**Obstacle to peace**

Edward Hunt

Friday, May 10, 2024

Violent crackdowns on student protesters across the United States have brought to light an uncomfortable truth that goes unacknowledged by universities, the White House, and the mass media: the United States is an obstacle to peace in Gaza.

As Israel has directed an unrelenting military assault against Gaza, the United States has enabled it every step of the way. Among its most significant moves, the United States has provided Israel with offensive weapons, opposed a permanent ceasefire, and cracked down on student protesters.

“What we are doing today is very bad policy,” Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) said on April 23. “We are aiding and abetting the destruction of the Palestinian people.”

Since October 2023, Israel has been directing a military siege of Gaza. Israel began its operations in response to a terrorist attack on October 7, when Hamas militants crossed into Israel, killed 1,200 people, and took 250 people hostage. Hamas, the militant group that controls Gaza, is still holding an estimated 100 people hostage.

Although Israeli officials have insisted that their goal is to destroy Hamas, their military campaign has devastated Gaza. The Israeli siege has killed more than 34,000 people and displaced most of Gaza’s 2 million people. There is now “full-blown famine” in northern Gaza, according to the head of the World Food Program. The World Court is investigating whether Israel has committed genocide.

Over the course of Israel’s military offensive, the United States has provided Israel with diplomatic and military support. Although President Joe Biden has criticized Israel’s military campaign as “over the top” and Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has identified Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a “major obstacle to peace,” both the White House and Congress have worked together to help Israel continue its siege.

“This is not an Israeli war,” Senator Sanders said. “This is an Israeli-American war. Most of the bombs and most of the military equipment the Israeli government is using in Gaza is provided by the United States and subsidized by American taxpayers.”

The primary way in which the United States has intervened in Gaza is by arming Israel, just as Senator Sanders noted. Not only has the Biden administration regularly approved weapons transfers to Israel, but it has also worked with Congress to secure billions of dollars of additional military assistance.

This past April, a large majority of elected officials in both the Democratic and Republican Parties voted to send more weapons to Israel. On April 20, the House of Representatives approved a bill to provide more arms to Israel by a vote of 366 to 58. On April 23, the Senate granted its approval as part of a broader package with a vote of 79 to 18.

“It’s a good day for world peace, for real,” President Biden said, shortly after signing the legislation into law.

Regardless of the president’s efforts to frame the legislation as a victory for world peace, several US officials expressed dismay. Nearly 20 representatives issued a joint statement in which they warned that the approval of additional military assistance to Israel made the United States complicit in the destruction of Gaza.

“Are we going to participate in that carnage or not?” Representative Joaquin Castro (D-TX) asked. “I choose not to.”

When Senator Sanders spoke against the additional military assistance, he argued that the United States was violating the Foreign Assistance Act, which forbids the United States from providing military assistance to countries that are blocking the delivery of US humanitarian assistance, just as Israel has been doing in Gaza. “It’s illegal to continue current military aid to Israel,” Sanders said.

Regardless, only a minority of officials in Washington cared about the legality of sending additional arms to Israel. Their priority has been to ensure that Israel can continue its siege, just as several US officials have acknowledged.

“If you don’t help Israel replenish their conventional weapons, there will be a day when Israel, if they have to, will play the nuclear card,” Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) warned.

Another way in which the United States has empowered Israel is by preventing a permanent ceasefire. At the United Nations, the United States has repeatedly thwarted diplomatic efforts to bring Israel’s military offensive to an end.

When the UN Security Council crafted a resolution for an immediate ceasefire in December 2023, the United States vetoed the resolution. After the Security Council moved forward with another attempt in February 2024, the United States vetoed that resolution as well.

In March 2024, the United States allowed the Security Council to pass a ceasefire resolution, as it abstained from voting, but US officials made no effort to follow up on the resolution or enforce it. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US Ambassador to the UN, falsely claimed that the resolution was “nonbinding,” meaning that countries were not required to follow it.

Growing international pressure has had some effect, however. The same month that the Security Council passed its ceasefire resolution, the Biden administration began claiming that it wanted to see a ceasefire in Gaza. Administration officials took the position that a ceasefire would be beneficial to Gaza and Israel by halting the fighting and creating the conditions for the release of hostages.

As administration officials changed their public diplomacy, however, they framed their demands in ways that made it difficult to achieve a ceasefire. For starters, the White House refused to call for a permanent ceasefire. Instead, administration officials said that they favored a temporary ceasefire that would enable Israel to continue its military operations at a later date.

At the same time, the White House portrayed Hamas as the main obstacle to a ceasefire, even after Hamas indicated that it would accept a permanent ceasefire and Israel insisted that it would continue with its military offensive, “with or without a deal,” as Prime Minister Netanyahu put it.

Indeed, the main priority of the Biden administration has been to enable Israel to continue its siege of Gaza, just as Secretary of State Antony Blinken acknowledged earlier this year.

“Israel has made good progress in doing to Hamas what needs to be done so that it can’t do October 7 again,” Blinken said. “That’s what Israel should be focused on. That’s what we are focused on.”

More recently, forces within the United States have made another major move in opposition to peace. Across the United States, police have been cracking down on student protesters who have been calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and divestment from Israel.

Elected officials in Washington have been behind the crackdowns. Not only have they worked to destroy the careers of university leaders by calling on them to testify before Congress, but they have pressured university leaders to call in police forces to arrest students and eliminate their encampments.

“Administrators must take charge of their institutions,” Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) demanded on April 30. “Clear the encampments.”

So far, police forces have dismantled several encampments and arrested or detained more than 2,500 people.

As legislators have pushed for the crackdowns, many of them have justified their demands by portraying student protesters as anti-Semitic. Essentially, they have weaponized anti-Semitism, meaning that they have accused the protesters of being racists for the purposes of silencing them, destroying their reputations, and undermining the broader antiwar movement.

Amid the crackdowns, legislators have increased the pressure on universities. On April 30, House Republicans announced that they are starting to investigate whether universities that have experienced student protests should continue to receive federal funding.

“The Congress has two really important responsibilities that will be fulfilled in this exercise,” Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-LA) explained. “One is oversight,” and the other is “the use of the power of the purse.”

A day after House Republicans threatened to defund universities, the House of Representatives passed a bill to broaden the definition of anti-Semitism so that it would include criticism of Israel.

Excerpted: ‘The Main Obstacle to Peace in Gaza? The United States’. Courtesy: Commondreams.org