

# Air strikes kill civilians as Israel prepares new Gaza bloodbath

Bill Van Auken  
9 July 2014

Israeli bombings and rocket attacks against the densely populated and impoverished neighborhoods of Gaza claimed the lives of at least 27 Palestinians by late Tuesday night and left well over 130 others wounded, many of them seriously.

The Israelis military boasted that it had launched over 273 airstrikes on Tuesday. The attacks, carried out by F-16 fighter jets, Apache helicopters and drones, turned homes into rubble and sent towering plumes of fire and smoke into the skies over Gaza, where nearly two million Palestinians are confined in what amounts to the world's largest open-air prison.

The worst of the attacks was carried out against a house in the southern Gazan city of Khan Yunis, where a missile fired by an F-16 warplane struck the building as its residents were trying to escape. Among the seven killed in the attack were two young boys, ages 13 and 14. An eight-year-old child who was severely wounded by shrapnel died later in a hospital. At least 25 more people were wounded in the air strike.

Other strikes took the form of "targeted assassinations." Individual members of the ruling Hamas party were murdered by missile strikes on their homes or cars, or were annihilated while walking in the street.

Gaza medical officials are warning that the continued attacks will quickly spell a humanitarian catastrophe under conditions where the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of the territory has left hospitals without many basic drugs or supplies and woefully short on others. Fuel shortages have frequently caused Gaza to be without power, threatening the lives of patients on medical devices such as incubators and dialysis machines.

"In the past, we used to have a crisis in one field, not crises on all levels like today," Dr. Ayman al-Sahbani, the head of emergency services at Al-Shifa hospital, Gaza's largest medical facility, told Al Jazeera news.

The government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has authorized the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to call up as many as 40,000 reservists in preparation for a possible ground assault. Troops, battle tanks and armored

personnel carriers have already been mobilized along Israel's border with Gaza. While the IDF command called up only 1,500 reservists on Monday, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz indicated that a much wider call-up would begin in order to replace troops occupying the West Bank that are being redeployed to the Gaza border.

Israeli officials made it clear that the bloodletting on Monday night and Tuesday was only the beginning. A source close to Netanyahu told Israeli army radio Tuesday that the prime minister was meeting with top military commanders that afternoon to organize a "significant broadening" of the Israeli offensive, in which the IDF would be ordered to "take off the gloves."

In a video statement broadcast on Israeli television Tuesday night, Netanyahu declared that he had "directed a significant expansion" of the military assault on Gaza, which the IDF has dubbed, in English, "Operation Protective Edge." This is a deliberate mistranslation of the Hebrew, which is *Tzuk Eytan*, or "Solid Rock." The Israeli regime clearly thinks an accurate translation of the Hebrew phrase would too accurately suggest the brutality of the military aggression it is carrying out.

Israeli propaganda, dutifully echoed by the Western media, portrays the pummeling of Gaza as a "defensive" action by Tel Aviv in response to rocket attacks launched from Gazan territory against Israel. As of Tuesday night, however, these attacks had not claimed one Israeli life, nor left anyone seriously wounded. Ignored is the fact that the rocket attacks themselves were launched in response to earlier Israeli bombings, assassinations and wholesale arrests of Palestinian politicians and militants.

It is widely believed in Israel that some form of ground invasion is virtually inevitable. The last major attack on Gaza in November 2012 was ended, thanks to an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire, after some 150 Palestinians were killed, but without an invasion. The US-backed regime of Egyptian military strongman Abdel Fattah el Sisi has shown no desire to play a similar role this time around.

In the last ground invasion in 2008–2009, known as

Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli military killed more than 1,400 Palestinians, roughly half of them unarmed civilians. A total of 13 Israelis died during the same operation, all but three of them soldiers.

Such bloody assaults have become so regular that, as the *New York Times* noted Tuesday, Israeli security officials refer to the killing sprees in Gaza with terms such as “mowing the grass.”

As always, there is a strong element of domestic politics driving the Israeli aggression. On the eve of the offensive, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman dissolved his Yisrael Beiteinu party’s alliance with Netanyahu’s Likud bloc, while agreeing to remain in the coalition government. The maneuver allows Lieberman to criticize Netanyahu from the right, demanding an even more bloodthirsty policy against the Palestinians, in preparation for challenging Likud in the next election. This challenge from the right is clearly pushing Netanyahu to expand the killing in Gaza.

However, the present offensive has been politically prepared over the entire last month, beginning with the June 12 kidnapping and murder of three Israeli youths, who were abducted while hitchhiking from an illegal Zionist settlement in the occupied West Bank.

The Netanyahu government launched a major international propaganda campaign employing the hash tag #BringBackOurBoys, indicting Hamas, without a shred of evidence, for the kidnapping. Under the pretext of searching for the missing young men, the Israeli regime launched a massive crackdown in the occupied West Bank, arresting more than 560 Palestinians, including leading officials affiliated with Hamas. At least 200 of them are still imprisoned without charges.

After the discovery of the bodies of the three youths on June 30, authorities released a tape recording of a call made by one of them to the police which ended with the sounds of gunshots. Security officials acknowledged that they had concluded from the outset that the three had been killed immediately after their abduction. However, they kept this news from the public, imposing a gag order on the Israeli media, and even lied to the families.

The Netanyahu government was determined to fully exploit the incident for a series of political purposes. It sought to use the repression on the West Bank—and the drawing into it of the security forces of the Palestinian Authority, which nominally governs the territory—as a means of scuttling the reconciliation pact the PA had reached with Hamas. That agreement led to a new unity government which has been tacitly recognized internationally, but bitterly rejected by Israel.

It also used the kidnapping to deflect international criticism of Tel Aviv for scuttling the latest round of the

decades-old “peace talks” by resuming the expansion of Zionist settlements on the West Bank and failing to proceed with a promised release of Palestinian political prisoners.

Finally, the episode was employed to foment right-wing Zionist nationalism and virulent anti-Palestinian sentiments within the Israeli population. Netanyahu himself referred to Palestinians as “human animals” and spoke of “vengeance.”

In an article exposing the Israeli regime’s manipulation of the kidnapping, Max Blumenthal, the author of *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*, writes of Netanyahu and the Israeli military-intelligence apparatus: “Through a toxic blend of propaganda, subterfuge and incitement, they inflamed a precarious situation, manipulating Israelis into supporting their agenda until they made an utterly avoidable nightmare inevitable.”

This nightmare took the form of right-wing Zionist mobs marching through Jerusalem chanting “Death to Arabs” and attacking Palestinians. It resulted in the savage murder of 16-year-old Mohammed Abu Khdeir, who was burned alive last Wednesday by a gang of extreme-right Zionists.

Now the nightmare is being inflicted upon Gaza. As with previous offensives, the latest Israeli aggression enjoys the unqualified support of Washington. Obama spokesman Josh Earnest told a White House press conference Tuesday, “We strongly condemn the continuing rocket fire into Israel... At the same time, we appreciate the call that Prime Minister Netanyahu has made to act responsibly.”

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki declared that Israel was “sending a strong message” with its killings in Gaza, and repeatedly asserted the Zionist regime’s “right to defend itself.” Asked by a reporter whether the Palestinians in Gaza had a right to defend themselves, she replied, “I don’t understand what you’re getting at.”



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**