

Israel bombs Gaza, shoots down West Bank youth

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Israel announced that it has placed its military on “high alert” Thursday as popular anger erupted following the deaths of a prominent Palestinian prisoner and two young protesters in the occupied West Bank.

Thousands joined funeral processions Thursday for Maysara Abuhamdia, a 64-year-old Palestine Liberation Organization veteran who died Tuesday in Israeli custody, and for two teenage cousins, Amer Nassar, 17, and Naki Belbisi, 18, who were shot down Wednesday night by Israeli troops using live ammunition against protests over Abuhamdia’s death.

According to the account of the Israeli military, its troops fired on the youth and two others after they threw a Molotov cocktail at a West Bank checkpoint in the town of Tulkarem. They responded with gunfire, killing one, and then chased after the three who fled, killing another and wounding one more.

Over a dozen Palestinian protesters have been killed by the Israel Defense Force since the year began.

Clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli forces broke out Thursday particularly in Hebron, a Palestinian city of 160,000 where a Zionist settlement, heavily guarded by Israeli troops, has been set up in the very heart of the town. Confrontations also took place in Nablus, Jerusalem and elsewhere.

Abuhamdia’s funeral procession in Hebron was joined by thousands of mourners chanting slogans and waving Palestinian flags as his body was carried to the mosque. Thousands more marched behind the bodies of the two murdered youth—wrapped in Palestinian flags with their bloodied faces visible—in their village of Anabta near Tulkarem.

Abuhamdia’s body was given a military escort by the armed section of Fatah, with which Abuhamdia had been affiliated in exile in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan in the 1970s. Returning to the occupied West Bank in the 1990s, following the Oslo accords, he became a general in the Palestinian Authority’s Preventive Security Force. He was arrested by Israeli authorities on charges of organizing a

failed suicide bombing during the second Intifada in 2002 and was sent to prison for life.

Some 4,600 Palestinian detainees launched a one-day hunger strike in protest over Abuhamdia’s death. The action was continued into a second day by at least 1,600 of them.

This marked the second death of a Palestinian in Israeli custody in little more than two months. At the end of February, Arafat Jaradat, 30, died after being tortured during interrogation.

Anger over Abuhamdia’s death stemmed from the conviction that Israeli authorities denied him necessary medical treatment, deliberately letting him die, while refusing to grant him a humanitarian release as his life ebbed away.

The PLO veteran had first sought medical treatment in August of 2012, complaining of pain and swelling in his throat and neck. While prison doctors examined him and took biopsies, it was not until January that he was told he had cancer. Only last month, after being told he had only days to live, did chemotherapy treatment begin, but it was then interrupted for the Jewish holidays.

Abuhamdia himself indicted the Israeli authorities for carrying out a form of medical torture. Excerpts from a letter posted on his Facebook support page state:

“The intentional negligence starts during the treatment, when the doctors receive orders to not cure the patient but to give him painkillers without any restoration of the damaged parts ... these instructions come from the Israeli security apparatus, and the goal is to keep the prisoners alive but not cured to be a lesson to others.”

The clashes on the West Bank follow Israeli air strikes against Gaza on Tuesday, the first since Israel carried out an eight-day siege of the embattled Palestinian territory last November in which at least 170 people were killed.

The bombing was another act of disproportionate retaliation over the firing of a handful of crude rockets toward Israeli territory—half of which landed short inside the Gaza Strip.

When similar rockets were fired two weeks ago during US

President Barack Obama's trip to Israel, Tel Aviv responded with sweeping acts of collective punishment, including sealing off the border crossings into Gaza for a week and reducing the Mediterranean waters where it permits Gazans to fish from six nautical miles to three.

Bowing to pressure from both Israel and the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, Gaza's ruling Hamas administration reportedly arrested at least two members of a Salafist organization that claimed credit for some of the more recent rockets. While Hamas denied that it had detained them or was suppressing "resistance against the occupation," the group publicly denounced their members' detention.

The president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Mahmud Abbas, charged that Israel had deliberately provoked tensions with the aim of derailing the revival of the so-called peace process by the Obama administration. US Secretary of State John Kerry is scheduled to return to Jerusalem and Ramallah next week ostensibly to restart negotiations between the extreme right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the PA.

"The Israeli government is liable for the repercussions of these incidents, which will harm American efforts to renew negotiations," Abbas charged. He accused the Israeli government of "trying to ignite chaos," adding, "Apparently Israel wants a third intifada."

Senior Israeli defense official Amos Gilad dismissed Abbas's warning, expressing the Zionist regime's contempt for the submissive leadership of the PA. "The term 'third intifada' is meant to describe a general breakdown and uprising," he told Israel Radio. "There are no powers there pushing for a third intifada or general uprising."

Indeed, during Thursday's protests, PA police intervened in an attempt to prevent demonstrators from reaching Israeli positions.

According to a report in the Israeli daily *Haaretz* Thursday, Abbas has unilaterally offered to postpone any actions through the United Nations, which granted the PA observer state status last November, in order to facilitate Kerry's "peace" efforts. This includes putting off applying to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, where it could charge Israel with war crimes for its illegal occupation and settlement activities.

Meanwhile, Israel has categorically rejected the PA's demand for a temporary suspension of settlement construction as a precondition for renewing negotiations. Already some 340,000 Israelis have been settled in the Palestinian West Bank, with their settlements and security roads dividing the territory into a patchwork of economically unviable scraps of territory. Netanyahu's new government is even more right-wing than the one that preceded it, with pro-

settler and ultra-nationalist parties holding key ministries.

During his visit last month, Obama demanded that the Palestinian leadership drop the call for even a temporary freeze on new settlements, even as Tel Aviv has announced plans to go ahead with construction in the so-called E1 corridor, which would bifurcate the West Bank and separate it from Jerusalem, putting the last nail in the coffin of the "two-state solution."

It was reported during the Obama visit that Abbas might accept a secret pledge from Netanyahu to suspend settlement construction.

Obama's reiteration of unconditional US support for Israel removed any grounds for illusions in Washington playing the role of an "honest broker" in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The continued pursuit of these talks by Abbas and the PA only reflect their own subordination to US imperialism's predatory project in the Middle East and dependence upon infusions of US cash to maintain their corrupt administration.

Israeli confidence that the PA's collaboration—as well as the submission of Hamas—effectively precludes a renewed revolt by the Palestinians in the occupied territories may soon prove unfounded. Anger in the occupied territories is increasingly directed against the Palestinian Authority itself and the clique of crony capitalists that have enriched themselves off of it. A new uprising has the potential of sweeping it away.

The attitude of Palestinians toward the PA and its leadership was expressed clearly by the son of Maysara Abuhamdia in the wake of his death. In an interview with the web site *Electronic Intifada*, he called it "a big disgrace that my father has the rank of major general in the PA, but the PA is not able to release him while at the same time it continues its security coordination with Israel." Tariq Abuhamdia added, "It's not even coordination, they are following orders like slaves."



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