

Death toll in Jabaliya refugee camp massacre soars to 195

Jordan Shilton
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One day after its brutal bombardment of the Jabaliya refugee camp in Gaza, the Israeli regime intensified its onslaught on the Palestinians, including with a second strike on the camp. The official death toll among civilians from the more than three weeks of constant air strikes is likely to pass 9,000 today, as Secretary of State Antony Blinken prepares to make another trip to the region to reaffirm US imperialism's unconditional support for the Israeli regime's genocide.

The two strikes claimed at least 195 civilian lives, with over 120 still missing as of late Wednesday evening. According to Gaza's Government Media Office, a further 777 people were wounded in the twin attacks on the enclave's largest refugee camp.

Al-Jazeera reported that most of the victims were being treated at the Indonesian Hospital, which like almost all health facilities in Gaza now operates without fuel. Al-Shifa Hospital, the largest in Gaza, "has announced that in a few hours it will completely stop operating because of a shortage of fuel," the broadcaster noted.

Responding to the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, the UN Human Rights Office declared that the air strikes "are disproportionate attacks that could amount to war crimes" due to the "high number of civilian casualties and the scale of destruction." Chris Gunness, the former spokesman for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) told Al-Jazeera that Gaza is rapidly becoming "the world's largest open-air death camp."

Knowing full well that its war crimes enjoy the support of all the imperialist powers, the Israeli regime has increasingly given up any pretense of justifying them. In what amounted to a brazen provocation, the Israeli military said of Tuesday's air bombardment of Jabaliya that it had targeted "tunnels underneath the

buildings, which resulted in the collapse of the buildings on top," according to Times of Israel.

Representatives of the imperialist powers issued typical anodyne statements following the massacre, prefaced as always with declarations of Israel's "right" to "self-defence." US President Joe Biden, in remarks that failed to mention the flattening of residential buildings in Jabaliya, stated, "Israel has a right to defend itself in a manner consistent with international humanitarian law."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz was no less fulsome in his backing for the Israeli regime, telling Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a Wednesday telephone call that he "renewed Germany's unwavering solidarity with Israel" and "underlined the importance of protecting civilians and humanitarian supplies."

A mere 61 aid trucks made it into Gaza Wednesday, less than a drop in the bucket for the 2.3 million residents. Israel continues to block all shipments of fuel from passing the Rafah crossing.

A statement from the French Foreign Ministry was one of the few to even mention the bombardment of the refugee camp. However, after stating that Paris was "deeply concerned" by the attack, it restricted itself to the bland declaration that "protection of civilian populations is an obligation of international law, which is binding on everyone."

Behind such empty references to "international law," the reality is that the imperialist powers have facilitated Israel's genocide against the Palestinian people. The multibillion-dollar military aid packages Washington has provided Israel over the years has turned the country into a garrison state for US imperialist interests in the Middle East. Biden has just requested another \$14 billion in military assistance to enable the Israeli

regime to continue its slaughter. Biden, Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron have all visited Israel to give Netanyahu their full backing since the beginning of the war. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is scheduled to pay another visit to Israel Friday to underscore Washington's support for the genocide.

The Israeli regime clearly felt emboldened by the reaction of its imperialist backers. Late Wednesday, the Palestine Health Ministry reported that a maternity ward at the Al-Helou International Hospital in Gaza City was "bombarded." Air strikes also occurred in the vicinity of Al-Quds Hospital, according to the Palestine Red Crescent.

Ground operations have also expanded, with Israeli Army spokesman Daniel Haggari claiming that Israeli forces have "broken through" Hamas defences in northern Gaza. Soldiers are reportedly approaching the outskirts of Gaza City. So far 16 Israeli soldiers have died in the intervention.

While fully endorsing Israel's pummelling of Gaza and slaughtering of its civilian population, some US officials have sought to give the impression that more clarity is needed from Israel on what its plans are for Gaza after Hamas has been defeated. US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby, for example, answered a question about what would follow Hamas by saying, "We don't have all the answers to that."

A letter signed by US senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren as part of the debate on the \$14 billion in aid to Israel asserted, "Congress needs more information about Israel's long-term plans and goals, as well as the United States government's assessments of those prospects."

The fact of the matter is that Israel has been more than explicit about its plans for Gaza, which consist in exterminating a significant section of the population and forcing the rest to flee to Egypt. Last month, Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, who described Palestinians at the outset of the onslaught on Gaza as "human animals," laid out three phases in the war. After eliminating Hamas's military and governmental capabilities, Gallant vowed that Israel would remove any responsibility it has for Gaza by creating a new "security reality." Plans to force Egypt to set up refugee camps in the Sinai Peninsula, where those fleeing Gaza could be housed, are under discussion.

On Wednesday, Galit Distel Atbaryan, a former minister in the Netanyahu government, explicitly called for the "erasure" of "all of Gaza from the face of the earth" in a post on X. "Gazan monsters" have the option of heading to Egypt or dying, she continued, while the occupied West Bank should experience "fire and smoke on the heads of Nazis."

Zvi Succot of the ultra-nationalist Religious Zionist party was also nominated to head the Knesset (Israeli parliament) Defence subcommittee for Judea and Samaria, which is responsible for security in the West Bank. Succot, a far-right settler activist who has been arrested on several occasions, said on his appointment that he would aim to "expand the settlements as much as possible" and ensure "personal security" for the residents, i.e., continue the brutalization of Palestinians in the West Bank at the hands of settler thugs that has intensified dramatically since the war began.

The mass opposition to Israel's imperialist-backed genocide of the Palestinians has found expression in the participation on every inhabited continent of millions of people in protests denouncing the massacre of men, women and children in Gaza. These protests must be developed and fight for the mobilisation of the working class around the world in a political general strike to put an end to the Israeli bloodbath in Gaza.



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