

Israel carries out biggest air strikes on Gaza since 2014 war

Keith Jones
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Israel carried out air strikes against Gaza on Saturday, killing two teenagers and injuring a dozen more people, in what the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are boasting was their largest bombardment of the tiny Palestinian enclave since the seven-week, 2014 Gaza War.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Sunday that the IDF attacks would continue until all missile and “arson attacks” on Israel cease. The first named are small crude rockets built with pipes, the second are Molotov cocktails and flaming kites. Both are rudimentary and ineffective compared to the massive US-supplied arsenal deployed by the Israelis.

Going into a cabinet meeting, Netanyahu distanced himself from a ceasefire that Egypt and the UN’s Special Mediator for the Middle East had brokered late Saturday between Israel, Hamas, Gaza’s governing party, and Islamic Jihad, its Iranian-backed ally. Israel, he declared, would not agree “to a ceasefire that would allow the continuation of terrorism by incendiary kites and balloons ... We are not prepared to accept any attacks against us.”

“Whoever hurts us,” continued Netanyahu, “we will hit them with great strength. This is what we did yesterday. I hope that they got the message; if not, they will get it later.”

According to Israeli media, the cabinet subsequently issued a directive to the IDF to mount an “identical military response,” i.e., air and mortar strikes, to a Molotov cocktail or flaming kite as to rocket fire.

Later Sunday, speaking from Gaza City, Nickolay Mladenov, the Bulgarian diplomat who is the UN’s Special Mediator for the Middle East, said that it was “taking the concerted efforts of everyone to make sure that we step back” from “war.”

As is his wont, Netanyahu is cynically trying to paint Israel as the victim of Palestinian terrorism and

aggression.

This under conditions where not only is Gaza little more than an Israeli concentration camp, with its 2 million impoverished people effectively imprisoned on a tiny strip of land one-tenth the size of Long Island, New York and subject to punishing Israeli attacks and economic blockades. But where, Israeli security forces have been meeting protests at the militarized security fence that divides Gaza and Israel with sniper fire, rubber bullets and tear gas since late March.

To date, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross and other observers, 138 Palestinians have been killed in IDF attacks on the protests and at least 15,000 wounded. More than 1,400 people are reported to have been struck with three bullets or more.

There has not been a single Israeli fatality during the “Great March of Return,” and not until May 14 did the Israeli government claim that a single Israeli had even been injured.

Last Friday, when more than 30,000 marched to the border fence, in what was billed as the sixteenth Great March of Return, Israeli forces again opened fire. They killed 15-year-old Othman Rami Halas and 18-year-old Muhammad Nasser Sharab, and injured more than 200 others.

A contributing factor in the size of Friday’s protest was recent Israeli actions aimed at intensifying its economic war against Gaza. These include reducing the designated fishing zone off Gaza to just six nautical miles and placing severe restrictions on the movement of goods through Kerem Shalom, the Gaza Strip’s main commercial crossing. Since last Monday, goods from Gaza cannot be imported into Israel and only Israeli-approved “humanitarian aid” is allowed into the Palestinian enclave.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad cited Israel’s lethal attack

on Friday's protest as the reason for firing what the IDF claimed were some 200 projectiles into southern Israel.

Led by the US, the imperialist powers have staunchly defended Israel's savage attacks on the Palestinian March of Return protests, describing them as an appropriate use of force. In response to the latest Israeli efforts to economically strangle the Gaza Strip, the European Union issued a hypocritical statement Friday. It called on Israel to reverse its latest acts of economic war, saying they risk "aggravating the already dire economic situation in Gaza, while demanding " Hamas and other actors in Gaza ... cease and refrain from violent actions and provocations against Israel." The statement made no mention of the Israeli government's slaughter of March of Return protesters.

With the encouragement of Washington, Israel has stepped up its aggression in recent months not only against the Palestinians, but against neighbouring states.

Israel has repeatedly mounted air strikes on Syria. Last Wednesday, according to Israeli media, IDF warplanes attacked three military positions in Syria, supposedly in retaliation for a Syrian drone entering airspace over the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, and late Sunday evening Syria accused Israel of attacking a military site on the outskirts of Aleppo.

Netanyahu and his government have also been acting as cheerleaders for, and co-conspirators of, the Trump administration as it torpedoes the Iran nuclear deal and intensifies economic and military pressure on Tehran across the region.

On Saturday, Netanyahu spoke with President Trump about his impending meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin and US efforts, strongly supported by Israel, to drive a wedge between Teheran and Moscow in preparation for a major escalation of the imperialist drive for regime change in Iran.

Israel's opposition parties are attacking Netanyahu for failing to deliver on his promises to provide "security." Zionist Union head Avi Gabbay attacked the Israeli prime minister Sunday for accepting a ceasefire that " Hamas decided on." "When they shoot, you shoot back, hit back," said Gabbay. "A kite is absolutely the same as a Kassem rocket."

At the same time, Gabbay and the rest of the opposition is invoking the "crisis in southern Israel" to

press Netanyahu to abandon plans to force a Knesset vote later this month on a new discriminatory "Basic Law" that would declare Israel a "Jewish state" and strip Arabic of its status as an official language. The establishment opponents of the law fear its flagrant, anti-democratic character will further undermine Israel's international legitimacy.

With a view to winning quick approval of the proposed legislation, Netanyahu reached an agreement Sunday with his coalition partner Naftali Bennett, the head of the Jewish Home Party, to drop a clause from the bill that explicitly sanctioned state-enforced segregation. This clause, which would have empowered the state to "authorise a community composed of people having the same faith and nationality to maintain the exclusive character of that community," is being replaced by one that commits the state to promote "Jewish settlement."



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