

## Arab regimes collude with Israel's genocide and ethnic cleansing of Gaza

By Jean Shaoul

As Israel's fascist government prepares to launch a massive ground invasion to take over Rafah city, discussions are now under way about setting up 15 campsites—each with around 25,000 tents—across the southwestern part of the Gaza Strip, to house the million-plus Palestinians that have taken refuge in the city.

These tent cities are to be funded by the United States and Arab despots and operated by the butcher of Cairo, Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Egypt and other Arab regimes are in effect providing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with the ability to claim he has assured the “safe passage” he said he would provide so that the planned ground invasion could take place. As Netanyahu again declared as Israel mounted a massive aerial bombardment of the city, his real goal is “total victory”—which means killing as many Palestinians as possible and driving the rest into the desert.

That such proposals could even be discussed with the Arab regimes confirms that their collusion with Israel's genocidal offensive against Gaza, from day one, has now become direct participation in its ethnic cleansing through a second Nakba.

Israel has already killed at least 29,000 people, mostly women, children and the elderly, buried thousands more under the rubble, and displaced approximately 86 percent of Gaza's population—1.7 million out of 2.3 million people. The majority are now sheltering in Rafah, close to the border with Egypt where they face famine, lack access to clean water and medical care and the imminent prospect of extermination.

### Egypt: Israel's border guard

Egypt, the most populous Arab state with 104 million people and the key frontline state, has for decades played a criminal role as a direct accomplice in Israel's suppression of the Palestinians and its de facto border guard.

Since signing a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, Cairo has extended its ties with Tel Aviv, importing natural gas from Israel for refining and re-export, coordinating security over their shared border and the Gaza Strip, maintaining Israel's blockade on Gaza, and strictly limiting the movement of people and goods across its borders after Hamas took control in 2007. Egypt stood by when Israel launched murderous assaults on the besieged enclave in 2008-9, 2012, 2014, the 2018-19 Great March of Return and 2021.

When the Gaza offensive started in October, Israel's “wartime proposal” to push Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians into Egypt's Sinai desert was met with a furious response from Cairo. However, this was not out of any concern for the Palestinians but because of what El-Sisi called “Gaza's existential threat to Egypt's national security.” If a million Gazans crossed the border, he warned, this would lead to a resurgence of Islamist “militancy” in Sinai.

When El-Sisi refers to a resurgence of Islamist militancy, he means a renewal of the mass popular opposition known as the 25 January Revolution, which in 2011, at the height of the “Arab Spring”, ended Mubarak's personal rule. On July 3, 2013, the junta was able to resume power in a military coup thanks to

the political bankruptcy of the bourgeois liberal opposition and their pseudo-left appendages in the Revolutionary Socialists, who provided leading personnel for the anti-Islamist Tamarod movement through which the military and its billionaire backers prepared the political ground for the coup. El-Sisi has brutally crushed all dissent ever since and the last thing he wants is millions of displaced and angry Palestinians to act as the focus for broader political opposition to his regime, to US imperialism and all its allies in the region.

The army has already fortified the concrete border wall with Gaza, installing barbed wire to prevent the Palestinians from crossing into the Sinai and deploying troops and 40 tanks along the border.

El-Sisi, speaking at a press conference on October 18 with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Cairo, argued that Israel could move Gaza's Palestinians to Israel's Negev desert instead of Sinai "until Israel is capable of defeating Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Afterwards, Palestinians could return to their homeland."

Reports are circulating, citing the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, that Egypt is constructing an eight-square-mile walled enclosure in northern Sinai to host Palestinians forcibly expelled from Gaza, though this is described as a "contingency plan" in the event Palestinians succeed in breaching the reinforced border.

But wherever the de facto concentration camps being discussed are eventually established, Egypt and the other Arab regimes involved are giving a greenlight for mass murder in Rafah. On Sunday, with breathtaking cynicism Egyptian officials, responding to these latest proposals for tent cities, told Israel that they would not object to a military operation in Rafah as long as it is conducted without harming Palestinian civilians. Army Radio also said that Egypt had emphatically denied reports it might pull out of its 1979 Camp David treaty if Israel attacked Rafah.

