

Israeli security forces storm al-Aqsa after Gaza ceasefire

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On Friday, just hours after a fragile ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad came into effect, Israeli security forces fired tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets at worshippers in the al-Aqsa Mosque compound. At least 20 Palestinians were injured, with two taken to hospital.

Tens of thousands had come for Friday prayers to celebrate the ceasefire. They carried Palestinian flags, distributed sweets and chanted slogans including “God is the Greatest” and “Greetings to Ezzedin al-Qassam,” referring to Hamas’ military wing, led by Mohammed Deif, who has been targeted repeatedly by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Police entered the compound to confiscate flags and disperse the crowd, provoking angry scuffles. The Jerusalem District commander then ordered mass reinforcements to “handle the protesters.”

In Sheikh Jarrah, police violently broke up a peaceful protest of hundreds of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis because one of the participants waved a Palestinian flag. The police chief also reinforced the police presence in Silwan, Isawiya and Sheikh Jarrah, having put in place barricades around the East Jerusalem neighbourhoods.

The IDF was preparing for unrest in the West Bank, including in Hebron where Hamas supporters were planning to celebrate “the resistance’s victory.” The IDF announced that the Border Police, sent to Lod in Israel to put down Palestinian protests against gun-toting Zionist vigilante groups were to return to the West Bank.

Unrest is also expected in Umm al-Fahm in central Israel, following the fatal shooting in the head of 17-year-old Mohammed Kiwan on Wednesday, leading to protests the police dispersed with tear gas. A general strike closed the town on Thursday, the day of Kiwan’s funeral.

Israel’s air strikes continued up until the ceasefire, mediated by Egypt, brought a temporary end to the one-sided war that killed at least 243 Palestinians, including 65 children and wounded more than 1,900. In contrast,

just 12 people were killed in Israel.

The scale of the destruction and suffering in just 11 days is truly shocking. Hamas’ information officer Salaameh Maaruf has estimated the damage to be about \$250 million. Of this:

- * \$92 million is damage to housing and NGO offices,

- * \$40 million is damage to Gaza’s commerce and industry,

- * \$27 million is damage to roads and water and sewage infrastructure,

- * \$23 million is damage to government buildings,

- * \$22 million is the cost of replacing the electricity distribution grid, and

- * \$24 million is damage suffered by the agricultural sector.

About 800,000 people have no regular access to drinking water. Around 10,000 metres of underground sewage and water lines, as well as wastewater networks, sewage evacuation vehicles, wells and a wastewater pumping station have been damaged. At least 50 schools have been seriously damaged.

US President Joe Biden absurdly said that the Israel-Gaza ceasefire would bring a genuine opportunity for progress. He ignored the murderous assaults by Israel on Gaza, including the wars of 2008-09, 2012 and 2014, and the weekly attacks on the Great March of Return in 2018-19, as well as countless other lesser attacks on the besieged enclave greenlighted by Washington and the Arab regimes.

Signaling his ongoing support for Israel against Hamas, Biden said “humanitarian assistance” for the reconstruction of Gaza would be done in coordination with the Palestinian Authority, run by Hamas’ rival, President Mahmoud Abbas, in the West Bank, and “in a manner that does not permit Hamas to simply restock its military arsenal.” He promised Netanyahu that Washington would replenish Israel’s Iron Dome missile

defence system that had protected it from Hamas' projectiles.

There was great rejoicing in Gaza and the occupied West Bank at the end of hostilities, with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh hailing a "victory" and claiming it would have a wide impact in the region's relationship with Israel. "We have destroyed the project of 'coexistence' with Israel, of 'normalization' with Israel", he claimed, and Hamas would enjoy growing regional support. The fight against Israel would continue until the al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem was "liberated."

Osama Hamdan, Hamas' foreign relations bureau chief, said that Hamas had received assurances regarding Israeli policy toward Sheikh Jarrah, where several families faced eviction, and the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem that had triggered the war.

Israeli politicians, however, gave Hamas leaders no grounds for such optimism. Netanyahu threatened "a new level of force" if Hamas broke the ceasefire, saying, "If Hamas thinks we will tolerate a drizzle of rockets, it is wrong." He claimed that the IDF's operations had succeeded in dramatically setting back Hamas, with the destruction of 100 kilometres of tunnels, military infrastructure used for both land and sea attacks, as well as the assassination of 20 senior Hamas members.

Aware that he had made similar claims before without bringing an end to the conflict, Netanyahu said that while Israel had "changed the equation" the "public and Hamas don't know everything... the entirety of our achievements will be revealed over time."

But according to *Ha'aretz*, security officials were less than convinced about the "success" of the operation, noting that Israel's strikes on Hamas' rocket arsenal and launchers were less damaging than originally thought, with just 40 percent destroyed, meaning Hamas still had a large arsenal of rockets. They criticized the "poor" intelligence and the IDF's failure to destroy most of Hamas' tunnels, as well as the failure to mount a ground invasion and assassinate Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' leader, and Mohammed Deif, its military leader.

Defence Minister Benny Gantz, who has spoken with the leaders of the Arab regimes in the last days, threatened Hamas that any funds for the reconstruction of Gaza depended on making progress with Israel's other conditions. He warned that without further political and diplomatic progress against Hamas, Operation Guardians of the Walls would "end up being another round on the way to the next military operation."

Israel's criminal aerial bombardment of the essentially

defenceless population was originally triggered by outrage in both the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel over its violent raids on al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan and the threatened expulsion of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan in favour of Jewish settlers. The families have appealed to the Supreme Court, which will hear the Silwan case on Wednesday and the Sheikh Jarrah case, postponed on Jerusalem Day in a bid to quell the turmoil, in a few weeks' time. The results of the hearings are likely to further inflame tensions between the Palestinians and fascistic settler groups, under conditions where Israel is now confronted with the very real possibility of a civil war.

At the same time, the war has also intensified the deep political crisis, exemplified by Israel's inability to form a stable government after four inconclusive elections in two years. A major factor in Netanyahu's provocations against the Palestinians was his determination amid his ongoing trial for corruption, bribery, and breach of trust to torpedo any possibility of opposition leader Yair Lapid forming a coalition government. With Lapid's success dependent on support from Mansour Abbas's Arab Joint List, the war with Gaza sent one of Lapid's potential allies, Naftali Bennett and his right-wing Yamina Party, scurrying back to Netanyahu's camp. Despite this, Netanyahu is no nearer to being able to form a government, potentially precipitating a fifth election. It is these conditions that underpin Netanyahu's deepening hostility to Iran. On Wednesday, he accused Tehran of launching an armed drone from either Iraq or Syria to Israel via Jordan.



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