US military chief pledges increased support as Israel steps up attacks on Palestinians

Jean Shaoul
19 October 2015

General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, flew to Tel Aviv Sunday to discuss a 10-year military aid package worth some $3.7 billion a year. The pledge of increased American military support came in the midst of an increasingly brutal Israeli crackdown on Palestinians within both the occupied territories and Israel itself.

In his first overseas visit since assuming the post of joint chiefs chairman at the beginning of October, Dunford sought to play down the frosty relations in recent months between the Obama administration and Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu. Underscoring Washington's support for the Israeli regime and its repression of the Palestinian masses, he said that "the military-to-military relationship had remained strong," adding, "The challenges that we face, we face together."

The Obama administration announced it would step up US military aid to Israel following the signing of the nuclear deal with Iran over the bitter opposition of Netanyahu, who directly campaigned for the US Congress to block implementation of the agreement.

US and Israeli officials have indicated that the size of the military package could well rise above $3.7 billion per year. Tel Aviv is pushing for more aid, claiming that Iran is likely to use sanctions relief to finance forces hostile to Israel, a reference to Iran's support for the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon is due to follow up Dunford's visit with talks in Washington later this month, and Netanyahu will meet with President Barack Obama in the White House on November 9.

Dunford's visit coincided with the launching of a joint US-Israeli air force drill in the southern Negev, set to last two weeks. The exercise, known as "Blue Flag," is held twice a year and simulates a large-scale multinational air operation.

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio also arrived in Israel for a three-day "solidarity mission at a difficult time." The Democratic politician, who presents himself as a left-leaning "progressive," wasted no time in lining up behind the Israeli government. He said Palestinian attacks on Israelis "must end" and called them "unconscionable and unacceptable" acts of violence. De Blasio is not scheduled to meet any Palestinian leaders. It is his first visit to Israel as mayor of New York.

US Secretary of State John Kerry is to meet Netanyahu in Germany before going on to a meeting with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Jordan's King Abdullah in a bid to restore calm. Netanyahu had been due to visit Berlin on October 8 for an annual joint cabinet meeting and talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel, but postponed the trip due to the violent clashes between Palestinians, Israeli security forces and Jewish settlers.

Kerry has been at pains not to blame Israel or the Palestinians for the recent wave of violence, saying, "I am not going to point fingers [at the culprits] from afar." His public caution reflects concerns within the Obama administration that the escalating violence could ignite protests throughout the Arab world, potentially disrupting Israel's relations with its Arab and Muslim neighbours, with whom it has been covertly working in support of the US-backed war to topple the Assad regime.

Recent incidences of individual attacks by Palestinians on Israelis, mainly in East Jerusalem, are the outcome of relentless repression on the part of Israeli authorities combined with pervasive poverty and unemployment. Three quarters of the population in Arab East Jerusalem live below the official Israeli poverty line. Protests in the enclave have increased sharply since Jewish extremists kidnapped 16-year-old Muhammad Abu Khdeir from the Shuafat neighbourhood, poured gasoline down his throat and set him afire. That atrocity occurred just days before Israel launched a 49-day war that killed over 2,300

© World Socialist Web Site

Gazans and wounded another 10,900, mainly civilians.

Last week, Israel denounced a Palestinian call at the United Nations for an international force to protect Palestinian worshippers at the al-Aqsa mosque compound, also known as Temple Mount, in Jerusalem's Old City. The al-Aqsa mosque has been at the centre of the escalating violence, amid fears that the government plans to open the site to Jewish prayer in contravention of the 1994 Peace Treaty with Jordan, which retains ultimate control over religious affairs at the compound.

The new Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, told reporters on Friday, "Israel will not agree to any international presence on the Temple Mount. … Any such intervention would violate the decades-long status quo."

Yesterday, Netanyahu rejected a French proposal for international observers at the mosque. He said, "Israel cannot accept the French draft resolution at the United Nations Security Council," adding, "It doesn't mention Palestinian incitement; it doesn't mention Palestinian terrorism; and it calls for the internationalisation of the Temple Mount."

Jordan, Washington's client, has also opposed the deployment of an international force. Its ambassador to the UN, Dina Kawar, said she was not pushing for an international force, although she called for Israeli security forces to stay away from al-Aqsa.

Over the weekend, Israeli security forces shot and killed at least five more Palestinians. This brings to at least 56 the number of Palestinians killed by security forces this month, including 18 alleged assailants who were shot on the spot. Most of the victims were killed in clashes in the West Bank or along the Gaza border. A pregnant woman and her 2-year-old daughter were killed by Israeli air strikes on Gaza.

In the southern city of Beersheba, an assailant shot and killed an Israeli soldier, took his gun, and shot and wounded 10 others, including four police officers, at the central bus station. Israeli police said they killed one attacker who they thought was a Palestinian and critically wounded another, who is now believed not to be a second attacker, but an Eritrean migrant. This brings the total number of Israelis killed in attacks by lone Palestinians to eight this month.

Last week, nine Israeli human rights organisations issued a statement, based on videos and photographs taken on bystanders' cameras, challenging the accuracy of Israeli accounts of the shootings and killings by security forces. The organisations said the videos provided clear evidence that police were carrying out a "quick to shoot to kill" policy, rather than arresting Palestinians in Jerusalem and Israel they suspected of attacking Israeli Jews. They also noted that the Palestinians had been shot despite posing no physical threat to security forces.

Adalah, a legal centre for Israeli Palestinians, and Addameer, a Palestinian NGO defending prisoners' rights, say Israeli officials are blocking any investigation of one of the filmed shootings—of Fadi Alloun on October 4. Videos show a police officer shooting the 19-year-old Alloun even though he posed no threat. Alloun had been chased by a mob of Israeli Jews accusing him of a stabbing that had occurred earlier and demanding his execution.

The government has authorised the use of live ammunition against Palestinians who throw stones in Israel and East Jerusalem, thereby bringing the practice of extra-judicial executions from the West Bank to Israel itself. While the Palestinians in the West Bank live under military rule, Palestinians in Israel, including East Jerusalem, which Israel illegally annexed after the 1967 war, are subject to civil law.

On Saturday night, some 1,500 Jewish and Palestinian Israelis rallied in Jerusalem to call for an end to the weeks of violence and a resumption of negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Meretz party leader and legislator Zahava Gal-On called on Netanyahu to accept the French proposal to deploy international observers to the Temple Mount. In Beersheba, some 150 Palestinian and Jewish activists formed a human chain in support of peace.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site