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INTERNATIONAL OPINION

# France must no longer be an accomplice to the war in Gaza

Monday 3 June 2024, by [BREDOUX Lénaïg](#), [EL AZZOUZI Rachida](#) (Date first published: 28 June 2024).

**The deadly strike that hit a camp for displaced people at Rafah once again highlights the extreme violence that Israel has been carrying out for nearly eight months against the Gaza Strip. Western countries, including France, can no longer just be content with issuing superficial condemnations of such attacks, argue Rachida El Azzouzi and Mediapart's joint editor-in-chief Lénaïg Bredoux in this op-ed article.**

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“How much longer will the states let this go on?” This question, posed by the non-governmental medical organisation Médecins du Monde on Monday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, is now the only one that matters. It has become urgent in the face of the unbearable images coming from Rafah, in the south of the Gaza Strip. Viewed from France, one could also rephrase the question this way: how much longer will France remain complicit?

On Sunday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, at least 45 people were killed, some burned alive, by an Israeli army strike on a displaced persons' camp northwest of the city, a camp administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

Among those victims were 23 women, children, and elderly people who were sheltering with their families in utter destitution under tents, according to the local Ministry of Health, which is controlled by Hamas. A further 249 people were injured, according to the same source.

“Gaza is hell on earth. Images from last night are yet another testament to that,” [declared](#) UNRWA, which has been a target of the extremist Israeli government for years.

These victims in Rafah add to the devastating toll of the relentless war waged by Israel, with the latest official count reaching 36,050 dead, the majority of whom are women and children, following the [Hamas attacks](#) on October 7<sup>th</sup> that killed nearly 1,200 people, mainly civilians.

*Palestinians gather at the scene of an Israeli strike on an area of a camp sheltering displaced people in Rafah on May 27<sup>th</sup> 2024. © Photo Eyad Baba / AFP*

Last February, the number of children killed in Gaza after four months exceeded 13,000, surpassing the number of children killed in four years of conflicts worldwide, according to the United Nations.

## **Brazen defiance of international law**

Officially, Israel claims that the bombing on Sunday May 26<sup>th</sup> targeted a “ Hamas compound ” and specifically two leaders of the movement who were “ drenched in Israeli blood ,” [according](#) to government spokesman Avi Hyman. In response to global outrage sparked by the images of mutilated bodies, Hyman conceded on Monday that Israel would “ look into this ”. Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu eventually [admitted](#) it was a “ tragic mistake ”.

No one will be deceived by this. This strike on a displaced persons camp comes two days after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) [ordered](#) the Israeli government to “ immediately ” halt its offensive in Rafah, in the face of “ further risk of irreparable harm ”. Back in January the ICJ had [ordered](#) Israel to take protective measures to “ prevent the commission of any act of genocide ” against the Palestinians in Gaza.

This attack also comes less than a week after Karim Khan, prosecutor at the separate International Criminal Court (ICC), basing his case on the views of a panel of international experts, publicly announced his request for arrest warrants for war crimes and crimes against humanity against the Israeli prime minister and his defence minister, Yoav Gallant, as well as three Hamas leaders, Ismail Haniyeh, head of the political bureau, Mohammed Deif, commander of the Al-Qassam Brigades, and Yahya Sinouar, head of Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

## **Vital need to recognise the Palestinian State**

Since Sunday’s attack, condemnations have been pouring in. Josep Borrell, the head of diplomacy for the European Union, was “ [horrified](#) ”, and Emmanuel Macron was “ [outraged](#) ”. For eight months, the French President has masked his impotence behind expressions of compassion.

That is not what we expect from a political leader. What is expected of him, as well as from others, is to act, publicly and behind the scenes, to end the massacre, to ensure respect for international law, and to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, as it was described in the past.

The impunity enjoyed by the state of Israel must now come to an end. It is time for Emmanuel Macron to take responsibility by acting on three vital measures: a look at possible sanctions, imposing an embargo on the sale of military equipment and armaments, and taking political action in the form of [recognising the state of Palestine](#).

