

As thousands mourn murdered teenagers

## Israeli government prepares onslaught against Palestinian people

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2 July 2014

Tens of thousands of people across Israel and internationally assembled yesterday to mourn the three teenagers whose bodies were discovered on Monday in a shallow grave not far from where they disappeared on June 12. Eyal Yifrah, 19, and Naftali Fraenkel and Gilad Shaer, both 16, were kidnapped and murdered as they hitchhiked back from a religious school in Kfar Etzion, one of the illegal Israeli settlements in the Gush Etzion region of the Palestinian West Bank territory.

The Israeli regime of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has seized on the tragic death of the young men as the pretext for escalating its aggression against the Palestinian people and strengthening Israel's grip on the occupied territories. The Israeli government has declared that the Islamist party Hamas is responsible for the murders, without providing any evidence to substantiate the charge, which is denied by Hamas.

Early Tuesday, the West Bank homes of two Hamas members accused of involvement in the kidnapping were blown up by Israeli troops—the first such punitive demolitions since 2005. In Gaza, Palestinian sources said Israeli jets had carried out many as 40 air strikes since the bodies were found.

On Tuesday, Israeli police released extracts of an emergency call recorded on the day the teenagers disappeared, in which one, believed to be Gilad Shaer, stated, “I was kidnapped.” The *New York Times* reported that another voice, speaking in Hebrew, shouted “head down” and then, in Arabic, demanded the phone. According to the *Times*, Israeli journalists who have heard more of the call claim that a gunshot could be heard. Medical examinations have ascertained that the three youth were killed not long after they were abducted.

In Israel, the families held separate services in their home towns before coming together to conduct a joint burial of the three youth at the Modi'in Cemetery.

Among the thousands who attended the funerals was

Netanyahu, who delivered a eulogy to the slain teenagers. Within hours, he was fronting the media to issue blood-curdling threats of vengeance against Hamas.

Even the US State Department, which rarely questions any action or statement of the Zionist regime, refused yesterday to endorse the accusation against Hamas. Deputy spokesperson Marie Harf stated: “Hamas may have been involved. I am not at this point saying they were responsible.”

Netanyahu has had no such hesitations. Flanked by his defense minister, Moshe Ya'alon, and military head, Lieutenant General Benny Gantz, he told a press conference a few hours after the funerals: “Hamas is responsible. Hamas is paying and Hamas will continue to pay.” A meeting of the Israeli security cabinet took place on Tuesday night, at which the nature of the Netanyahu government's response to the murders was being discussed.

Two members of Hamas who live in the town of Hebron, not far from where the teenagers were abducted, have been named as the key suspects in their murder. From the day the youth went missing, Netanyahu's government has exploited its unsubstantiated accusations against the entire Hamas organisation to unleash massive violence in the West Bank.

Thousands of homes have been raided and up to 600 alleged Hamas members or supporters dragged off and imprisoned. At least six people have been killed and 120 wounded.

The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, which is controlled by Hamas's rival, Fatah, and headed by President Mahmoud Abbas, has collaborated with Israeli forces while issuing token condemnations of the scale of the repression.

Netanyahu's immediate aim has been to destroy any prospect of Hamas and Fatah implementing the agreement they reached in April to form a “national unity” government and establish a common administration over both the West Bank and the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. The national unity regime is viewed by the Palestinian bourgeois factions

as crucial in getting the necessary international support for the recognition of the Palestinian Authority as a nation-state, with a seat in the United Nations.

The Fatah-Hamas agreement followed talks in March between US President Barack Obama and Abbas, during which Obama heaped praise upon the Palestinian Authority for the “strong institutions” that had been built in the West Bank “in preparation for a day in which the Palestinians have their own state.” The so-called Palestinian state formally endorsed by Washington would, were it ever to come into existence, be little more than a holding pen for the Palestinian people, with the Israeli military remaining in control of the borders and Palestinian lands divided and cut off from one another by Israeli-controlled roads and barriers.

Netanyahu’s Likud party, along with much of the Israeli political establishment, formally accepts a so-called “two-state solution,” but is virulently opposed to losing control over the territories that Israel seized and occupied in the 1967 war.

In April, an alarmed Netanyahu seized upon the beginning of talks between Fatah and Hamas to reject any further negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, on the grounds that Hamas was a “terrorist organisation.” The Obama administration, however, signalled that it was prepared to work with the unity government.

The Israeli ruling elite now sees an opportunity to reverse what it feared were moves in Washington toward recognising Palestine. The US and other major powers are focussed on the tensions with Russia over Ukraine and the chaos wracking the Middle East, with the civil wars in Syria and Iraq threatening to draw the neighbouring Arab states and Iran into a regional war.

The disappearance of the three teenagers this month, and now the confirmation that they were murdered, is being used to whip up nationalist and anti-Arab sentiment in Israel and justify yet another barbaric war against the Palestinian people.

There are indications that Netanyahu is preparing a full-scale military onslaught into the Palestinian territories. Last night, following the security cabinet meeting, he outlined his government’s three “objectives” to the media: to find the killers and kidnappers of the youth; to weaken Hamas’s infrastructure and manpower in the West Bank; and to conduct operations against it in Gaza.

In operations last night, a 19-year-old Palestinian, Yousouf Ibrahim, was shot dead by Israeli troops during raids in the Jenin refugee camp, in the north of the West Bank. Israeli authorities stated he had thrown a grenade. Witnesses cited by Al Jazeera denied the allegation, accusing Israeli forces of gunning him down as he and a friend were walking home. He was carrying a box of eggs.

Many more Palestinians and Israelis, young and old, may well lose their lives in the coming days and weeks. Among the measures Netanyahu is reportedly contemplating are wholesale targeted assassinations, the first deployment of Israeli troops into Gaza since early 2009, demands that Abbas repudiate the unity agreement with Hamas, and the announcement of the permanent military occupation of the West Bank.

In a chilling comment to journalists as the cabinet session was underway, Deputy Foreign Minister Tzachi Hanegbi remarked: “I don’t know how many leaders of Hamas will remain alive after tonight.” Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman issued a statement calling for an operation in the West Bank and Gaza on the scale of the 2002 “Defensive Shield” onslaught, during which tens of thousands of Israeli troops rampaged through the occupied territories, destroying the infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority, killing close to 500 people, wounding over 1,400, and detaining at least 7,000.

The most extreme Zionist tendencies in Israel are not waiting for the government to decide on a course of action. A mob rioted in Jerusalem yesterday, attempting to attack Arabs and their property. As they marched, they chanted “Revenge” and “Kahane was right.” Meir Kahane, a right-wing demagogue who was assassinated in 1990, advocated annexing the occupied territories and ethnic cleansing to drive all Arabs out of what he called “Greater Israel.”

The *Times of Israel* reported that in the Gush Etzion region a group of Zionist settlers exploited the deaths to declare the establishment of yet another illegal Israeli settlement, cynically naming it Givat Oz Ga-on—which in Hebrew characters forms an acronym of Gilad, Eyal and Naftali.

Political responsibility for the tragic death of the teenagers lies first and foremost with Zionism and its representatives such as Netanyahu, as well as US imperialism, which supplies Israel with billions worth of military equipment. The death, dislocation and oppression the Zionist state has inflicted and continues to inflict upon the Palestinian people is the root cause of the sectarian and ethnic hatreds that lie behind the murder of three innocent youth.



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