

Israel's murderous assault on Nablus a deliberate provocation

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The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) carried out a mass raid on the northern West Bank city of Nablus on Wednesday morning, killing 11 people and wounding 103 in a barbaric show of brutality and militarism. Those killed included two older men aged 72 and 66.

It was by far the deadliest raid in decades, with soldiers preventing paramedics from evacuating the injured from the scene and firing on ambulances. Video clips showed a military jeep driving into a crowd of Palestinians who were confronting the raid, while another shows an elderly man lying motionless on the ground after he was apparently shot and left to bleed. Others showed three apparently unarmed people running along a sidewalk, one of whom fell to the ground after they came under fire.

These extra-judicial killings in broad daylight by the Middle East's strongest war machine in a busy downtown area are nothing short of a war crime by the newly installed coalition government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israel, with its customary hypocrisy and cynicism, justified its murderous assault with claims that it was "seeking to arrest" three armed terrorists who had killed an Israeli soldier in October and were "involved in the planning of shooting attacks" in the future, without providing any evidence to back up the allegations. An army spokesperson said that the soldiers were met with heavy gunfire when they attempted to detain the three wanted men but did not explain why a further eight were killed.

The raid was a deliberate provocation calculated to precipitate revenge attacks in Israel and rocket fire from the besieged Gaza Strip, which is controlled by Hamas, the bourgeois clerical group affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood. Such attacks will in turn be used by the authorities to declare a "security crisis" and derail the growing protest movement against the government's efforts to assume dictatorial powers and neuter the judiciary. This is in pursuit of their broader plans to annex the Palestinian territories that Israel has occupied illegally since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

While the leaders of Israel's protest movement largely share the Netanyahu government's agenda and are hostile to any appeal to Israel's Palestinian citizens, they fear his fascist-backed power grab is endangering the stability of capitalist rule and the Israeli state. Very conscious that the growing movement is also animated by broader social discontent and opposition to Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinians and system of apartheid rule, they are determined that those participating in the rallies should not reach out to the Palestinians and unify their struggles. They have sought to restrict the protests to protecting the Supreme Court, which has nodded through Israel's Jewish Nation-State Law and authorized settlements, land seizures and evictions in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

After the killings in Nablus, the IDF carried out airstrikes on two military sites operated by Hamas. This followed the firing of six rockets from the Gaza strip, that for the last 15 years has served as an open-air prison for its two million inhabitants, five of which were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome air defence system.

Wednesday's deadly raid was the third major operation in the West Bank in which several Palestinians have been killed since the new government took office at the end of last year. A raid on Jenin refugee camp in late January killed 10 Palestinian militants and civilians, while a similar operation in Jericho earlier this month killed five Palestinian fighters.

The latest massacre brings to 61 the number of Palestinians that have died at the hands of Israeli police, soldiers and settlers so far this year, as well as 10 Israelis and one Ukrainian national in the escalating violence. It follows last year's record that saw at least 170 Palestinians killed in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including 30 children, the highest death toll in the occupied Palestinian territories in a single year since 2005.

The Nablus atrocity is part of Operation Breakwater, launched last March in response to a series of Palestinian attacks on Israelis, that has seen almost daily raids and arrest operations in the West Bank, focusing on the cities of Jenin,

Nablus, Hebron and Jericho. These operations are fueling ever more resistance in the West Bank under the banner of new groups such as the Lions' Den, the Nablus Brigade and the Tubas Brigades. Hostility is escalating towards the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA), headed by President Mahmoud Abbas, for its craven subservience to Israel.

Indeed, in a tacit admission that the assault would lead to further violence, especially in the run up to Ramadan that begins next month, a police spokesperson said it would deploy extra personnel across Jerusalem and the West Bank in anticipation of further attacks. The *Jerusalem Post* wrote that Israel was preparing "for possible ripple effects from the operation such as revenge terrorist attacks in the West Bank, Jerusalem and the interior or rocket fire from the Gaza Strip."

These events come just days after the cabinet approved the legalization of nine illegal outposts in the West Bank and the construction of 7,000 homes in existing settlements, prompting the United Arab Emirates, at the request of the Palestinian Authority, to table a resolution condemning the decision. The UAE, which has normalized its relations with Israel under the Abraham Accords, subsequently watered down the resolution at Washington's insistence so that it could pass without the customary US veto.

Part of the backroom wheeling and dealing at the UN was that the PA would receive a financial aid package while Israel would not approve any more illegal settlements or settlement construction and would "reduce" its armed incursions into areas of the West Bank under the PA's nominal control. All this was for public consumption. Just three days later, Netanyahu rode roughshod over the deal and authorized the raid.

This latest atrocity met with the customary tut-tutting by the United Nations, the US, the European powers and their Middle East allies. It underscores the fact that they have given Israel's fascist government carte blanche to terrorise and suppress the Palestinians with ever greater force in pursuit of its agenda of annexing the Palestinian territories and implementing apartheid rule—as embodied in the Nation-State Law that enshrines Jewish supremacy as the legal foundation of the state. The Arab regimes that long proclaimed their support for a Palestinian state as a means of legitimizing their dictatorial rule over their own citizens stand exposed as outright accomplices of the Zionist state.

It also demonstrates the utterly opportunist use of the charges "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity." The Biden administration excoriates Russia for such crimes in Ukraine while glossing over what its attack dog does on a daily basis as the quid pro quo for services rendered in pursuit of Washington's predatory interests in the Middle East. What is defined as a war crime or crime against

humanity and who is sent to the Hague tribunal—whose authority the US and Israel do not recognize for their own officials—depends entirely on the geo-political and economic interests of the various imperialist powers.

There is no solution to the Palestinian workers' desperate economic and social situation within the capitalist system, nor is there any national solution. No amount of pressure will change the policies of the Palestinian leadership, the Israeli government and their imperialist backers. That has been bitterly demonstrated over decades.

The only real ally of the Palestinian masses is the international working class. The wave of international protests and strikes in Europe and North America as well as the Middle East is part of a growing militancy among workers, who harbour a growing outrage and revulsion at Israel's war crimes, imperialist militarism and the deepest economic crisis of the world capitalist system since the Great Depression.

It is the united mobilization of the working class of all countries, including Arab and Jewish workers, that holds the key to a genuinely democratic and progressive solution to a crisis that extends beyond the Palestinian territories to Israel itself, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Iran. This must take the conscious form of a struggle against Zionism, imperialism and the Middle Eastern bourgeoisie for a socialist federation of the Middle East, as part of the world socialist revolution. This is the international socialist perspective fought for by the Socialist Equality Parties and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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