

Israel attacks Palestinian territories after bodies of missing youth discovered

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The bodies of three Israeli teenagers were discovered overnight, buried in a shallow grave in a field northwest of Halhoul, a town inside the West Bank territory of the Palestinian Authority. Halhoul is only a short distance from where they were last seen hitchhiking to a nearby illegal Israeli settlement on June 12. According to initial media reports, Gilad Shaer and Naftali Fraenkel, both 16, and Eyal Yifrah, 19, were most likely shot shortly after they disappeared.

Without any evidence, the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately accused the Islamist Palestinian party Hamas of kidnapping the youth. Over the past three weeks, a purported search for the boys was used to justify a rampage through the West Bank by the Israeli military, attacking Hamas members and facilities.

Hundreds of checkpoints were erected across the territory and Palestinians were blocked from entering East Jerusalem. At least 2,200 homes and businesses have been ransacked, colleges and universities raided, and radio and television broadcasts shut down. As many as 400 Palestinians have been detained without charge. Six people have been killed by Israeli forces, including a 14-year-old boy, and at least 120 injured.

The Israeli political establishment has now seized on the discovery of the teenagers' bodies to bay, for not only more blood, but the physical destruction of Hamas in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu stated: "Hamas is responsible and Hamas will pay." Economy Minister Naftali Bennett declared: "There is no forgiveness for those who murder children." Transport Minister Yisrael Katz called for the destruction of "Hamas infrastructure in Gaza and Judea and Samaria [the West Bank]." Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon said: "We must destroy the houses of Hamas members, destroy their arsenals

wherever they are."

The leader of the opposition Labor Party, Isaac Herzog, said the "long arm of the security forces will reach the murderers."

Hamas had denied involvement in the disappearance of the teenagers, though one of its statements labelled as "heroes" whoever was behind the kidnappings. Yesterday, its spokesman Abu Zuhuri declared as "stupid" the allegation that Hamas murdered them. He accused the Netanyahu government of "trying to use this story to justify its extensive war against our people, against resistance and against Hamas."

Israeli human rights groups had already accused the Netanyahu government of responding to the disappearance of the boys with "unwarranted infringements on basic rights and collective punishment." The operations now being prepared are of a vastly greater magnitude.

Overnight, the West Bank homes of two Hamas members accused of involvement in the kidnapping were blown up by Israeli troops—the first such "punitive house demolitions" since 2005. B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights group, labelled the demolitions "an official policy of harming the innocent."

In Gaza, Palestinian sources claimed that Israeli jets have carried out many as 40 air strikes since the bodies were found. The main Hamas leadership has reportedly gone underground in anticipation of Israeli assassination attempts. Ground troops are poised to go back into Gaza for the first time since the bloody onslaught launched by Israel in December 2008.

Netanyahu and his government have shamelessly exploited the disappearance of the boys to break up the tentative steps by Hamas and the Fatah organisation of Palestinian Authority President Mamoud Abbas toward forming a "national unity" government, ahead of

elections next year. The agreement, struck in April and signed on June 1, was intended to end the current division of the Palestinian territories between the Hamas-controlled Gaza and Fatah-controlled West Bank.

The façade of unity among the warring Palestinian bourgeois factions was being used to appeal to the major powers and the United Nations to apply greater pressure on Israel to curtail its illegal establishment of settlements in the West Bank and withdraw its military forces from the occupied territory.

In April, Netanyahu cancelled negotiations with the Palestinian Authority on the grounds that Hamas refuses to officially recognise Israel and is a “terrorist organisation.” In June, he called on “the international community” not to recognise any government that includes Hamas.

Since the June 12 disappearances, Netanyahu has moved toward openly repudiating any “two-state solution” in which the Palestinian Authority would be established as a nation state. On Sunday, he utilised the geopolitical turmoil produced by the seizure of Iraqi cities by the extremist Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to declare that his government would maintain an indefinite military occupation of the Palestinian territories. He told a conference that Israel required “a security fence on our eastern border,” which he defined as the Jordan River, thereby including the West Bank. He asserted that only the Israeli military could provide security and prevent incursions into Palestinian territory by ISIS or other Islamists.

Dani Dayan, a representative of the Yesha Council, an Israeli settlers’ organisation, gloated to the *Times of Israel* that the speech demonstrated that Netanyahu “does not believe the creation of a Palestinian state is possible under the current circumstances.” Earlier on Sunday, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman told Israeli Army Radio that only the full occupation of the Gaza Strip, not just air strikes, could prevent Palestinian militants firing missiles into Israel.

Even before the current intensification of repression, UN political affairs officer Jeffrey Feltman had warned on June 21 that tensions were so acute that “we might get to the point of a third intifada”—referring to previous Palestinian uprisings against Israeli oppression.



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