

Death toll mounts from Israeli air strikes in Gaza

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Israeli warplanes and naval gunboats intensified their attacks on Palestinian homes and institutions throughout the Gaza Strip over the weekend, bringing the death toll in the five days of aggression against the densely populated area to more than 75.

At least 29 people were killed Sunday, the majority of them women and children. There are undoubtedly more dead people, who remain buried in the ruins of dozens of houses and buildings.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Saturday that Israeli warplanes had carried out more than 1,000 strikes against targets in Gaza. Spokesmen for the Palestinian Red Crescent said at least 660 people were wounded or missing in the rubble. At least 137 children have been wounded.

Hospitals in Gaza are overwhelmed with casualties and short on essential supplies, according to the World Health Organization. The Save the Children charity said families were running out of food and water, with most trapped in their homes and enduring power cuts of up to 18 hours a day.

In the single bloodiest atrocity Sunday, nine members of the family of Mohamed Dallu, a Hamas official, were killed when Israeli bombs destroyed his home. The dead include his four small children—Sara (7), Jamal (6), Yusef (4) and Ibrahim (2). The blast was so powerful that it also killed two people who were merely walking past the house at the time.

In another incident, at Jabalya Camp in northern Gaza, a man, his wife and two small children, aged three and two, were killed when a bomb fell while they were sleeping and collapsed their small home on top of them.

With the cynicism typical of Israeli government spokesmen, Moshe Yaalon, minister for strategic affairs, blamed the Palestinians themselves for the

deaths of women and children. “When they use civilians as human shields, what is our choice?” he said at a press conference in Jerusalem. He was referring to Hamas officials, living at home with their families, who are targeted by Israeli missiles and bombs.

Yaalon’s remarks underscored the ruthlessness of the Israeli aggression. “We operate slowly, identify the target and clean the area around it,” he said, as though he was referring to the extermination of vermin, not human beings.

“If they position rockets in densely-populated areas, such as mosques and schoolyards, we should not be blamed for the outcome,” he continued. In fact, there were no rockets near the high-profile targets hit this weekend, which included the offices of the Hamas prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh, and the building used as a media center by many journalists in Gaza.

The media center housed offices used by Sky News of Britain and the Dubai-based Arab broadcast network al-Arabiya, among others. The Foreign Press Association in Israel issued a statement of concern, noting a United Nations Security Council resolution—which Israel has repeatedly violated—that calls for protection of journalists engaged in covering civil and military conflicts.

The attack on Haniyeh’s offices came one day after the Egyptian prime minister visited Haniyeh there. It amounts to a direct warning to the various Arab bourgeois regimes that verbally oppose the assault on Gaza: they too will be the target of Israeli bombs and missiles if they seek to interfere.

Another Israeli official dispensed with the pretext that the purpose of the air strikes is self-defense against Palestinian rockets. Israeli Interior Minister Eli Yishai declared that the “goal of the operation is to send Gaza back to the Middle Ages,” the Israeli newspaper

Haaretz reported.

Yishai was speaking in response to mounting international criticism of the Israeli attacks, which have sought to destroy much of the public infrastructure of the Palestinian enclave, ruled by Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Based on its official declaration that Hamas is a terrorist group, the Israeli government justifies in advance the demolition of every public building in Gaza, including government offices, hospitals, schools and other facilities essential to civilized life.

While the evidence of widespread atrocities mounted, the US government gave its most public and unconditional endorsement of the Israeli attacks. President Obama, speaking at a press conference in Thailand at the start of his three-country tour of Southeast Asia, said, “We are fully supportive of Israel’s right to defend itself. Israel has every right to expect that it does not have missiles fired onto its territory.”

An official of the National Security Council traveling with Obama rejected claims that Israel had deliberately instigated the crisis with its assassination last Wednesday of the Hamas defense chief, Ahmed al-Jabari. He defended the Israeli killing of al-Jabari as a legitimate response to previous Palestinian rocket attacks from Gaza, although no Israelis were killed in these attacks and Hamas had opposed them, seeking to curb the influence of rival Palestinian groups such as Islamic Jihad.

Diplomatic activity sparked by the assault on Gaza continues, largely focused on Cairo, where an Israeli envoy was reported to have arrived Sunday for ceasefire talks with Egyptian officials, acting as mediators for Hamas. Nabeel Sha’ath, a senior Fatah official, was sent to Gaza by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for talks with the rival Hamas leaders.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the emir of Qatar, Sheik Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, were in Cairo on previously planned visits, and an emergency meeting of the Arab League was held as well. Erdogan and the Qatari emir have been working closely with the Obama administration in the US-backed campaign to subvert and overthrow the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, but they found that this subservience wins no influence in Washington when it comes to the mass murder of Palestinians in Gaza.

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi is under mounting public pressure to take action in response to the atrocities in Gaza, but his military-backed regime has reiterated its commitment to the Camp David accord between Egypt and Israel signed by Anwar Sadat in 1978. US officials, who hold the purse strings for the Egyptian military, have made it clear that Washington will not tolerate any shift in Egyptian policy in relation to Israel.

The Obama administration has demanded that Morsi pressure Hamas to accept a ceasefire, in effect demanding that the victims of Israeli aggression stop fighting back and allow themselves to be killed at will.

More fundamentally, Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood regime, representing a faction of the Egyptian bourgeoisie, are preoccupied with the dangers of a social explosion in Egypt arising from mass dissatisfaction with the new government, which has failed to resolve any of the burning social questions that led to the revolutionary upheaval against the Mubarak dictatorship last year.

While Israeli warplanes were dropping bombs on Gaza Sunday, Egyptian military units were moving against squatters on an island in the Nile in the southern part of Cairo, where they killed three protesters who were using metal barricades and burning tires to block an access road. Dozens were arrested in the violence, the first street battle between the army and the Egyptian population since Morsi took office in June.



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