

Gaza truce sets stage for deepening of crisis in Israel

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The announcement of an indefinite ceasefire between Israel and Hamas sets the stage for an intensification of the political crisis of the Israeli Zionist regime, but no longstanding peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Palestinians in Gaza understandably rejoiced over the seeming end to a 50-day war in which Israel criminally and indiscriminately targeted a defenseless civilian population in one of the most densely packed territories in the world. But the terms of the ceasefire, brokered in Egypt by the US-backed military regime of General el-Sisi, go no further than those reached at the end of the last Israeli assault on Gaza in 2012.

The devastating, decade-long Israeli blockade is to be eased, but not lifted, and the policing of Gaza on behalf of Israel is evidently to be carried out by the US-trained proxy security forces of the Palestinian Authority.

At the same time, the terms of the truce fall far short of the announced war aims of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who had insisted that nothing less than the “demilitarization” of Gaza would suffice.

The indecisive manner in which the latest Gaza war has apparently concluded—leaving a horrific toll of death and destruction among the Palestinians and an unusually high number of dead Israeli soldiers—has left large sections of the Israeli population questioning what the war was all about and why it was waged.

In *Haaretz* Wednesday, Gideon Levy published a column headlined “Lessons from a futile war,” which began: “This was the most brutal war Israel has ever waged, and it ended yesterday exactly where it started. En route, it inflicted countless wounds. Those of the Palestinians bleed more, but those of the Israelis are deeper. The 50-day war ended with no victors, but only Gaza celebrated last night, and with some degree of justice.”

The latest Israeli aggression will only intensify what

is already a deep and pervasive social and political polarization in the country. Within the political establishment and even within his own government, Netanyahu has come under withering attack from forces even further to the right than himself. These include outright fascist elements who have been mobilized and cultivated in the course of decades of occupation and repression of the Palestinian people, and who, during this latest Israeli slaughter, called for a genocidal “solution” to the Palestinian “problem.”

At the same time, growing sections of the Israeli working class and youth are appalled by the mass bloodletting unleashed by the government, which they find both morally and politically indefensible. Last week, an estimated 10,000 Israelis took part in a protest rally under the banner “Changing direction: Toward peace, away from war.”

This sentiment, compounded by social grievances bound up with one of the highest levels of social inequality among industrialized countries, finds no serious reflection within the political establishment, including the official “peace” movements such as Peace Now and Meretz.

The scale of destruction wreaked on the Palestinians by Israel is mind-boggling. At least 2,143 were killed and over 11,000 wounded. The overwhelming majority of casualties were civilians, and at least 490 children were killed.

Some 17,000 Palestinian homes were destroyed and many more damaged.

Half a million people, more than one-quarter of the population of Gaza, were forced to move to emergency shelters or live with friends or family. An estimated 100,000 Gazans are now homeless.

According to Al Jazeera, the United Nations believes the level of damage is three times that inflicted by

Israel in the 2008-2009 war. The UN estimates that if the current restrictions remain in place, it will take 15 years to rebuild the Gaza Strip.

Right up to the beginning of the ceasefire Tuesday evening, Israel was escalating its aggression with the targeting of high-rise buildings. Two children were killed in an air strike in Khan Younis shortly before the truce, and police reported that an Israeli air strike flattened a seven-story building in Beit Lahiya, the sixth high-rise to be toppled since the weekend.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu held a nationally televised press conference Wednesday night to answer critics who have denounced the ceasefire as a cave-in to Hamas and international pressure, including from Washington. Leading newspapers have called for his resignation.

At the press conference, Netanyahu said the war was a “great military and political” achievement and that Hamas had been dealt a “heavy blow.” He boasted that Hamas had not secured any of the demands it had previously set as a condition for a truce. He hailed the support of the major international powers for Israel, and pointed indirectly to the complicity of the Arab regimes, declaring, “Moderate forces in the Middle East bring new diplomatic opportunities, a new horizon for Israel.”

But his own cabinet is split on the agreement with Hamas. Netanyahu announced the deal without putting it to a vote within his security cabinet.

Three cabinet members—Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, Economy Minister Naftali Bennett and Internal Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovich—each declared their opposition. Danny Danon, a member of Netanyahu’s Likud Party, who was dismissed as deputy defense minister last month, said on Army Radio, “I ask myself, what have we accomplished? If we would have acted much more aggressively to begin with, we would have ended this fighting with a much lower price and much preferable conditions.”

Foreign Minister Lieberman wrote on his Facebook page: “As long as Hamas rules in Gaza, it will be impossible to guarantee security to Israeli citizens and impossible to reach a diplomatic agreement. Hamas is not a partner for any arrangement, be it diplomatic or security-related. It’s impossible and forbidden to rely on worthless murderers.”

Yuval Steinitz, Israeli minister for intelligence and

strategic affairs, said of the agreement, “There is no confidence here. People are very skeptical.”

Steinitz was one of many Israeli officials who threatened an early resumption of military action should the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel resume. He told the BBC that just prior to the ceasefire agreement, Israel’s security cabinet had discussed plans for a full military reoccupation of Gaza. That could still happen, he insisted, “if Hamas would resume the fire and leave us with no other option.”

At the Wednesday night press conference, Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon said, “We live in the Middle East and we may have to return to the battlefield, and if we do, we will pound Hamas in the same way we did during this operation.”

Indirect talks are to resume in Cairo within a month at which Hamas will raise its demands for a seaport and airport in Gaza, the release of Hamas prisoners from Israeli jails, and the release of funds to pay 40,000 police, government workers and other administration staff who have been largely unpaid since late last year.

Israel will press its demand for the “demilitarization” of Hamas, presumably by making use of the US-Israeli puppet security forces headed up by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

The Israeli regime has promised to take a hard line in the talks, underscoring the fragility of the truce. Tzachi Hanegbi, the deputy foreign minister, said in a radio interview: “The only goal that Hamas had, to lift the siege, was not achieved. There will be no seaport, no airport, no materials will enter Gaza that can be used to build rockets or tunnels. That is the Israeli position and will be presented as soon as negotiations resume.”



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