

Gaza braces for new onslaught as Israel vows to expand war

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Brushing aside calls from the United Nations and Washington for an immediate and unconditional humanitarian cease-fire, the Israeli government vowed late Monday to escalate and prolong the three-week-old slaughter in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli warplanes dropped leaflets over Gaza City warning residents of an impending onslaught, while the Israel Defense Forces reported that the army had made telephone calls and sent text messages to the civilian populations of the eastern Gaza City neighborhoods of Shejaiya and Zeitun as well as the northern Gaza towns of Jabaliya, Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya, demanding that they “evacuate immediately towards central Gaza City.”

The warnings made clear that these areas, inhabited by an estimated 400,000 people, would be turned into free-fire zones, with anyone remaining behind treated as an enemy combatant. As of last week, the United Nations Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA reported that Israel had decreed fully 43 percent of Gaza—where 1.8 million people are crowded into a territory about the size of the US city of Philadelphia—as off limits to civilians. These latest threats substantially increase the size of these no-go areas, which have in many cases been reduced to rubble, killing entire families in their homes.

There is nowhere safe for people to go, with over 167,000 Gazans already having fled their homes to seek refuge in schools and facilities run by the main United Nations Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, and with even these buildings coming under Israeli bombardment. Many tens of thousands more Gazans are believed to have moved in with relatives. With the territory blockaded by both Israel and Egypt, no one can escape.

The death toll in Gaza climbed toward 1,100 on

Monday with at least 44 more people reported killed by Israeli bombs and shells. The worst single atrocity took place in the northern Gaza refugee camp of al-Shati, when Israeli shells tore into a playground where families had gone to celebrate the first day of the Eid al-Fitr Muslim holiday. At least 10 people were killed, eight of them children, and another 46 were wounded.

According to aid agencies, at least three-quarters of those killed thus far have been civilians, while close to one third of the dead, as well as of the some 6,500 wounded, are children.

In another strike, Israeli missiles struck an outpatient clinic of the al-Shifa Hospital, the main medical facility in the besieged and impoverished coastal territory. While no casualties were reported, the attack was only the latest in a series of Israeli bombings of medical facilities, a war crime under international law.

In both cases, spokesman for Tel Aviv claimed that the IDF had not conducted attacks in those areas and attributed the strikes to misfires by Hamas missiles. This was the same tack adopted in the aftermath of the attack Thursday on a UN school in Beit Hanoun, where 15 of the hundreds who had taken shelter there were killed. Those present left no doubt that the source of that attack was Israeli guns, while in the latest massacre, local officials have said that they recovered fragments of the Israeli munitions used.

Among the murdered children at the playground Monday was the 10-year-old son of the driver for CBS News in Gaza. CBS News’ Barry Petersen reported from the scene of the killing, showing a still smoking Israeli round.

The Israeli media strategy is to lie about their responsibility for particularly high-profile and egregious mass killings, even while defending the IDF’s slaughter of over 1,000 Palestinians.

While the total number of attacks was substantially down during the day on Monday, as a result of Hamas calling a unilateral Eid truce, they resumed in earnest by mid-evening, with heavy artillery and tank fire.

The IDF suffered its own losses in the largely one-sided war, reporting that five more of its soldiers were killed, bringing the total number of fatalities to 48, the highest toll the force has suffered since Israel's ill-fated invasion of Lebanon in 2006. Total civilian deaths in Israel during the three-week war in Gaza amount to three.

In a press conference at the Defense Ministry compound in Tel Aviv Monday night, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared, "There is no war more just than the heroic one our sons are fighting in," and warned that Israel "must be prepared for a prolonged campaign."

Netanyahu was followed by Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon, who said, "We have begun a military operation that will not end until we decide it," adding that Israel must be prepared to expand the war.

And Israeli army chief of staff Benny Gantz claimed that the IDF had made "considerable" achievements, adding, "As I speak, we are intensifying our operations."

The Israeli officials have presented the escalation of the assault on Gaza as a matter of destroying tunnels and rockets, but as the military campaign has gone on it has become increasingly obvious that the real aim is to terrorize the entire Palestinian population in order to break its will to resist the abysmal conditions created by Israeli occupation.

In addition to the killing and wounding of thousands and the destruction of thousands of homes, the continuing Israeli blitzkrieg against Gaza has cut off electricity to the population for at least 21 hours a day because of attacks on power lines and other infrastructure. The lack of power has left much of the population without access to water, because pumps are inoperative. Food supplies are also short.

In vowing to continue and even escalate the killing in Gaza, the Netanyahu regime explicitly rejected the calls by the United Nations and Washington for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire.

Speaking to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Netanyahu condemned a statement issued by the UN Security Council supporting a cease-fire, saying that it

was tailored to "the needs of a murderous terrorist group that attacks Israeli civilians, and has no answer for Israel's security needs—among them a demilitarization of the Gaza Strip."

The fact that the Security Council issued merely a statement, rather than passing a binding resolution, which would have been blocked by the Obama administration, left Tel Aviv free to continue its bloody operations.

Netanyahu has shown equal contempt for US calls for a ceasefire. President Barack Obama spoke with the Israeli prime minister on Sunday, describing a cease-fire as a "strategic imperative." The US president, according to the White House, also stressed support for the "disarmament of terrorist groups and the demilitarization of Gaza."

While clearly supporting Israeli objectives, Washington is nervous that the continuing carnage in Gaza will undermine its interests elsewhere, including in Iraq, where it is sending US military "advisors" to counter a Sunni insurgency, and in Afghanistan, where protests over the slaughter of Palestinians have broken out in the midst of major advances by the Taliban.

The Israeli regime has apparently brushed these concerns aside, treating its foremost financial and political patron with contempt. The Israeli daily *Haaretz* Monday cited "very senior officials in Jerusalem" as describing US Secretary of State John Kerry's proposal for a cease-fire as a "strategic terrorist attack."

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki Monday described the Israeli attacks on Kerry as "simply not the way that partners and allies treat each other," while quickly adding that "anyone would be hard pressed to find a stronger partner and ally with Israel than Secretary Kerry."



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