 690, mostly civilians. More than 100 of the dead are children. More than 3,700 Palestinians have been injured. Israel has bombed more than 70 sites inside Gaza, including five mosques and a football stadium. In the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah, five people died and 70 were wounded when Israel bombed the al-Aqsa Hospital. It was the third medical facility to be struck by Israel in as many weeks. The injured included about 30 medics.

Israel says it has lost 27 soldiers since the ground invasion began.

This is the very definition of disproportionate force.

And the Israeli government has been appallingly callous about the civilian death toll it has been inflicting.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claims: "All civilian casualties are unintended by us but actually intended by Hamas. They want to pile up as many civilian dead as they can because somebody said, and I mean, it's gruesome, but they use telegenically-dead Palestinians for their cause. They want– the more dead the better."

The American political establishment – from the left and right to include Obama's cabinet members, serve as a backup chorus of Netanyahu's inhumane statement.

Obama's Secretary of State John Kerry said the leaders of Hamas need to "recognize their own responsibility" for the civilian deaths, with no denunciation of Israeli brutality or its consistent deployment of collective punishment, which is against the Geneva Conventions.

Kerry said, "when three young Israeli kids are taken and murdered and Hamas applauds it ... that's out of balance by any standard." But when asked about Israel killing kids he answered, "No human being is comfortable with children being killed, with people being killed. But we're not comfortable with Israeli soldiers being killed, either."

How Kerry would dare compare the Israeli gunboats attack on the Gaza City beach that killed Ismail, Zakaria, Ahed and Mohamed Bakr, four boys, aged between 9 and 11, who were just playing soccer to Israeli soldiers being killed during an armed assault or combat is just disgusting.

In an useless attempt to counter the charge that Israel's policy of collective punishment and the weapons it uses are disproportionately to what the Palestinian people have at their disposal, David Brooks of the *New York Times* offers "...what we're seeing is sort of a desperate Hamas trying to gin up some sort of publicity coup through the death of their own people..." Former President Bill Clinton in sync with Netanyahu and Brooks chimed in saying that Hamas is "forcing Israel to kill Palestinian civilians" so as to gain world sympathy.

Then there are the unapologetically bloodthirsty types like New York University professor of law Thane Rosenbaum who claims that all those in Gaza have lost their status as civilians because the elected Hamas. Rosenbaum wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*: "... **you forfeit your right to be called civilians** when you freely elect members of a terrorist organization as statesmen, invite them to dinner with blood on their hands and allow them to set up shop in your living room as their base of operations. At that point you begin to look a lot more like conscripted soldiers than innocent civilians. And **you have wittingly made yourself targets...** It also calls your **parenting skills** into serious question..."

Rosenbaum caught my attention because of a similar sentiment made by former White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs during Obama's 2012 reelection campaign. Defending the drone killing of 16-year-old American citizen Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, the son of "accused terrorist" Anwar al-Awlaki, Gibbs said, "I would suggest that you should have a far more responsible father if they are truly concerned about the well being of their children ..." It didn't matter to Gibbs that the kid hadn't been charged with anything and wasn't killed in the same drone strike as his father. He was killed by a drone missile elsewhere, two weeks after his father's assassination.

For most of the world, the facts are clear. The citizens of Gaza live in a virtual open-air prison, and now they face missile attacks and a brutal ground invasion.

What's happening in Palestine is not fundamentally different from what occurred in apartheid South Africa. Kids are being killed. People have been herded into the (more deadly) equivalent of bantustans. Political leaders are targeted for assassination.

The Palestinian people live under Israel's apartheid blockade where even humanitarian aid is not allowed through – where citizens can get food, medicine and even goats, in addition to guns and weapons, only through tunnels.

Not just in Gaza but also throughout all the occupied territories, Palestinian water rights along with their land and human rights have been stolen. Fundamentalist Jewish immigrants from Brooklyn have automatic citizenship and automatic civil and property rights, while the indigenous Palestinians lose and lose some more. Most often, it is Palestinian land that the

migrants have settled on – in the face of international and United Nations’ resolutions against such settlements.

Supporters of Israel never mention the blockade on Gaza or political assassinations or the wall or the poverty and despair. Instead, they label and attack anyone opposing occupation as supporting “terrorists.” At best they lamely apologize for the civilians killed calling them “collateral damage.” At worst they claim that the women and children killed in the school or hospital or UN facilities are “being used as human shield.”

Israel’s racist behavior throughout the years, not just the latest episode of warfare, demands the same response from the world human rights community as was mustered against apartheid South Africa – international isolation and sanctions, economic divestment, and a cultural boycott.

Those who support justice must insist that all people have a right to exist – Jews and Palestinians.

Obama and Kerry need to find the courage to hear the cries of the Palestinian people, and to rethink the one-sided, Israel-can-do-no-wrong policy.