All the oil-rich despots are working openly with Israel to enable it to pursue its genocidal war, even deepening their ties to ensure Israel can continue the war without hindrance. They cover their treachery with crocodile tears over the plight of the Palestinians in Gaza, support for South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice and appeals for an urgent meeting of the toothless UN Security Council that is subject to Washington's veto "to prevent Israel from causing an imminent humanitarian disaster for which everyone who supports the aggression is responsible."

### **Jordan: Repressing Palestinian protests**

Jordan has played the most open role in repressing popular opposition to Israel. It shares a long border with Israel and is home to over 2.2 million registered Palestinian refugees driven there by wars between 1947 and 1967, and their descendants. Around half of its 11 million population are of Palestinian descent, of whom around two thirds have been granted citizenship, but they face discrimination, while nearly 400,000 still live in 10 refugee camps. Jordan has maintained a "cold peace" with Israel following a US Clinton administration-brokered normalization treaty in 1994.

The Jordanian government has banned protests along its border with the West Bank and clamped down on protests against Israel's war on Gaza. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), it has "arrested or harassed" over 1,000 pro-Palestine protesters who have called for the Jordanian government to take action against Israel. Lama Fakih, HRW's Middle East director, said, "Jordanian authorities are trampling the right to free expression and assembly to tamp down Gaza-related activism."

Last week, the authorities arrested activist Khaled al-Natour, after he shared posts calling for the lifting of the blockade on Gaza, as part of the government's heightened crackdown on pro-Palestine activists, under a controversial new cybercrime law. According to Amnesty International, the vaguely worded law,

passed in August, gives the government huge latitude to crack down on free speech and has been used to arrest and charge at least six political activists for their “social media posts expressing pro-Palestinian sentiments or criticizing the authorities’ policies towards Israel and advocating for public strikes and protests.”

### **Arab regimes keeping Israel’s economy running**

Jordan, along with several other Arab states, is also playing a central role in keeping Israel’s economy functioning during the war.

According to Israel’s television Channel 13, the United Arab Emirates-based PureTrans FZCO and Israel-based Trucknet, which provides logistics technology for the Arab shipping companies, are transporting vital goods, including food, plastics, chemicals and electronic devices and components, between Dubai’s Jebel Ali port and Haifa port, via roads passing through Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

The route was established prior to the Gaza offensive. In June, Miri Regev, Israel’s Minister of Transportation and Road Safety, announced plans to develop the route, stating on X/Twitter that “the overland transportation of the goods will shorten the time by 12 days and greatly reduce the existing waiting time due to the wire problem. We will do it and we will succeed.” In September, Trucknet signed a shipping agreement with the UAE and Bahrain.

The plans also include a railway line, yet to be agreed, linking the UAE and Israel, with a high-speed train service between Israel’s northern city of Beit She’an and southern port of Eilat on the Red Sea.

The route has assumed greater strategic significance since October and especially because of Houthi attacks on Israeli-linked shipping in the Red Sea, helping Israel circumvent the shipping blockade and cutting the 14-day sea route around the Cape to four days.

Acutely conscious of the mass opposition within its already restive population to Israel’s genocidal war, Jordan denied that goods were being transported to Israel via its territory. But television reports showing trucks from the UAE crossing Jordanian territory to reach Israel exposed this lie, sparking anger and demonstrations against Jordan’s “shameful land bridge” to Israel.

Screenshot from Middle East Eye YouTube video of “A special report by Israeli television Channel 13 on Tuesday reveals how Israel is using the land route [in green] that begins from Dubai and passes through Saudi Arabia and Jordan to transport cargo in order to bypass the Houthi blockade in the Red Sea.”

The Dubai-Haifa “land corridor” was in fact first mooted in 2017 by Israel’s transport minister Yisrael Katz and highlighted at the signing in 2020 of the Abraham Accords with the UAE and Bahrain—and later with Sudan and Morocco—that ended the participants’ long-standing economic boycott of Israel. It made apparent Israel’s economic ties with the Gulf states that had long been kept under wraps.

