

Israeli terror raid provokes new clashes in Gaza

Bill Van Auken
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Israel and the impoverished Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory of Gaza have teetered on the brink of another all-out war this week. This follows in the wake of a botched terror raid Sunday by Israeli special forces commandos who were sent deep into Gazan territory, provoking an armed clash that left seven Palestinians and an Israeli lieutenant colonel dead.

At least 15 Palestinians have been killed since Sunday, seven of them in the clash with the Israeli commando squad and eight others in air strikes carried out by Israeli F-16 fighter jets and armed drones. Hamas, the bourgeois Islamist party that controls Gaza's government, responded to the Israeli attack with a barrage of hundreds of rockets and mortar shells against Israel, killing one person, identified as a Palestinian.

Hamas and other Palestinian factions reported on Tuesday that Egypt had brokered a new cease-fire with Israel.

"Egypt's efforts have been able to achieve a ceasefire between the resistance and the Zionist enemy," a statement issued by Hamas and the other Palestinian groups said. "The resistance will respect this declaration as long as the Zionist enemy respects it."

For its part, Israel refused to acknowledge the existence of any such agreement. After a six-hour meeting of Israel's security cabinet on Tuesday, the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a statement declaring that it had directed the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to continue its military operations against Gaza "as necessary."

The Israeli strikes launched on Monday imposed a reign of terror on the Gazan population, with seemingly every area of the strip a target. Among the structures demolished was the building housing the Hamas-affiliated Al Aqsa TV station.

Another six-story building was reduced to rubble. Located in the city center, it held apartments, a kindergarten, offices and a language training center.

The Israeli military boasted that it had carried out strikes against 160 separate targets. In the densely populated Gaza Strip, these strikes, in blatant violation of international law, have demolished civilian structures and forced hundreds of families from their homes.

On the eve of Sunday's special forces raid, Netanyahu had made a statement at a press conference that an effort should be made to avoid another major war against Gaza. Israel, the most powerful military force in the Middle East, has repeatedly bombed and invaded the territory since unilaterally withdrawing its troops and settlers in 2005—most recently in its 2014 "Operation Protective Edge," which killed 2,251 Palestinians.

Just before the raid, Netanyahu had also told his cabinet that he was doing "everything I can in order to avoid an unnecessary war" and that a previous cease-fire brokered by Egypt appeared to be holding.

The provocative special forces raid, however, appeared designed to blow up any such truce. The commando squad, some of them dressed up as Palestinian women, penetrated deep into Gazan territory before it was discovered by a Hamas security team. Hamas has charged that the team's aim was to assassinate or abduct a Hamas military commander. Nour el-Deen Baraka, a battalion commander in Hamas's armed wing, the Qassam Brigades, was shot dead in the raid.

The Israeli military, which has long pursued a campaign of "targeted assassinations," denied that the squad was sent in to kill or abduct a Hamas commander. It claimed that the elite troops were

conducting an “intelligence” operation.

The Hamas leadership has been attempting to calm the seething anger of Gaza’s population, which has found expression in the wave of “March of Return” protests which saw hundreds of thousands of Palestinians marching on the heavily fortified border between the occupied territory and Israel, demanding an end to the Israeli siege and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the lands from which they were driven by force with the creation of Israel in 1948. Of Gaza’s population of 2 million, at least 1.4 million are either refugees from the 1948 Israeli terror campaign against the Palestinians or their descendants.

The “March of Return” protests, in which at least 233 unarmed demonstrators have been shot dead by Israeli snipers and more than 20,000 have been wounded, have continued despite the attempt by the Hamas leadership to wind them up on May 15, the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel, marked by Palestinians as Nakba (Catastrophe) Day.

The protests express popular outrage over the intolerable conditions of life imposed by Israel’s siege and occupation, with infrastructure devastated by repeated Israeli bombardments, a lack of water and fuel, an unemployment rate of 53 percent—70 percent for young workers—and more than two-thirds of the population dependent on aid, which the administration of Donald Trump has slashed.

Last Friday, Rami Wael Ishaq Qahman, 28, died after being shot through the neck with a live round while protesting at the border. Another 37 Palestinians, including six children and 10 women, were wounded. The international media has long since stopped paying any attention to this bloodletting by the Israeli military, treating it as a matter of course.

The latest cease-fire has provoked a furious wave of recriminations within Netanyahu’s right-wing Zionist government.

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman’s office released a statement denying media reports that he had supported an end to Israeli strikes on Gaza. It read: “The defense minister’s stance is consistent and hasn’t changed. [News reports of] Lieberman’s support of halting attacks are fake.”

Education Minister Naftali Bennett released a similar statement denying he supported any kind of cease-fire.

The two right-wing Zionist politicians have been

vying with each other over who has a tougher policy against the Palestinians amid criticisms of Netanyahu for being too “soft” on Gaza. The bellicose rhetoric is part of the preparations for an anticipated early general election in Israel next year.

Joining in this ugly contest was the leader of the supposed opposition, the Israeli Labor Party, Ehud Barak, who as defense minister presided over the 2008-2009 “Operation Cast Lead,” which killed at least 1,400 Palestinians in Gaza. He bragged last month, “When I was defense minister, more than 300 Hamas members were killed in three and a half minutes in an air force attack,” referring to a strike that killed defenseless police recruits and civilians. In a recent television interview, he described Netanyahu as “weak” and “afraid,” charging that he had “surrendered” to Hamas.

Fueling and abetting this right-wing rampage is the policy of Washington, which has provided its unconditional support to every act of brutality and aggression carried out by the Israeli regime against the Palestinian people. The Trump administration’s decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem and its cutoff of \$364 million to the Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA—30 percent of its funding—are part of a broader strategy aimed at building up an anti-Iranian axis in the Middle East, based upon Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Millions of Palestinians, together with tens of millions in Yemen, are collateral damage in this imperialist drive to assert unchallenged US hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East, a crusade that threatens to ignite a wider war with potentially catastrophic implications for the entire region, including Israel.



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