

Israel Continues Blitz Against Gaza Amid Truce Talks

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After initial reports Tuesday that a ceasefire agreement with Israel was imminent, a senior Hamas official, Izzat Rishq, told the media that a deal would not be finalized until Wednesday at the earliest, as Israel had failed to respond to proposed terms of a settlement.

With the world media focused on international efforts to broker a truce in the week-old military assault on Gaza, the war crime initiated by the Israeli government's assassination last Wednesday of Hamas military leader Ahmed al-Jaabari continued to escalate.

The unrelenting attack by F16s, drones, warships, tanks and artillery has killed or wounded well over 1,000 Palestinians, in their great majority civilians. On Tuesday afternoon, it was reported that the death toll had topped 140, with at least 27 more people killed during the day. More than 900 others have been injured by bombs, missiles and shells.

The Israel Defense Forces increasingly appears to be hitting homes and other clearly civilian targets. In the wake of Sunday's shocking massacre of 10 members of the same family—including four young children and four women—there have been a number of similar atrocities.

Late Monday evening, a missile strike on the Jabaliya refugee camp killed two young boys, ages two and four, along with their mother and father. More than a dozen others were wounded in the attack, most of them women and children.

An air strike on the town of Beit Lahiya murdered two four-year-old twins along with their father, leaving their mother critically injured. Also killed in Beit Lahiya was a 15-year-old boy, hit by a drone strike as he was hunting birds in an open space near the town.

Many of the wounded are badly burned and suffering from crushing injuries from houses and buildings collapsing on top of them. "It is very hard now, with many injured people coming every hour," a nurse on the orthopedic ward at Gaza's Shifa hospital told the UN's IRIN news agency. "Women and children outnumbered men, especially with the new wave [of attacks] targeting houses and civilian buildings."

Hospital staff said that the bombing casualties were even worse than in Israel's 2008-2009 Operation Cast Lead invasion of Gaza.

Even as Egyptian and Palestinian officials predicted an imminent ceasefire agreement, Israel engaged in mass terror tactics against the civilian population of Gaza. Aircraft dropped leaflets on villages in the northern, southern and eastern areas of Gaza telling residents to flee their homes.

“For your safety, we demand you evacuate your homes immediately and move toward the center of Gaza City,” the leaflets stated.

Different leaflets were dropped on other areas of Gaza warning people to stay inside their homes or risk being killed. The effect was to drive home the threat posed from the outset of the Israeli blitzkrieg: that an entire population of 1.7 million people is not safe anywhere.

The Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called up 45,000 reserve troops and massed infantry, tanks and artillery on the border with Gaza, but indicated it would hold off launching a full-scale invasion until Thursday, as talks on ending the conflict continued. The leaflets, however, made clear that an invasion is still an imminent threat.

Among the civilian targets reported hit on Monday night were a Jordanian field hospital—an attack universally recognized as a war crime—and the National Islamic Bank, which pays the salaries of Gaza public employees. At least four civilians were wounded in the bank attack.

Mortar fire killed one Israeli soldier and one civilian in the Eshkol Regional Council, just east of the Gaza Strip. This brings to five the number of Israelis who have died in the conflict, with three killed in southern Israel by a Palestinian rocket fired last Thursday in response to the Israeli bombardment.

The vast disparity in casualties reflects the hugely unequal nature of the conflict between Israel, one of the most heavily armed countries on Earth, and Gaza, an impoverished and blockaded territory. While under international law Israel is obliged to protect people subject to its occupation, it is slaughtering them and then blaming Hamas—the territory’s elected leadership—for “hiding behind civilians.”

This perverse justification for lethal collective punishment has been fully embraced by the Obama administration as well as the media in the US. Speaking for the administration, Obama’s deputy national security adviser, Benjamin Rhodes, stated that a truce deal would have to include “an end to that rocket fire” from Gaza, while making no demands of Israel.

Washington dispatched Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to the region, cutting short her participation with President Barack Obama in a Southeast Asian tour. Clinton met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel on Tuesday night, reiterating that “America’s commitment to Israel is rock-solid and unwavering.”

She was set to go to Ramallah Wednesday for a meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the occupied West Bank’s Fatah-led Palestinian Authority, followed by a stop in Cairo for talks with the government of President Mohamed Mursi.

The US refuses to hold any talks with Hamas, the elected leadership in Gaza, having branded the Islamist movement a “terrorist organization.”

The *New York Times* Tuesday gave voice to Washington’s official story with a hypocritical editorial entitled “Hamas’s Illegitimacy,” accusing the Palestinian organization of being “so consumed with hatred for Israel that it has repeatedly resorted to violence, no matter what the cost to its own people.” No such illegitimacy or motives were attributed to Israel’s bloodletting in Gaza.

Nor, of course, was anything said of the legitimate demands of Hamas. These include a halt

to Israeli assassinations of its leaders and a lifting of the six-year-old Israeli blockade of Gaza, which holds 1.7 million people prisoners in a 25-mile long coastal strip.

The blockade has strangled the territory's economy, blocked the delivery of medicines and other essential supplies, and condemned an entire population to poverty.

A document released last month showed that the Israeli government had gone so far as to calculate the minimum number of calories needed for Gazans to avoid mass malnutrition. It concluded that it could avoid crossing a "red line" of generalized starvation and "maintain the basic fabric of life" by allowing in just 106 trucks carrying food and other essentials a day. Prior to the blockade, some 400 trucks delivered supplies daily.

The *Times* editorial lamented that the crisis "threatens to complicate and divert attention from international attempts to deal with the threat of Iran's nuclear program and the Syrian civil war" while "marginalizing the moderate Palestinian Authority that helps administer the West Bank."

These are the strategic issues—having nothing to do with concern for the men, women and children being killed and maimed in Gaza—underlying Washington's efforts to bring an end to the conflict and forestall an Israeli ground invasion.

In relationship to Syria, the Gaza attack has served to expose the cynicism of Washington's supposed "humanitarian" concern for civilian casualties caused by that country's military. In Gaza, the US openly justifies and supports the murder of Palestinian civilians by its ally Israel.

Similarly, after denouncing Russia and China for blocking UN Security Council resolutions dealing with Syria—a decision taken after Washington seized upon such a resolution as a pseudo-legal cover for its war for regime-change in Libya—the US has prevented the Security Council from passing any resolution expressing concern for the people of Gaza.

The conflict, and the popular revulsion it has engendered across the Middle East and around the world, also cuts across the efforts of Washington and its despotic allies in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states to foment a Sunni-Shia regional conflict as a means of weakening Teheran's influence and preparing a war against Iran.

The war on Gaza also threatens to destabilize two regimes that have functioned as Washington's puppets: the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan and the Palestinian Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Jordan has seen a series of escalating demonstrations, with thousands marching in Amman last Friday against fuel price increases, chanting, "The people want the downfall of the regime."

The West Bank has seen major demonstrations in solidarity with the people of Gaza. Young protesters have attacked Israeli patrols and roadblocks with rocks and Molotov cocktails, while Israeli forces have responded with violent repression. A 28-year-old Palestinian who had been shot with live ammunition during a Saturday demonstration in Nabi Saleh, near Ramallah, died of his wounds on Monday. News of his death provoked fresh protests in Ramallah.

Washington fears that a continuation of the Gaza conflict will spark greater unrest, directed

not only at Israel, but at the impotent and corrupt regime of the Palestinian Authority as well.

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