The Accords not only signified the ditching of their long-defunct adherence to securing a “two-state solution,” even as Netanyahu threatened to annex one third of the West Bank, illegally occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. It crucially paved the way for trade and investment deals with Tel Aviv, particularly in arms, technology and cyberware, and Israel’s broader economic integration into the region begun clandestinely after the 1993 Oslo Accords.

### **Saudi Arabia and the planned war against Iran**

Bahrain could only sign up to the Accords with the tacit consent of its paymaster in Saudi Arabia. Riyadh is now directly involved in the Dubai-Haifa corridor as part of its efforts to extract as many concessions as

possible from Washington, including a defence agreement, commitment of “security” support, arms and fighter jets and help with a civilian nuclear program, even as it expanded its economic and political links with China to strengthen its bargaining position.

The land corridor is a key concern for the US and European imperialist powers. It is aimed at positioning the Israeli port of Haifa as a major gateway to Europe, altering the political and economic map of the region by bypassing the Red Sea and furthering Israel's integration into the Gulf states' economies.

Haifa would be the linchpin of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), a major transport infrastructure project aimed at integrating India, the Gulf and Europe while avoiding Iran, which would bring India closer to US imperialism and counter China's Belt and Road Initiative. Oman's Salalah Port, which has extensive ties with India, could also become part of the new network.

The project, which excludes Turkey, the largest non-oil economy in the Middle East, has aroused Ankara's wrath, with government officials saying that the most suitable route for east-west trade passes through Turkey not Greece. It also undermines Egypt's Suez Canal, which is already suffering financial losses from the diversion of shipping round the Cape, intensifying its economic and social crisis.

The Arab regimes now account for one quarter of Israel's \$12.5 billion defence exports. Leaders from the UAE have also reiterated their commitment to the Abraham Accords, with UAE presidential foreign affairs adviser Anwar Gargash telling a conference in Dubai last month, “The UAE has taken a strategic decision, and strategic decisions are long-term.”

The bilateral flow of goods has exploded, expanding from \$11.2 million in 2019 to \$2 billion, excluding software, from January to August 2023, according to Israel's UAE ambassador. The UAE-Israel partnership deal that came into force last year lowered tariffs with the aim of increasing bilateral trade to \$10bn within five years. While far less than Israel's trade with the European Union and Turkey, this is nevertheless far more than Israel's trade with Egypt and Jordan.

As Israeli CEOs told the Financial Times, amid the Gaza genocide it has been “business as usual,” with new investment plans going ahead and the UAE's airline continuing its flights to Tel Aviv even as others cancel theirs.

While Saudi Arabia was never a “frontline state” in the Arab Israeli conflict, in October 1973 it led the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) ban on the export of oil to those countries that had supported Israel during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War. The war began after Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to recover the territories lost in the 1967 war. Only Iraq and Libya did not take part in the oil embargo that was lifted in March 1974, by which time the price of oil had risen nearly threefold, massively increasing the oil states' wealth and reactionary political influence in the region.

Fifty years later, there has been no mention of a similar embargo in defence of the 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza, indicating the monarchies' backing for Israel's war, paid for and planned by the Biden administration, to assert US hegemony over the resource-rich region and suppress all opposition to Washington and its regional allies and to their own regime.

Israel's war on Gaza has done nothing to derail Washington's long-running efforts to broker a normalization deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia. A potential Saudi-Israel deal is a crucial part of its bid to settle the Gaza conflict with Riyadh indicating its willingness to proceed with discussions. For their part, the US and UK have consolidated the reversal of their previous opposition to Riyadh's war to unseat

the Houthis in Yemen, launching hundreds of aerial strikes on the Houthis in response to their attacks on shipping linked to Israel aimed at putting pressure on Israel to end its war and blockade of Gaza.

The Arab regimes, whose populations hold them in contempt, have made a pact with the devil: support for Israel—and by implication US imperialism—in return for Washington’s commitment to back their “security” in the event of a new “Arab Spring” or mass movement to unseat them, and to wage war against Iran, which has backed opposition forces to their rule, as part of its preparations for war on China.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2024/02/16/rsly-f16.html>