

Israel carries out heaviest bombardment of Gaza war

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30 July 2014

The Israeli military Tuesday carried out the most savage bombardment yet in its three-week old war against Gaza, pummeling the small impoverished territory from the air, land and sea and inflicting hundreds more civilian casualties.

While the spokesmen for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) claimed that the intensified assault had attacked 110 “terror targets,” what was struck included vital infrastructure and demonstratively non-military sites, including most importantly Gaza’s only power plant, as well as its finance ministry, the high-rise headquarters of the Al Aqsa television and radio channels and the homes of leading Hamas politicians.

For the first time in the war, central Gaza City, where many have fled to escape violence near the Israeli border, bore the brunt of the onslaught.

Entire neighborhoods were reduced to rubble, with many hundreds of more homes destroyed. According to Gaza authorities, some 5,000 homes have been completely demolished in 22 days of Israeli attacks, while over 26,000 have been damaged.

By Tuesday night, the Palestinian Ministry of Health had recorded more than 130 new fatalities since the Israeli military resumed its punishing assault on Gaza the night before, sending the death toll past the 1,200 mark.

It now seems certain that the IDF will soon surpass its own bloody record in Palestinian deaths in Gaza, killing more than the 1,400 who died during the last ground invasion, Operation Cast Lead, carried out during the New Year’s period of 2009.

The Red Crescent aid agency reported that the latest to be killed by the IDF included seven members of one family who died in an air strike in the southern town of Rafah. Tank fire claimed the lives of another seven members of a second family, who died in their home.

The deaths reported Tuesday included a number of children, who make up close to a third of those killed thus

far. Among them, according to the Ma’an Palestinian news agency, was Tahrir Nasser Jaber, age 15, who died when an Israeli air strike demolished her home in the al-Salatin neighborhood of the northern Gaza Strip. And the bodies of two young siblings, Muhammad Atta al-Najjar, 2, and Rafif Atta al-Najjar, 3, were brought to the Nasser medical center in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 194,000 Gazan children have been wounded, many of them grievously, or have lost their parents, relatives or homes, and are badly in need of psychological care.

“The physical toll is obvious. There will be chronic complications changing these children’s lives forever,” Dr. Saeed Salah, a pediatrician at Kamal Odwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya, told the *Wall Street Journal*. “Psychologically, these children will be handicapped for the rest of their lives,” he added.

It was tank fire that destroyed Gaza’s sole power plant, although Israeli spokesmen claimed that they did not know who was responsible, suggesting it could have been an errant Hamas rocket—much as they have in the previous IDF massacres of children playing in a park and of refugees seeking shelter in a UN school, as well as an attack on the territory’s main hospital.

The shells ripped into the plant’s main fuel tanks, igniting a massive fire and sending a huge plume of black smoke rising over Gaza City. Jamal Dardasawi, a spokesman for Gaza’s electricity distribution company, reported that 15 workers had been trapped inside the facility by the fire and that their fate was not immediately clear.

The Gaza Energy Authority warned that the damage caused to the plant could take a year to repair. Even before the attack, Gazans were receiving at best barely three hours of electricity a day.

The further reduction of power spells a deepening of the

territory's humanitarian catastrophe, threatening the lives of the wounded and sick in medical facilities that are already desperately short on medicine and the most basic supplies.

Reporting from the al-Shifa hospital in Gaza, Jesse Rosenfeld of the *Daily Beast* reported that its staff has seen as much as a 20 percent rise in premature births since the start of the Israeli offensive. With the power outages, incubators cease to function. "These tiny beings—too tiny even to open their eyes—never see the world they were born into," Rosenfeld reports. "Hospital staff told me that three infants have died during the power cuts."

The power outage has also affected cell phone service for hundreds of thousands of Gazans, leaving them unable to call for ambulance service when their homes are bombed and their families wounded.

In addition, without power, Gaza's pumps have ceased operation, meaning the population has no access to water. Sewage treatment plants have also been struck, and garbage collection has ceased. The result is a deepening sanitation crisis that could claim many new victims.

Tuesday's blitz against Gaza followed the televised statement of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu telling Israelis to "be prepared for a lengthy campaign." It also followed the worst one-day toll for Israeli troops, with five killed Monday in a gun battle with Hamas fighters, who emerged from a tunnel inside Israel to attack their post. Four others were killed in a mortar attack, and a tenth died in fighting in southern Gaza.

The carnage carried out on Tuesday suggests that the Netanyahu government decided to exact revenge for these military casualties by inflicting death and destruction on Gaza's civilian population. Thus far, an estimated 80 percent of the Palestinians killed in Gaza have been civilians, while only three civilians have been killed in Israel during the three weeks of war, along with 53 IDF troops.

The figures alone demonstrate that, for all the denunciations of Hamas "terrorism," it is Israel that is engaged in a war of terror against civilians, while the Palestinians are waging a struggle of resistance against a vastly superior military aggressor.

Reports of a supposed truce agreement came to nothing Tuesday following claims that both a united delegation of Palestinian factions and the Israeli government had accepted a temporary humanitarian cease-fire that was supposedly to lead to talks in Cairo.

The announcement was first made by the Palestine Liberation Organization on the West Bank. Later the same

day, Israel's Channel 2 cited an Israeli official as saying that all sides had reached an agreement.

First Hamas repudiated the claimed agreement, saying it had accepted no cease-fire and would not do so until Israel committed to a cessation of hostilities. The Israeli government also denied that it had accepted a cease-fire.

The terms of the abortive agreement apparently would have allowed the IDF to continue occupying Gaza and continue with its purported aim of destroying tunnels in the territory.

The US and Israel also offered conflicting accounts of the search for a cease-fire. US Secretary of State John Kerry said Tuesday that Netanyahu had asked for US help in brokering a deal, adding that any agreement would permit "Israel to protect itself against the tunnels and obviously not be disadvantaged for the great sacrifice they have made thus far."

Israeli officials denied any such request for US assistance. "Kerry was the one who brought up the option of a cease-fire to Netanyahu, not the other way around," Israeli officials told the AFP news agency. Netanyahu insisted, they said, that the IDF operation would "continue until the mission is over."

The latest Israeli slap in the face for the US secretary of state did nothing to shift Washington's continued support for the Zionist state's "right to defend itself," with Republicans and Democrats in Congress vying with each other over who was more committed to resupplying the IDF war machine.

Polls indicate that, in spite of the overwhelming pro-Israeli propaganda of the US media, there is growing revulsion over the Israeli bloodbath in Gaza, particularly among younger Americans. A recent Gallup survey found that 18-29 year olds in the US expressed the view two-to-one (51 percent compared to 25 percent) that Israel's actions in Gaza are unjustified. These views find no expression within the ruling political establishment.



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