

Bomb attack against US convoy in Gaza as US-Israeli aggression continues

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18 October 2003

An October 15 attack on US diplomats with a roadside bomb in the Gaza Strip killed three US security guards and severely wounded a diplomat. It was the first attack against foreigners in three years of the Intifada and came just hours after the US had vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution which sought to condemn Israel for constructing an illegal wall around the West Bank.

All militant Palestinian groups immediately denied any responsibility. The Palestinian Authority's (PA) chairman Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia both condemned the bombing and have promised to work with the US to find the perpetrators.

Fatah's military wing, the al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, accused Israel of carrying out the bombing to poison the PA's relations with Washington and ensure US support for new acts of Israeli aggression in the occupied territories. This type of provocation has certainly been carried out in the past by Mossad, the Israeli secret police.

The attack took place on Saladin Street near the Beit Lahiya junction in northern Gaza, about three kilometres from the Erez crossing. The bomb appears to have been manually detonated and specifically targeted against the US convoy, which was en route to interview Palestinian academics who had applied for Fulbright scholarships to teach in the US.

PA security officials stated that they have "told the Americans many times that if they want to come to Gaza they should just come in a taxi. The things they come for are really unimportant, but they always come in large convoys with escorts and flashing lights so that the whole town knows that they are here. They make it look like what they are doing is very important and some people see it as provocative. The feeling here is that people are annoyed at the widening of the conflict,

but there are those who see the US and Israel as the same passport."

The dead, all in their thirties, were employees of DynCorp, a Virginia-based US government contractor. It is one of the largest suppliers to the Pentagon, while providing maintenance and security at US bases and embassies.

Soon after the attack, the Israelis sent tanks and armoured vehicles into Gaza under cover of a helicopter gunship to evacuate the dead and wounded. When US investigators showed up later to photograph the scene they were confronted by a crowd of Palestinian youths hurling rocks and chanting, forcing them to beat a hasty retreat.

The US has advised all its citizens (around 200-400 people) to leave Gaza for their own safety, and has promised to "pursue the perpetrators until they are caught and brought to justice."

The attack coincided with Israel's six-day-old incursion into Gaza—ostensibly to find and destroy tunnels allegedly used for transporting arms into Gaza from Egypt, which denies any involvement. Tunnels have been known to exist for the transporting of foodstuffs and goods for sale in Gaza, which is isolated, and no evidence has been produced that any tunnels have been used for transporting arms.

Israel's raid into Gaza began in the early hours of Friday, October 10. The target was the Yubna refugee camp near Rafah, a slum with some 90,000 residents that was plunged into darkness as a tank shell destroyed an electricity transformer. Eight Palestinians, including two children, were killed in the raid and 70 injured as up to 100 tanks and armoured vehicles, backed by helicopter gunships, swept into Rafah from three directions sparking an intense gun battle lasting several hours.

Most were wounded when an Israeli helicopter fired a missile at a crowd. The army has said that anyone on the street was presumed to be hostile. “Where were we supposed to be?” asked local resident Ashraf Khusa, “They were blowing up our homes. There were bulldozers crushing our houses. Where could we go but the street?”

A senior UN official reported that the Israelis bulldozed some 120 houses making around 1,240 people homeless. He said also that the scene looked like the aftermath of an earthquake. Kofi Annan accused Israel of breaching international law through the “disproportionate use of force” in a civilian area.

The UN’s Relief and Works Agency has set up tents to shelter the homeless, but the refugees generally balked at the idea of staying in a “camp within a camp”. Amnesty International has described the “wanton destruction of homes and civilian property” as a war crime.

Many believe that the search for tunnels is a red herring, and that the Israelis’ intention is to push back neighbourhoods from the boundary fence with Egypt. Two full blocks of homes had already been flattened to create a “no man’s land” in front of the fence, which is dotted with Israeli security towers. The latest incursion widened this strip.

The US refused to condemn the raids—a White House spokesperson indicating that Washington viewed them as part of Israel’s right to defend itself.

PA police have arrested five members of the Popular Resistance Committee (PRC), who initially were reported to have claimed responsibility for the bombing, but later denied this. PRC leader Yasser Zanoun stated: “We can distinguish between Americans who come to Iraq as invaders and those who come to Gaza as guests.”

The PRC is one of a myriad of splinter groups from Arafat’s Fatah movement. It contains many disgruntled former security guards and policemen and arose in the months after Sharon’s al Aqsa visit provoked the current Intifada. The PRC has claimed responsibility for blowing up three Israeli Merkava tanks over the last three years. The five PRC members were arrested in Jabalya refugee camp near the site of the explosion in Gaza following a brief gunfight.

It remains unknown who precisely was responsible for the bombing of the US convoy. An Israeli

provocation cannot be excluded. Even if there was no direct Israeli involvement, it is the constant provocations carried out by Tel Aviv with the support of Washington—including raids into Syria and Rafah, its building of a separation wall around the West Bank, the continual bulldozing of houses, and the recent illegal deportation of 15 Palestinians from the West Bank to Gaza—that has inflamed the passions of the Palestinian population and created the climate in which such an attack could take place.

The Israeli administration is seeking all-out war with the Palestinian Authority in pursuit of its goal of a “Greater Israel,” and has laid blame for the bombing squarely with Yasser Arafat. The White House and the European Union have followed suit.

President George W. Bush pointed to the “failure to create effective Palestinian security forces dedicated to fighting terror” and the need for “an empowered prime minister who controls all Palestinian forces—reforms that continue to be blocked by Yasser Arafat.”

US Secretary of State Colin Powell, meanwhile, accused the perpetrators of “killing the dreams of the Palestinian people.”

In reality, the PA is in no position to control militant Palestinian elements whose ranks are growing daily. The discrediting of the PA suits Sharon, who is keen to stoke up tensions in the region.



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