Evidence of Israeli war crimes mounts as Gaza cease-fire continues

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Israel's truce with Hamas held for a second day Friday, as talks continued between the government of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and all three main Palestinian factions—including Fatah and Islamic Jihad.

The talks, mediated by Egypt, have produced statements from all three Palestinian groups claiming that a breakthrough is possible, while on Friday morning, Israeli Environmental Protection Minister Amir Peretz said that the country is "in the midst of the final stages of the negotiations, the most important stages."

Pressure is being exerted for a resolution of the ongoing conflict in Gaza from the Obama administration in the United States and by the European powers. While they support the war against the Palestinian people, they are concerned that their ally Israel is destabilising the entire Middle East and sparking a growing anti-war protest movement internationally.

Evidence of tensions between Tel Aviv and Washington was provided in reports by the *Wall Street Journal*. It claims that ties deteriorated due to concern over the toll in civilian casualties. It asserts that Israel's Defense Ministry went so far as to secure additional munitions, including mortar shells, through military-to-military channels and without the knowledge of the White House. This prompted a review procedure that required the Pentagon to consult with the White House and State Department before approving any new Israeli requests.

On Thursday, US State Department spokesperson Marie Harf told the press, "We thought Israel could do more to prevent civilian casualties… Due to the crisis in Gaza we took additional care like we would take in any crisis."

"The additional care we are taking is not permanent …The US commitment to Israel's security is unshakable," she added.

The Palestinians are seeking the rebuilding of an airport and possibly a seaport, with diplomats from Germany, France and Britain reportedly offering a secure sea route from Gaza to Cyprus that would provide access to international trade in exchange for guarantees against rearmament by Hamas. A donor conference has also been mooted for September 1.

Nevertheless, Israeli air strikes continued Thursday while Netanyahu pledged to local authority leaders that even sporadic rocket fire from Gaza would meet with massive retaliation.

On Thursday, around 10,000 Israelis protested in Rabin Square to demand that the war be resumed, a position taken by many of Netanyahu's rightist political allies and rivals, including Ysrael Beiteinu, led by Avigdor Lieberman.

One result of the lull in fighting is that it allowed reports of Israeli war crimes to take prominence. The United Nations Human Rights Council has appointed Professor William Schabas to head a commission of inquiry into Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip.

Around 2,000 Palestinians were killed in the recent fighting and 10,000 wounded, mostly civilians, compared with 64 Israeli soldiers and three civilians. Palestinian deaths include 459 children—a figure higher than in the previous two Gaza conflicts combined.

Among the crimes to be investigated is the Israeli military's policy of bombing family homes, based upon claims of them being used by Hamas and others as "command and control centres" or for weapons storage, and the Israeli assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah on August 1.

Britain's *Guardian* yesterday featured the results of an investigation conducted by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) and Al Mezan, both based in Gaza, and the West Bank-based Al-Haq; the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem; and the UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). It shows that at least 59 Palestinian families suffered multiple casualties during four weeks of Israeli bombardment. The

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youngest person killed was 10-day old Hala Abu Madi. The oldest was Abdel al-Masri, aged 97.

The *Guardian* notes that "among families in which four or more people died, 479 people were killed in total, including 212 children under the age of 18, and 15 people aged 60 and over." The killings cited include:

• An attack July 16 in which four boys, members of the Al-Bakr family, were killed while playing on a beach.

• An attack July 19 in which eight members of the Abu Jarad family were killed by the shelling of their family home, with three adults, three infants including a five month old baby, and two teenage girls "torn to pieces."

• An attack July 21 killing 11 members of the Siyyam family and injuring nine. Four more members of the family were killed in another air strike the following day.

• An attack the same day killing nine members of the Al-Qassas family. Mother, Shadia, explains, "I saw my daughters brought out on stretchers. They were cut into pieces. We couldn't recognise their face, just their clothes. We buried nine bodies in one grave because we couldn't separate the pieces."

• An attack July 23 that killed 26 members of the Abu Jame family.

• The deaths of 38 members of the Al-Najjar family in four separate strikes.

Writing in *Haaretz*, Amod Harel reports that "Operation Protective Edge" saw the IDF fire at least 32,000 shells, many into densely populated areas in just the first three weeks of fighting.

On July 20, for example, 600 artillery shells were fired in less than an hour at the east Gaza City neighborhood of Shujaiyeh, in order to extract troops under fire.

In an incident of most concern to war crimes investigations, on August 1, in Rafah, more than 1,000 artillery shells were fired and 40 airstrikes carried out in three hours following the supposed capture by Hamas of Lt. Hadar Goldin—who, it was later admitted, was, in fact, dead. Between 130 and 150 were killed, mostly civilians.

Harel reports that a senior officer "yesterday told journalists that troops in Gaza were supplied with 43,000 artillery shells… In Operation Cast Lead in 2009, the IDF fired some 8,000 artillery shells…"

Writing in *Al Monitor*, August 12, Rasha Abou Jalal cited doctors and human rights activists stating that "they have conclusive evidence that Israel used internationally banned weapons against civilians during its military aggression on the Gaza Strip, as it did during the previous two wars against Gaza in 2008-2009 and 2012."

During a press conference on July 13 at Al-Shifa Hospital, Norwegian doctor Erik Fosse said, "Many of the casualties that have arrived at the hospital confirm Israel's use of internationally banned weapons of the [Dense Inert Metal Explosive] DIME variety."

DIMEs cause the loss of limbs and lead to wounds that do not respond to treatment. They kill their victims through the amputation of limbs and contain carcinogenic tungsten.

"Al-Monitor's two-hour stay at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza saw the arrival of 11 civilians, all with amputated limbs, eight of whom died shortly after their arrival. The amputation areas had similar distinctive patterns. The skin was charred and the tissues extremely damaged, while the bones looked as if they had been sawed," Jalal writes.

Dr. Ayman al-Sahbani said, "The Israeli army indeed used DIME weapons, as some bodies arrived at the hospital amputated with a distinct smell. We have dealt with wounds that can't be healed." In addition, "Some bodies even arrived at the hospital beheaded, and others have been crushed, as if a huge rock had fallen on them."

Imad al-Gharbawi, a volunteer medic, told *Al-Monitor* that when removing the dead and wounded from their homes, "The bodies came apart in our hands as we removed them from the rubble, and their burns and wounds gave off a strange, unfamiliar stench."

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