This last move, which Spain, Ireland, and Norway in Europe [have made](#), might not immediately alter the war Israel that is waging. But as we [wrote on April 27<sup>th</sup>](#), the history of nations and peoples partly consists of symbols.

In the face of the horrors suffered by the people of Gaza, there is now almost a consensus over this idea. Seventeen Israeli personalities, including the former ambassador to France, Elie Barnavi, backed the move in a recent op-ed article published in *Libération* newspaper. “ The recognition of a Palestinian state is a matter of principle and historical justice ,” they wrote.

On Monday, Gérard Araud, another former ambassador, in this case French, tentatively suggested on social media: “ I know that recognition of the Palestinian state is merely a gesture without practical consequences, but I wonder if France should take this step given the behaviour of the current Israeli government .”

Such a move would be a “ long-awaited, welcome [one] for a people whose existence has been

continually denied”, says historian, poet, and former Palestinian ambassador Elias Sanbar in his recent short book, *La Dernière Guerre?* ('The Last War?' Tracts, Gallimard, 2024). “This recognition could prove to be a historic turning point, but only as long as it does not lead to a [da capo al fine](#), a repeat of previous negotiations, all dedicated to formulating the solution that Israel would be willing to accept,” he warns.

For their part, Emmanuel Macron and his government continue to resist. Foreign minister, Stéphane Séjourné, ruled it out again [last week](#): such a gesture was not a “taboo”, he promised, but it was not the “right moment”.

In reality, France under Macron has finally reached breakdown point when it comes to the political balance over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that France’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has long advocated. The atmosphere in this country is increasingly unbearable, amid an explosion in the number of anti-Semitic acts, unabashed Islamophobia, and a public debate that has become a cesspit.

## **Embargo and sanctions**

Since mid-October, non-governmental organisations and Parliamentarians, particularly from the Left, have made a number of appeals for France to suspend the sale of arms and military equipment to the Israeli state.

“France must abide by its duty to prevent genocide. This means in particular not providing Israel with the means that could enable it to commit acts falling within the scope of a genocide risk,” wrote Amnesty International in an [open letter](#) on February 20<sup>th</sup>, following [Mediapart’s articles](#) on the subject.

Each time, the French authorities come back with the same response. They claim to only sell defensive weapons or components, without ever being transparent, without specifying the type of weapons or their final destination. Asked again last week if France was going to reconsider its position following the ICC’s decision, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has still not responded.

This political passivity, which fuels deadly accusations of double standards against Western countries, that of supporting Ukraine while showing indifference towards Palestine, can no longer continue. Sanctions against Israel must be considered, just as European Union member states have adopted sanctions against Vladimir Putin for violations of international law and the laws of war.

To date, France has imposed just one sanction: it has banned 28 violent Israeli settlers from its territory for acts committed in the West Bank, where colonisation continues with impunity, regardless of international law. Not only is this a minimal - very minimal - measure (the French Left, for instance, is demanding the freezing of assets), it also fails to address the actions of the Israeli army in Gaza.

Paris is opposed to any economic or diplomatic sanctions against the Israeli state, either nationally or at European level. An embargo on products from the settlements, a suspension of trade missions, a pause in trade: France is refusing to consider any of these measures. Nor will it even back a review of how Israel is respecting the terms of the [EU-Israel association agreement on trade](#).

If, in a few weeks, the judges of the International Criminal Court follow prosecutor Karim Khan’s lead and issue arrest warrants against the Israeli prime minister and defence minister, the impact will be explosive. France will no longer be able to continue its “[on the other hand](#)” approach: that of

condemning Israel's repeated violations while maintaining its military, diplomatic, and economic support for the country. At that point it could officially be accused of complicity by the ICC.

**Lénaïg Bredoux and Rachida El Azzouzi**

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## **P.S.**

- MEDIAPART. 28 May 2024 à 13h57:  
<https://www.mediapart.fr/en/journal/international/280524/france-must-no-longer-be-accomplice-war-gaza>

- The original French version of this op-ed can be found [here](#).

*English version by Michael Streeter*

*Les articles de Lénaïg Bredoux sur Mediapart :*  
<https://www.mediapart.fr/biographie/lenaig-bredoux>

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