

Netanyahu attacks Lebanon and Gaza, with full support of Israel's opposition leaders

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Israeli fighter planes pounded targets in southern Lebanon and Gaza early Friday morning, following rocket attacks blamed on the militant clerical group Hamas that controls the besieged Palestinian enclave of Gaza.

The rockets, many of which were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defence system, caused little damage and minor injuries.

Israel's furious bombardment takes place amid escalating tensions following the police's deliberately provocative attacks on tens of thousands of Palestinian worshippers at the al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem this week.

It is bound up with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's determination to whip up war-fever by attacking Israel's enemies—the Palestinians, Iran and its allies, Lebanon's Hezbollah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad—as a means of suppressing opposition to his government's plans to assume dictatorial powers. The protest movement, now entering its fourth month, is the largest and most significant in Israel's 75-year history. His aim is to manufacture some kind of national "unity" based on militarism to deflect the country's profound social and political tensions outwards.

To this end, Netanyahu was quick to blame Hamas for the rocket attacks from both Gaza and Lebanon, possibly to avoid sparking a war with Lebanon, with whom Israel fought an inconclusive war in 2006 and which is backed by Iran. Nevertheless, Israel Defence Forces (IDF) spokesperson Daniel Hagari declared, "The state of Lebanon is considered responsible for everything that happens in its territory, including the firing of rockets by Hamas. We will not allow Hamas to operate from Lebanon."

On Thursday evening, after Netanyahu had convened his security cabinet made up of his fascist partners, he issued a brief statement saying, "Israel's response, tonight and beyond, will extract a heavy price from our

enemies."

On Friday, IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi ordered a call-up of reserve troops, saying the military would enhance its readiness to conduct aerial-related operations. The call-up would focus on air defence units and the "air attack arrays"—a reference to fighter jet pilots and attack drone operators, as well as other air crew. Halevi instructed the IDF to strengthen its forces in the West Bank after two sisters were killed and their mother seriously injured in a shooting attack near the settlement of Efrat in the Jordan Valley Friday.

Israel's Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai stoked the flames, blaming the Palestinians for the escalating tensions and calling on licensed gun owners to carry their weapons. "The motivation to disturb the peace has risen in recent days and is a result of unrelenting incitement."

In East Jerusalem, the police deployed 2,300 officers in and around the Old City, ahead of early afternoon prayers, and arrested 15 worshippers in the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound for waving Palestinian flags, which they branded as 'terrorist flags' and an "incitement." This followed the breakup before dawn of a gathering of thousands near an entrance to the Mosque.

Netanyahu's provocations against the Palestinians have the full support of the Biden administration. Vedant Patel, the US State Department's spokesperson, while expressing his "concern" about Israel's storming of the al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan, refused to condemn Israel's actions. He did however condemn the launching of rockets from Lebanon and earlier strikes from Gaza and reiterated Washington's longstanding justification for Israel's criminality, saying, "Our commitment to Israel's security is ironclad and we recognize that Israel has the legitimate right to defend itself against all forms of aggression." According to an Israeli official, the Biden administration also blocked a UN Security Council statement to the press criticizing Israel for the raids.

Netanyahu could also count on the full-throated backing of the self-proclaimed leaders of the opposition movement, National Unity chairman and former defence minister Benny Gantz and Yesh Atid leader and former prime minister Yair Lapid. On Thursday evening, Gantz declared that the opposition stood united with the government on its response to the rockets fired from Lebanon. He said, “Facing terror that threatens our citizens, facing shooting on the houses of our citizens, there is no coalition and opposition—we are all united around the IDF and all of the security organization.”

Gantz accused the government of damaging Israel’s resiliency and defence establishment and threatening the country with an internal rift. He declared his support for defence minister Yoav Gallant, a leading member of Netanyahu’s Likud Party who faced the sack for calling a halt to the judicial overhaul, and called on Netanyahu to reinstate him. Gallant, who had cited statements from thousands of reservists saying they would refuse their regular call-ups because they did not want to serve under a government that was destroying democracy, now leads the war drive that includes a call-up of air force reservists.

Gantz also backed the police’s brutal storming of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound on two successive nights. Flatly contradicting all the evidence to the contrary, he declared, “Israel maintained and continues to maintain a freedom of worship and even increased recently the entry of worshipers to the site but will not allow mosques to turn into nests of terror.”

Lapid assured the government it could count on cross-party support following the rocket attacks, saying, ‘Israel today is at conflict on four fronts: the northern border, Gaza border area, Judea and Samaria [the occupied West Bank] and in [occupied East] Jerusalem.’ He added, “When it comes to security, in Israel there is no coalition and opposition. We will stand united against any enemy. The opposition will give the government full support for a harsh response by the IDF and security forces.”

Gantz and Lapid’s support for Netanyahu’s fascistic onslaught against the Palestinians and bellicosity against Hezbollah, Syria and Iran confirms that the official opposition in no way represents a progressive alternative to dictatorship and authoritarianism, much less to war against the Palestinians, Iran and its allies. As committed defenders of the Zionist state, their opposition stems from their fear that Netanyahu and his fascist coalition partners are undermining Israel’s thin democratic veneer and risking splintering an already deeply polarised society to the point of precipitating a civil war.

Under their leadership, the mass opposition movement has largely failed to embrace the struggles of the Palestinian people or mobilise support from Israeli Arabs, much less the Palestinians in the occupied territories.

This movement is now at a turning point. If it is to succeed, Jewish workers and youth must reject the Zionist myth that a capitalist state, based upon the expulsion and dispossession of the Palestinian people, can provide equality, freedom and democracy for the Jewish people, and adopt a socialist strategy based on the revolutionary unification of Jewish and Arab workers in a common struggle against capitalism.

The powerful objective basis for the development of such a movement is to be found not just among workers and youth in Israel’s towns and cities who have been protesting against the Netanyahu government for months, but among Palestinian teachers in the West Bank who have been on strike for the last two months over the failure to implement a pay award and elections to a free trade union, Lebanese workers who have been protesting the erosion of their wages and pensions amid strikes of telecom and other workers, as well as workers in the advanced countries--in France, the UK and US--where powerful battalions of workers are in struggle against their governments.

But for that power to become actualised, the working class must be armed with a clearly worked out programme, grounded on the historically developed strategic lessons drawn by the world Trotskyist movement, represented today solely by the International Committee of the Fourth International, over the course of a century of unrelenting political and theoretical struggle.



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