

Israel rejects UN cease-fire, continues Gaza assault

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On Friday, Israel continued its bombardment of the densely populated Gaza strip, rejecting a UN Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire. Israeli leaders hinted that they were preparing the "third phase" of the blitz, which would entail an invasion of the inner city of Gaza, home to 410,000 people.

The criminal character of Israel's war is reflected in its death toll. The number of Palestinians killed is rapidly mounting. Nearly 800 have died, and thousands more have been maimed. It is now believed that about half of those killed in Gaza have been civilians.

Meanwhile, 13 Israelis have died, with only three of these civilians. The ratio of Palestinian civilians to Israelis killed is over 100 to 1.

Between Thursday night and Friday afternoon, at least 22 more Palestinians were killed. Israel bombed at least 30 targets in Gaza during the night. Among the buildings destroyed was a five-story structure in northern Gaza, where seven members of a family, including one infant, perished.

Aid workers report that the situation in Gaza is increasingly desperate. Unless food and water deliveries are allowed, many of the area's population of 1.5 million people face starvation.

The UN Security Council resolution called for an immediate end to the hostilities. The US—which normally vetoes UN resolutions related to the Palestinians that do not completely correspond to Israel's interests—abstained from the vote, thus allowing the measure to pass without opposition.

The resolution was crafted as a face-saving measure for Israel. In effect it was an ultimatum issued to the Palestinian population, predicating any cease-fire on the ending of all resistance to Israel. Only after Palestinians lay down their primitive rifles and rockets

would the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) be required to rein in its military. The resolution also called for a "durable cease-fire," a US-Israeli euphemism for the cessation of all resistance on the part of the Palestinians, now and in the future, against Israel's blockade, which even before the IDF's December 27 attack had reduced over half of Gaza's population to malnourishment.

The UN resolution envisaged a tightening of the noose around Gaza, including language demanding the prevention of the shipment of arms to Gaza from Egypt. One of Gaza's few means of acquiring food and medicine is a series of tunnels under its southern border with Egypt. Israel has targeted the border area with a massive bombing campaign in a bid to destroy the tunnels.

Nonetheless, Israel rejected the UN motion out-of-hand. The Israeli cabinet met immediately, and, in language reminiscent of Nazi Germany's defiance of the UN's forerunner, the League of Nations, issued a statement rejecting the notion that the UN has any right to intervene in the Israeli offensive.

"Israel has never agreed that any outside body would determine its right to defend the security of its citizens," said the office of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

For its part, a Hamas representative in Lebanon said the group "is not interested" in the UN cease-fire because it does not meet the organization's minimum demands. Another Hamas spokesperson said that the UN has not counted Hamas as a legitimate party to truce negotiations. Ayman Taha, a Hamas delegate in Egypt for informal negotiations, told Al-Jazeera television that Israel must stop its attacks and withdraw from Gaza. "We are not asking the impossible," he said. "This is our right to ask for it, and to protect our people

and their blood."

Protests, large and small, against Israel's attack on Gaza have continued throughout the world.

Thousands gathered at demonstrations in the West Bank, Alexandria in Egypt, Amman in Jordan, and in Kuwait and Baghdad. It is reported that protests in Egypt have been growing in size and intensity, and are spreading across the country. The protest in Alexandria attracted more than 50,000.

In Kenya, a protest of about 5,000 was prevented by police from advancing toward the Israeli embassy. Five thousand also protested in Malaysia. A protest of 1,000 in Oslo, Norway, was broken up by police after altercations erupted with a pro-Israeli counterdemonstration.



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