

# Israel rejects Kerry's Gaza ceasefire

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet unanimously rejected a US-Egyptian proposal for a seven-day ceasefire in the one-sided war against Gaza Friday night, signaling that Tel Aviv intends to expand its massacre of Palestinians.

In 18 days of war, Israel's military machine has killed nearly 900 Palestinians, 80 percent of them civilians. Nearly 6,000 others have been wounded, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced in the besieged territory, which faces a humanitarian catastrophe as water, electricity, food, medical supplies and other basic necessities are cut off for the majority of the population.

The cabinet decision came amid mounting international opposition to Israel's blitzkrieg as well as the greatest unrest on the occupied West Bank in a number of years. Another six Palestinians were slain Friday in demonstrations throughout the West Bank called as a "day of rage" against the slaughter in Gaza. One of the fatalities was caused by an armed Zionist settler firing into a protest from his car.

The protests came on the heels of a massive Thursday night march from Ramallah to the fortress-like Qalandiyah checkpoint separating Jerusalem from the West Bank. Over 30,000 participated, with Palestinian youth throwing rocks, flares and fireworks at Israeli troops, who fired on them with live ammunition. One 17-year-old protester was shot to death in these clashes while another was mortally wounded and ruled "clinically dead."

The mass protests have led to predictions that the West Bank is on the verge of a third Intifada, referring to the mass popular uprisings that broke out in the occupied territories between 1987 and 1993 and again from 2000 to 2005.

The upheavals have severely undermined the Palestinian Authority (PA) of President Mahmoud Abbas, which has acted as an extension of the Israeli

occupation in return for rich payoffs to its leadership from Washington and the European Union. While in the past, the PA's US-trained security forces have brutally repressed demonstrations on the West Bank, serving as a buffer for Israeli occupation forces, this time the decision was made that they could not contain the popular outrage over Gaza. A new generalized uprising would, inevitably, be directed not only at Israel, but also at its accomplices within the PA.

There were reports late Friday that the Netanyahu government had agreed to a 12-hour cease-fire beginning Saturday morning. Reuters quoted a Hamas spokesman as saying that the Islamist movement would also observe the half-day truce.

Whether this brief respite from the continuous air, land and sea bombardment of the impoverished and densely populated territory holds or not, there are indications that a major escalation of the violence is being prepared. The Israeli government has repeatedly used truces and their alleged violations by Palestinians as the justification for such escalations.

Speaking to troops in central Israel on Friday evening, Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon instructed them to be "ready for the possibility that we will instruct the IDF to significantly expand the ground offensive in Gaza very soon."

Similarly, the Israeli commander of the Gaza operation, Maj.-Gen. Sami Turgeman, made a public appeal Friday for the Netanyahu government to continue the onslaught. "I believe that every day of combat will allow us to deliver a fatal blow to what Hamas considers an important infrastructure," he said.

Tel Aviv has presented the ground invasion as a defensive action to destroy tunnels that supposedly threaten Israel with infiltration by armed militants and are used to move the largely ineffectual rockets fired by Hamas in protest over Israel's siege of Gaza. In reality, as a series of bloody events have demonstrated, the real

aim of the Israeli offensive is to terrorize and subdue an entire population that was turned into homeless refugees 66 years ago and has been subjected to occupation for at least 47 years.

The Israeli cabinet vote Friday represented something of a public humiliation for Kerry, who had gone through the motions of shuttle diplomacy the previous five days, flying back and forth between Tel Aviv and Cairo, promoting a ceasefire deal crafted by Egyptian military strongman Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. That proposal was designed to secure an unconditional surrender by Hamas, which is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Egyptian movement that has been ruthlessly repressed by el-Sisi since the July 2013 coup that overthrew President Mohamed Mursi.

The agreement apparently would have kept the Israel Defense Forces inside Gaza, allowing them to continue blowing up tunnels and other infrastructure. The truce would supposedly be accompanied by negotiations on Palestinian and Israeli demands. Given Kerry's track record on such negotiations in the so-called "peace process," this is a decidedly empty promise.

Kerry tried to recruit Turkey and Qatar to pressure Hamas, which is designated by Washington as a terrorist organization despite having been popularly elected by the people of Gaza, into accepting the deal. There was no indication that it had done so when the Israeli rejection came.

Previously, Hamas leaders had indicated that they would enter into a lasting truce only on the basis of an agreement to lift Israel's seven-year blockade of Gaza. They have also demanded that Israel release hundreds of Palestinians rounded up in the crackdown on the West Bank last month following the kidnap and killing of three young Israeli settlers.

At a press conference that had been meant to announce the implementation of the ceasefire proposal, Kerry was barely coherent, talking first about having still to work out "terminology in the context of the framework" of the proposal, and then acknowledging that the US and its allies "don't yet have that final framework." He babbled further about still "having a discussion about various ideas and various concepts on how to deal with this issue."

If the US was seriously interested in halting the slaughter in Gaza, it could force an end to the Israeli aggression in short order. Israel depends upon

Washington for \$3 billion annually in military aid. This does not include hundreds of millions of dollars worth of missiles and other equipment that is being rushed to Tel Aviv to keep the war against the Palestinians going.

US imperialism views Israeli aggression as an adjunct of its own bloody campaign to assert US hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East. Just as it has carried out its own reckless and disastrous interventions, from Iraq to Libya to Syria, it is prepared to support the Zionist camarilla in a military adventure that can only deepen Israel's profound internal crisis.

The shelling of Gaza continued into the evening hours, bringing Friday's death toll to at least 67. Among the dead was Mohammad Matar al'Abadla, 32, a medic who was killed when an Israeli missile was fired at his ambulance as he was trying to retrieve dead and wounded people from the Khuza'a district of Khan Younis.

A five-year-old Palestinian child was shot and killed by an Israeli sniper in the Shuja'eyya neighborhood of Gaza City. And an air strike killed a 23-year-old pregnant woman inside her home in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah. The Gaza Health Ministry reported that doctors were able to save her unborn child.



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