

Israel's new government sends planes to bomb Gaza

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On Tuesday, in line with his hostile stance towards the Palestinians, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett authorised a new series of attacks on the Palestinians, including airstrikes on Gaza and a crackdown on protesters in East Jerusalem.

While the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said that it had struck military compounds in Gaza City and the southern town of Khan Younis belonging to Hamas, the Muslim-Brotherhood-affiliated group that controls Gaza, Palestinian media reported that one of the strikes had caused property damage. There have been no immediate reports of casualties. The IDF said that it was “ready for all scenarios, including renewed fighting in the face of continued terrorist acts emanating from Gaza.” According to *Al Arabiya*, Egypt asked Hamas and Islamic Jihad not to escalate the crisis and the two groups told Cairo they were not seeking to do so.

These latest airstrikes follow the launching of incendiary balloons from Gaza that caused some fires in open fields in southern Israel.

Bennett, the multi-millionaire businessman, religious nationalist and settler advocate who was sworn in as prime minister on Sunday, is notorious for his hard-line response to the Palestinians, having boasted of killing “lots of Arabs” and criticised previous governments for failing to respond to incendiary balloons. Before becoming defence minister in 2019, he tweeted that those launching the balloons were “terrorists” who should be killed. According to the news site *Ynet*, he denounced these home-made devices as life-threatening and said, “An explosive balloon is like an anti-tank missile ...Whoever launches one is a terrorist who is trying to murder Israelis and must be hit,” he added.

The airstrikes come just four weeks after a fragile ceasefire on May 21 ended Israel's criminal 11-day assault on the besieged enclave that killed more than 250 Palestinians, including 66 children and 39 women, injured 1,900 more and destroyed numerous buildings, displacing at least 60,000 people. These horrifying figures contradict Israel's claims to have solely targeted Hamas's arsenals, weapons manufacturing facilities and underground infrastructure network. They demonstrate, coming atop of Israel's

2008-09, 2012 and 2014 wars and its lethal repression of the 2018-19 Great March of Return, that the bombing is aimed at terrorising the Palestinians into submission.

In contrast, the Palestinians' largely amateurish rockets killed 12 people, including two children and three foreign nationals, and injured 357 in Israel, indicating the grossly one-sided nature of the assault. Since then, Israel and Egypt, which together control access to Gaza, have withheld key financial and material assistance, blocking any reconstruction. Israel has made any easing of its blockade conditional upon Hamas's agreement to return the bodies of four of IDF soldiers missing in action in Gaza.

This latest bombardment early Wednesday morning comes just days after the new coalition secured a confidence vote with a majority of just 60-59 as a United Arab List legislator who had been expected to support the new government abstained, indicating its extremely tenuous hold on power.

The new government, headed by Bennett, was cobbled together by Yair Lapid, former TV news anchor and head of the second largest party, Yesh Atid, in a bid to revive Israel's relationship with the Democratic Party in the United States, Israel's chief backer. That bond had frayed under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who infuriated President Barack Obama, had close relations with his Republican successor, President Donald Trump and used his last speech in office at the weekend to attack President Joe Biden as a danger to Israel.

The government's leading lights, all of whom were once aides to Netanyahu and occupied senior government posts under his leadership, have no significant political differences with him. It is a thoroughly unprincipled and reactionary coalition of parties, from the far-right to the former peace camp, dedicated to rescuing Israel's bourgeoisie from the gathering economic, social and political storm at the expense of Jewish and Palestinian workers within Israel/Palestine and the working class across the resource-rich Middle East.

One of the first decisions of the Bennett-Lapid government was to confirm Netanyahu's decision to allow a march by Jewish extremists through Palestinian neighbourhoods of

East Jerusalem on Tuesday, which critics had warned could lead to angry confrontations between Palestinian residents and Jewish marchers and a violent escalation with Hamas.

The march was a rescheduled version of the one planned for May 10 to mark the anniversary of Israel's capture of East Jerusalem in the 1967 war between Israel and its Arab neighbours and its annexation, illegal under international law, that was cancelled amid Israel's violent crackdown on Palestinians worshipping at the al-Aqsa Mosque and protesting against the planned eviction of Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. It was the escalating violence in the city that precipitated Hamas's firing of rockets toward Jerusalem on May 10.

On Monday, Hamas warned that it would respond if the postponed march were allowed to go ahead.

The postponed march, initially conceived as a means of derailing Lapid's efforts to form an anti-Netanyahu coalition, was given the go-ahead by Netanyahu in his last days in office with the dual purpose of appeasing his far-right supporters and destabilising the incoming government. It is part of his hysterically aggressive attacks from the right on the new government that include a fight over the threatened eviction of Evyatar, an illegal settler outpost in the West Bank.

Amid insistence from his cabinet colleagues that any blocking of the march would be a concession to Hamas, incoming public security minister Omer Bar-Lev, a Labour Party legislator and former IDF commander, who also oversees Israel's police force, green lighted the event, known as a "flags march." He said, "The flags march will be taking place. Jerusalem is Israel's eternal capital. In a democracy, it is permitted and it is important to hold demonstrations and marches like these, as long as they are in accordance with the law."

Bar-Lev's words were a provocation to the Palestinians. Firstly, because as occupied territory, East Jerusalem does not belong to Israel. East Jerusalem, the heart of Palestinian social and cultural life, had been envisioned as the capital of a future Palestinian state under a "two-state solution" long since rendered moribund by the relentless spread of Zionist settlements in the occupied West Bank. Secondly, Palestinian demonstrations are routinely broken up with brutal force, with the Damascus Gate Plaza, outside an entrance to the Old City, declared off limits to the Palestinians who use it for social gatherings to mark the end of the day's fast during Ramadan. Such is the abuse and violence from the marchers that those living on the route of the march often board up their homes and shops.

In anticipation of counterdemonstrations, the Israeli authorities raised the alert level and deployed additional

police and military forces near the Gaza Strip and in towns with mixed populations of Jewish and Palestinian citizens. Tor Wennesland, the UN's envoy in the region, warned of rising tensions and asked all sides to "avoid any provocations that could lead to another round of confrontation," while the US State Department banned its staff from entering the Old City the day of the march.

The march took place Tuesday with full police protection. The police arrested at least 17 Palestinians, while the Palestinian Red Crescent said 33 Palestinians were wounded as security forces forced Palestinian residents away from the route of the march for much of the afternoon, except for those working in the shops, closing roads and the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City. Videos posted online showed a Palestinian being beaten by officers on the steps at the Gate as they cleared the area to make way for the marchers.

Thousands of right-wing extremists assembled at the Damascus Gate, waving flags, singing anthems of the settler movement and chanting "Death to Arabs" and "May your village burn down." Fascistic legislators and allies of Netanyahu, Itamar Ben-Gvir, leader of Jewish Power, and Bezalel Smotrich, leader of the Religious Zionism faction, were carried on the marchers' shoulders.

Counterdemonstrations took place in Jerusalem as well as in Israel's mixed population towns and cities, with some Palestinian groups calling for a "day of rage" denouncing the far-right march.

In a radio interview on Tuesday, Mansour Abbas, the leader of the United Arab List or Ra'am, an Islamist party within the eight-party coalition, condemned the parade and said it should never have been allowed to proceed, while admitting he had not discussed the issue with Bennett. "If we quarrel over everything, there is no doubt that this coalition will fall apart," he explained.



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