

Gaza truce extended but Israel refuses to end blockade

Mike Head
14 August 2014

The Israeli government reportedly agreed late last night to a five-day extension of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. But it continued to flatly reject the central truce condition of the Hamas government in Gaza—a lifting of the devastating eight-year economic siege imposed on the tiny enclave’s 1.8 million people.

With the full support of the Obama administration and the US-backed Egyptian military regime, which is hosting the negotiations in Cairo, the Israeli government is insisting on the continuation of the ghetto-like conditions it has established in Gaza.

Not only that, Israel is demanding that Hamas effectively hand over control to the Palestinian Authority (PA), so that it can police the Gazan population and suppress resistance to Israel’s domination, as the PA already does on the West Bank.

The ceasefire extension remains in doubt, with Israeli tanks and troops still amassed on Gaza’s borders. A Hamas official accused Israel of violating the truce by shelling sites in Gaza, allegedly in response to five rockets being fired from inside Gaza just before the scheduled end of the previous 72-hour truce.

An Israeli official told Reuters that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to retaliate. Israeli aircraft carried out a number of air strikes after midnight, targeting “terror sites across the Gaza Strip,” according to an IDF statement.

Azzam al-Ahmad, head of the Palestinian negotiating delegation, earlier said the ceasefire was meant to ensure a “positive atmosphere,” claiming there had been “lots of progress.” At the same time, he conceded that Israel had refused to come to any agreement. “We had two options: not to reach an agreement, or to extend the ceasefire.”

Having pulverised Gaza for weeks, leaving nearly 2,000 Palestinians dead, thousands wounded, and

425,000 people displaced, according to UN estimates, Netanyahu’s cabinet is intent on using its destruction to strengthen Israel’s grip over Palestine.

The scale of Israel’s atrocities is indicated by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon’s statement on Tuesday that the number of Palestinian deaths includes 459 children—higher than the number of children killed in Gaza during the previous two Israeli offensives, in 2008–09 and 2012, combined.

Throughout this barbarism, Israel has been armed and financed by the US, and assisted by the Egyptian junta’s intensification of the crippling blockade since seizing power in a military coup last year. General Sisi’s regime cut off nearly all of Gaza’s already severely limited supplies and finances, rendering the Hamas government incapable of even paying its public sector workers.

Washington’s backing for Israel’s aggression was underscored when President Obama phoned Netanyahu yesterday as the truce renewal deadline approached. The White House stated: “The president reaffirmed the United States’ support for Egypt’s mediation efforts and underscored the importance of achieving a sustainable outcome that ensures Israel’s security and addresses Gaza’s humanitarian crisis.”

Despite the lip service paid to the humanitarian crisis, “ensuring Israel’s security” means continuing to arm Israel with the weapons that have been used to murder Palestinians.

“Egypt’s mediation efforts” consist of collaborating with the Zionist government to force Hamas to accept Israel’s terms. According to media reports, the Egyptian proposal includes dismissing Hamas’s demand for the lifting of the siege, delaying Palestinian demands for a seaport and an airport in Gaza, and retaining a “buffer zone” along Gaza’s border with

Israel, to be guarded by PA President Mahmud Abbas's security teams.

Israel has refused to accept even these terms, or make any other concessions, except perhaps to permit Gazans to fish along their coast, and allow some goods into Gaza, under Egyptian and PA supervision. Netanyahu's government is demanding the full "demilitarisation" of Gaza, which Israel previously occupied from 1967 to 2005.

Members of Netanyahu's coalition government publicly oppose any deal with Hamas, demanding instead its ouster via an all-out military invasion. Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, the leader of the ultra-nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party, yesterday told a meeting of district heads in Bat Hadar: "Israel cannot afford a war of attrition. If the current ceasefire is heading towards collapse," Israel must "take the initiative, even if it means a significant escalation."

Fascistic-like sentiments are increasingly being voiced, including within Netanyahu's Likud party. Likud parliamentarian and former deputy defence minister Danny Danon called on Netanyahu to assassinate the heads of Hamas after the reports of five rockets being fired into southern Israel last night. "All those trying to harm us must know clearly that we will always win," he said. "Enough stuttering and humiliation."

Netanyahu and others, however, fear that another full-scale takeover of Gaza, as existed before 2005, would be extremely costly, both financially and in troop casualties, and fuel the public outrage expressed in demonstrations around the world denouncing Israel's Gaza atrocities.

Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who is portrayed in the media as a "moderate" pushing a "peace plan" is also vehemently opposed to any deal with Hamas. Livni, who was foreign minister in Ehud Olmert's coalition during the 2008–09 Operation Cast Lead invasion of Gaza, has proposed eventual negotiations with the PA on conditions that include recognising the PA as the sovereign ruler of Gaza, insisting that all Palestinian factions yield to its rule, and establishing a PA-run mechanism to police Gaza's border crossings.

Livni told Israel's Channel 2: "The world would accept this plan for a new Gaza order." She rejected any Gaza seaport or a land linkage with "Judea and Samaria" (the West Bank), while expressing

confidence that the PA would accept such terms. "I, like most members of the cabinet, believe that Abu Mazen (Abbas) is a partner," she said.

According to Israeli commentators cited by the *New York Times*, however, "Abbas remains politically weak among his people," making any such arrangement unlikely to succeed. The PA's record of prostrating itself to Israel and the US was a major factor in Hamas's defeats of the PA in Gaza and West Bank elections in 2005 and 2006.

The atrocious conditions confronting Gazans were highlighted earlier yesterday when an ordnance blast killed five Palestinians and an Italian journalist in the northern town of Beit Lahiya as a bomb disposal squad tried to disable an Israeli missile.

Hazem Abu Murad, head of field operations for the Gaza police bomb squad, was among those killed. In interviews with foreign media in the days before he died, Murad estimated that there were 2,000 unexploded munitions in Gaza, including shells fired by Israeli tanks, artillery batteries and gunboats, and missiles from Apache helicopters, armed drones and F-16s.

Aid groups said the overall situation remains dire, with water, sewage and electricity services crippled, tens of thousands of people unable to return to their homes, and medical resources severely strained by the thousands of people wounded in the conflict.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact