

Israel intensifies Gaza slaughter after ceasefire collapses

Peter Symonds
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The 72-hour ceasefire in the Gaza Strip collapsed yesterday morning within hours of coming into force resulting in an intensification of the Israeli military's slaughter of Palestinians. At least 140 Palestinians were killed on Friday bringing the overall death toll to more than 1,600, mostly civilians, and at least 8,000 wounded since Israel launched its attacks on Gaza on July 8.

The renewed Israeli offensive has been accompanied by a barrage of lies blaming Hamas, the ruling party in Gaza, for breaching the ceasefire agreement. Just two hours after it came into effect, the Israeli military seized on a clash with Palestinian militants, in which two Israeli soldiers were killed and one possibly captured, to declare that the truce was over.

Confident that it has the backing of Washington and the international media, the Israeli government was never serious about abiding by the ceasefire or entering talks with Palestinian factions in Egypt over a longer term settlement. On Thursday, a further 16,000 reservists were called up to boost Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip.

The ceasefire was jointly announced by US Secretary of State John Kerry and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon on Thursday afternoon to give "innocent civilians a much-needed reprieve from violence" and to allow "the opportunity to carry out vital functions, including burying the dead, taking care of the injured and restocking food supplies."

However, no sooner had the truce come into force and people begun to emerge on the streets than the Israeli military renewed its operations with even greater ferocity.

Under the terms of the ceasefire, Israel and Hamas agreed to end all offensive operations at 8 a.m. local time. For Israel that meant its troops on the ground

could continue to destroy tunnels, but only those that were behind their defensive lines and led into Israel. However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared on Thursday that the military would completely destroy Hamas's tunnel networks "with or without a cease-fire."

Israel blamed Hamas for a clash involving Israeli troops searching for tunnels in no-man's land east of the city of Rafah on the Egyptian-Gaza border. Military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Peter Lerner claimed that several Palestinian militants emerged from a shaft, killed two soldiers and captured an officer.

Hamas spokesmen emphatically rejected Israel's claims that their fighters had been involved in aggressive operations. Fawzi Barhom said: "The Palestinian resistance is acting on the ground in order to defend themselves. Another spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri declared that Israel was attempting "to mislead and justify its violation of the truce and to cover their savage massacres in Rafah."

The Israel military immediately used the incident as the pretext to advance deeper into southern Gaza with airstrikes along the Egypt-Gaza border as well as heavy tank and artillery shelling continuing into the night.

Rafah resident Ayman al-Arja told the Associated Press: "We are under fire, every minute or so tanks fire shells at us... Now we are sitting in the stairwell, 11 members of my family, my brother, his nine children and wife. We just have water to drink and the radio to hear the news."

According to Gaza Health Ministry official Ashraf al-Kidra, at least 70 Palestinians were killed and 440 wounded in Israeli attacks on Friday in the Rafah area. The dead include a paramedic killed when an Israeli tank shell hit the ambulance in which he was travelling. Another 70 Palestinians were killed elsewhere in Gaza.

US President Obama immediately defended Israel, justified its continued operations to destroy tunnels as “entirely right” and blamed the collapse of the ceasefire on Hamas. He “unequivocally condemned” Hamas and called on it to release the captured Israeli soldier.

Putting pressure on Hamas to make concessions, Obama declared that it would be “very hard to put back a ceasefire back together if the Israelis and the international community can’t feel confident Hamas can follow through on a ceasefire commitment.”

In a cynical gesture to widespread international outrage over Israel’s murderous offensive, Obama added: “It’s hard to reconcile Israel’s legitimate need to defend itself with our concerns for those civilians.”

Despite this handwringing, the US, however, continues to give its unqualified support for Israel and its relentless efforts to completely crush any Palestinian resistance by terrorising the entire population of the Gaza Strip. Washington has authorised the replenishing of Israel’s stocks of ammunition and military supplies from a US stockpile in the country.

Moreover, the US Senate unanimously voted \$225 million in emergency funds for Israel to bolster its Iron Dome anti-missile system. The Israeli government is justifying its military aggression in the Gaza Strip on the basis of stopping Palestinian militants from launching crude rocket attacks on Israel as well as uprooting “terrorist tunnels.”

With the full backing of the US, the Israeli military is carrying out atrocities against a civilian population on a daily basis. Israeli war planes, tanks and artillery have laid waste to buildings and vital infrastructure in one of the most densely populated urban areas on the globe with complete disregard for civilian lives.

In a statement to the UN Security Council on Thursday, Valerie Amos, the UN’s emergency relief coordinator, detailed Israeli attacks on more than 103 UN facilities, including a school on Wednesday that killed 19 people and injured more than 100.

Much of the Gaza Strip has less than two hours electricity a day and medicine and safe water are increasingly scarce. The UN estimates that more than 400,000 people of a population of 1.8 million have been displaced from their homes, with about half staying with relatives and a quarter of a million in shelters run by local government.

The Israeli military’s brutal operations undoubtedly

constitute war crimes for which the Obama administration and its allies also bear a central responsibility.



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