

More Israeli crimes against Palestinians

Killings in Gaza, arrests on West Bank

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More than 10,000 Palestinians marched through the streets of Rafah, in southern Gaza, Thursday afternoon, in funerals for three top leaders of Hamas who were among the 26 killed overnight in Israeli bombing and missile strikes. The death toll of the last 45 days of one-sided warfare has reached 2,077, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

The three Hamas leaders were Mohammed Abu Shamalah, 41, Mohammed Barhoum, 45, and Raed Attar, 40, all officials of the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas. Barhoum has been marked for assassination by Israel since 1992, when he was only 23, according to the Islamist organization, which confirmed all three deaths.

The killings followed by one day the unsuccessful Israeli assassination attempt against Mohammed Deif, the senior leader of the Qassam Brigades, in an airstrike that killed his youngest wife and an eight-month-old son.

Israeli sources noted that the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his security cabinet were seeking to decapitate Hamas through such methods, after failing to decisively defeat the organization in the course of six weeks of war, including three weeks of ground incursions into the Gaza Strip. One media commentator described the killings as a potential “tiebreaker” that would provide a temporary political benefit to Netanyahu, whose poll numbers have sunk steadily throughout the conflict.

Netanyahu sought to link the Israeli escalation in Gaza to the Obama administration’s new round of airstrikes against the Islamist ISIS group in northern Iraq, calling Hamas and ISIS each a “branch of the same tree,” although there has never been evidence of links between Hamas and Al Qaeda, or any of its offshoots.

A meeting of the Israeli cabinet Wednesday revealed divisions within the Netanyahu government, with the leaders of more right-wing parties denouncing the failed talks in Cairo in which the Egyptian government acted as a go-between for Israeli and Palestinian delegations. Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman called for “the defeat of Hamas,” while Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon said “all options” were open, including another ground invasion of Gaza.

The cabinet gave the go-ahead to call up another 10,000 reservists, allowing release of an equivalent number who had been called up previously for duty in the Gaza crisis. This means that fresh troops will be available for another onslaught should the government order it. Some 64 Israeli soldiers have been killed during operations in Gaza, the most since the 2006 war with Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

Neither Israeli airstrikes nor the ground attacks have brought a halt to Palestinian resistance attacks from Gaza. Islamist militants fired a record number of rockets at Israeli targets Wednesday, at least 168, with the largest number aimed at the Eshkol Regional Council in the South. Only 23 rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome anti-missile system, while nearly all the rest fell harmlessly.

The Gaza Health Ministry said that 58 people died in Israeli airstrikes Wednesday and Thursday, the heaviest death toll since the end of the ground invasion earlier this month. Among those killed were five members of one family who were digging a grave at the Sheikh Radwan cemetery in Gaza City. There was no explanation from the Israel Defense Force on how such a funeral party could become a “military” target.

Five members of the Rafi family, also in Gaza City, were killed as they watered their garden. Three of the dead were children, and a neighbor found the garden

hose still running on flowers and trees after the explosion.

One press report said the three Hamas commanders were killed in the same home, in the Tel al-Sultan neighborhood in west Rafah, which was hit by multiple bombs about 3 a.m. local time. A total of ten people died in the house, including three children, as well as Issam Younis, director of Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, which has been documenting the death and destruction in Gaza in the course of the war.

At the same time, on the West Bank, Israeli authorities have arrested an estimated 35 members of the family of Mohammed Abu Khdeir, the 17-year-old Palestinian who was kidnapped and killed in early July by ultra-right settlers, just before Israel launched its ongoing war against Gaza.

Israeli police arrested one adult and two juveniles, all Jewish settlers on the West Bank, for the hideous murder, in which Khdeir was kidnapped, beaten, doused with gasoline and set on fire. There has been no move to arrest leading figures among the settlers, who inspired and may have facilitated the attack.

The result is that ten times as many members of the Khdeir family have been arrested—most for participation in protests over his death—compared to the number of settlers arrested for actually perpetrating the crime.

By contrast, when three Israeli settler youth were kidnapped and murdered near Hebron in June, Israeli police arrested hundreds of Palestinians on suspicion of involvement in the killings, and killed half a dozen Palestinians in the course of military raids that destroyed many homes.

The repression of the Khdeir family has become so brazen that even the US State Department, normally a bottomless reservoir of praise and apologetics for Israeli war crimes, was compelled to issue a protest.

State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf, confirmed that a US citizen and cousin of the murdered boy, who bears the same name, Mohammed Abu Khdeir, was arrested July 28 and has been jailed since then. A US consular official was able to visit him August 14. This follows the internationally publicized savage beating of another US citizen cousin, 15-year-old Tariq Abu Khdeir, in Jerusalem on July 5.

“We are concerned that the US consulate general in Jerusalem was not notified of his arrest by the

government of Israel,” Harf said, adding, “we are also concerned about the fact that members of the Khdeir family appeared to be singled out for arrest by the Israeli authorities.”



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