

Israel agrees to ceasefire in Gaza amid mounting provocations against Palestinians

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Late Saturday night, Israel agreed to a ceasefire, mediated by Egypt, following five days of unrelenting strikes on the impoverished Gaza Strip. But commentators are saying that the next escalation is “just around the corner.”

Israel’s massive aerial assault, ostensibly aimed at Palestinian Islamic Jihad personnel and its facilities, struck 370 targets, killed 35 Palestinians, at least one third of whom are civilians, and injured more than 147 people. It inflicted major damage on Gaza’s civilian infrastructure, including Gaza City, and left 375 people homeless.

This is the latest “ceasefire” in at least 15 murderous assaults, including four major wars, on the besieged Palestinian enclave since Israel’s “disengagement” from Gaza in 2005. Given that the far-right government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refused point blank to end its murderous campaign of assassinating leaders of Palestinian resistant groups or to return the body of Islamic Jihad member Khader Adnan—who died a week ago while on a hunger strike in Israel’s Nitzan jail—this is likely to provide only a temporary respite for the beleaguered Palestinians.

Gaza’s borders have been closed since Tuesday, halting the entry of essential goods that gives Israel total control over the civilian population, and preventing hundreds of people seeking urgent medical treatment from leaving. Palestinian officials warned they would have to shut down the enclave’s only power plant unless Israel reopened its border crossing to let in emergency fuel. Schools have also closed.

The response from Israel’s sponsor in Washington, the United Nations and the major imperialist powers has been limited to condemnations of Palestinian rockets fired on Israel, expressions of “concern” and calls for a ceasefire. US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman reiterated Washington’s “enduring commitment to Israel’s security” and “condemned the indiscriminate launch of rockets into Israel from Gaza-based terrorist groups, which endangers the welfare of both Israelis and Palestinians.”

The ceasefire comes as Palestinians mark the 75th

anniversary of the Nakba, or “catastrophe” in which at least 700,000 Palestinian refugees were driven out or fled their homes in the 1947-49 war following the UN General Assembly vote to partition Palestine, the end of the British Mandate over Palestine and Israel’s declaration of statehood in 1948.

Later this week, tens of thousands of far-right Israeli nationalists are expected to march through the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City in an annual parade, known as Flag Day, on a national holiday marking Israel’s capture of East Jerusalem in the 1967 Arab Israeli war. Even as tensions mount, Netanyahu has refused to cancel the march, one of Islamic Jihad’s conditions for a ceasefire. This same provocation and subsequent protests in May 2021 were among the factors precipitating Israel’s 11-day assault on Gaza that saw, for the first time, widespread protests in Israeli cities with large Arab populations against the government’s actions.

The latest round of attacks began after Israel’s refusal to return the body of Adnan, a well-known opponent of Israel’s repression of the Palestinians, with Islamic Jihad firing rockets from Gaza into Israel. This provided Israel with the pretext to send 40 jet bombers to target Islamic Jihad in a two-hour long bombing raid, killing three of its leaders in Gaza along with at least 18 others, including family members, children and neighbours, in what the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) called “precision” strikes against Jihad Ghannam, Khalil al-Bahtini and Tareq Ezzedine. The IDF claimed they were responsible for rockets fired on Israel during a brief flare-up sparked by Israel’s raid on the al-Aqsa Mosque compound during Ramadan last month that also led to rocket fire from neighbouring Lebanon.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant threatened, “Any terrorist who harms Israeli citizens will be made to regret it.” In anticipation of retaliation from Gaza, the authorities closed several roads and restricted gatherings and movement up to 40 kms from the Gaza Strip.

While one third of the renewed barrage of more than 1,100 rockets from Gaza were intercepted by Israel’s Iron Dome

defence missile system and a similar number fell far short of their targets landing inside Gaza, rockets killed an Israeli in Rehovot and a Palestinian day labourer from Gaza and injured 43 others. Israel let loose on Gaza, killing three more Islamic Jihad leaders and around 12 civilians.

Hamas, the militant clerical group that controls Gaza, opposed the IDF operation, but left Islamic Jihad—whose top officials are based in Beirut where it has close relations with Hezbollah and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—to fight alone. The Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank, which has fought a near-civil war with Hamas in Gaza, took five days to release a ludicrous appeal for Washington to intervene against Israeli aggression.

Israel’s foreign minister, Eli Cohen, said that the IDF had achieved its objectives in the operation and highlighted the support Israel had received, including the efforts by the US and several UN Security Council members—the United Arab Emirates, Russia and China—to block a joint statement expressing concern over the violence.

Even this horrific assault on Gaza is not enough for Netanyahu’s fascistic colleagues. Bezalel Smotrich, minister of finance and Religious Zionism leader, said that Israel would have to reconquer the Gaza Strip, calling it a “chronic problem” that had to be dealt with once and for all. Speaking in a television interview, he said, “The time will probably come to return to Gaza, disassemble Hamas and demilitarise Gaza. This too will be carried out according to the broad interests and considerations of the State of Israel,” adding “I believe the moment will come when there won’t be a choice but to reconquer Gaza.”

Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir, the leader of Jewish Power and national security minister, had earlier attacked Netanyahu for his “lenient” response to Islamic Jihad. Jewish Power legislators also refused to attend voting sessions in the Knesset, threatening to withdraw from the coalition. Opinion polls show plummeting support for Netanyahu’s far-right government and a likely election win for the opposition bloc led by former prime minister Yair Lapid and General Benny Gantz.

There has been no let up on the crackdown on Palestinians in the occupied West Bank where there were renewed clashes with protesters in Nablus in which six Palestinians were injured with live fire. The raid followed the wounding of an Israeli soldier by an explosive device near Nablus Tuesday afternoon.

On Saturday, undercover security forces shot and killed two men aged 19 and 32, reportedly members of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Fatah’s armed wing, in another raid on Balata—a refugee camp in Nablus. Israel’s paramilitary Border Police also shot a 33-year-old Palestinian man at a

West Bank checkpoint where he was left to bleed to death.

It signals an ever-sharper turn towards the military repression of the Palestinians on all fronts that threatens a broader conflagration throughout the region.

As Netanyahu doubtless calculated when he started the military operation in Gaza, the opposition leaders dutifully fell in line. This disparate group of Zionist parties, whose disagreements with Netanyahu reflect their concerns that he is endangering the state and jeopardising its support in Washington and the diaspora, issued statements of support and called off Saturday’s 19th successive weekly protest rally in Tel Aviv. They proved their unity on all essential issues with Netanyahu and the far-right, above all in relation to the oppression of the Palestinians.

Nevertheless, tens of thousands of Israelis defied their leaders’ call to abandon the protests, turning out Saturday to demonstrate against the Netanyahu government’s judicial coup in towns and cities across the country, with the largest rallies in the north. In Haifa, Doctors for Democracy led the rally, with a smaller group protesting against Israel’s bombing of Gaza. Protesters rallied in central Tel Aviv, despite the official cancellation of the main rally, with some demonstrating against the Gaza operation.

Israelis who want to oppose the threat of dictatorship and war must take up the fight to overcome the reactionary Zionist leadership of the protest movement and unite Arab and Jewish workers in a common struggle to defend jobs, living standards and democratic rights, including the national rights of the Palestinian people. This can only be done based on the programme and perspective of international socialism.



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