

Israel Resumes its Ravage of Gaza. Rising Death Toll

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A ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, which lasted barely 24 hours from Saturday morning to Sunday morning, enabled the Palestinian population and international observers and journalists to take stock of the devastation that has been inflicted by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) since it invaded the tiny territory on July 8.

Towns and districts close to the border between Israel and Gaza, such as the Shuja'iya suburb of Gaza City in the east, Beit Hanoun in the north, and Khan Younis in the south, have been devastated. Israel has declared that all of Gaza within three miles (5 kilometres) of the border—nearly half of the total territory—is a buffer zone that civilians must abandon.

The *Washington Post's* William Booth described the scene in Shuja'iya:

“On some streets, it seemed as if every house was riddled with bullet holes or shrapnel spray, charred by flames or levelled ... The tops of mosque minarets—perhaps sources of sniper fire—were blasted away. Schools and hospitals were peppered with shrapnel from missiles and shells that fell within their perimeters. Water pump stations were blown up, electrical lines toppled onto the streets, the main roads blocked by deep impact craters.”

“In some places”, Booth wrote, “the odour of bodies came so strongly that passersby gagged.”

The *Guardian* reported that in Beit Hanoun, “scores of homes were pulverised, roads were blocked by wreckage and power cables dangled in the street.... Israeli tanks stood by as people searched through the debris for their belongings.”

The hospital in the town was shelled on Friday night, and two ambulances had been attacked, according to the International Red Cross, killing one medical worker and injuring three others.

The Gaza health ministry announced late Saturday that rescue workers had extracted 85 more dead from the ruins across the territory. The ministry estimated the total death toll caused by Israel's onslaught to be at least 1,031 and over 6,000 injured. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency has documented 167,269 Palestinians—out of Gaza's population of 1.8 million—who have been displaced from their homes and are now sheltering in UN-operated facilities. Thousands more, especially from the border communities, have taken refuge with family in other areas of Gaza.

The Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had agreed to extend a ceasefire until midnight on Sunday. At 10am Sunday morning, however, it declared that

Hamas, the Islamist party that governs Gaza, had violated the arrangement by allowing Palestinian militants to fire rockets and mortars into Israel. The IDF resumed its killing and destruction, with artillery and air strikes taking the lives of at least 10 Palestinians yesterday and wounding dozens more. A total of 43 Israeli soldiers have been killed in fighting since the invasion was launched and two civilians by Hamas rockets.

Hamas has insisted that the only basis for a permanent ceasefire is the full withdrawal of the IDF from Gaza and the lifting of the economic blockade that is being enforced against the territory by both Israel and Egypt's military regime headed by President Abdul Fattah el-Sisi. It has also demanded the release of hundreds of Hamas members who were detained in the West Bank territory last month, on allegations they had knowledge of the whereabouts, or involvement in the kidnapping, of three Israeli teenagers.

BBC journalist Jon Donnison tweeted on Friday that he had been told by Israel's Police Foreign Press spokesperson Micky Rosenfield that in fact, Israeli authorities had known from the days the youth disappeared that the kidnappers were "def [definitely] a lone cell, Hamas affiliated but not operating under leadership." In a second tweet, Donnison wrote: "Seems to contradict the line from Netanyahu government."

The kidnapping of the youth, who Israeli police had known from phone recordings were murdered shortly after they were seized by their assailants, was used to whip up a frenzy of anti-Hamas hysteria and anti-Arab chauvinism in Israel and justify a rampage in the West Bank purportedly searching for them. The attacks on Hamas in the West Bank directly provoked the firing of crude rockets into Israel from Gaza by Palestinian militants, which were then exploited by Netanyahu as the pretext for the ground invasion of the Strip.

Netanyahu's government has refused to even entertain Hamas's terms for an end to the carnage. It is demanding instead the "demilitarisation" of Gaza. Demilitarisation would involve protracted IDF operations to destroy tunnel networks, which have been developed primarily to smuggle food and consumer goods into Gaza, the mass killing or arrest of Hamas leaders and fighters and the seizure of the limited arsenals of weapons in the hands of Palestinian militants.

Hamas has stated it will not submit to such conditions. It would mean accepting its own physical annihilation, and ending any resistance while the IDF realised Netanyahu's objective of turning Gaza into a smoking and uninhabitable ruin. The reports from the territory make clear that Israeli troops are deliberately slaughtering livestock and destroying farmland, blowing up water pumps and sewage treatment facilities, destroying the electricity grid and shattering health care infrastructure.

The underground water supply is contaminated. Sewerage runs through the streets. Gaza's only power plant has been bombed and is not operating. Israel has disabled 8 of 10 power lines into the territory. Households in Gaza City receive less than four hours of electricity per day, if any at all. Large numbers of people have no access to running water. The conditions for epidemics of cholera and other diseases have been created.

On the weekend, US President Barack Obama repeated his cynical expressions of "concern" over the fate of the civilian population in Gaza and called for an "immediate" ceasefire, while completely endorsing Israel's war aims. In a phone call with Netanyahu yesterday, he declared that any peace deal "must ensure the disarmament of terrorist groups and the

demilitarisation of Gaza.”

Demonstrations over the weekend testified to the outrage around the world at the Israeli atrocities and war crimes being committed in Gaza.

In the Palestinian territories of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, there were ongoing rallies and protests by youth against the assault on Gaza. Israeli troops and police are firing live rounds into demonstrations that approach checkpoints. Since Thursday night, at least 10 Palestinians have been shot dead and over 600 wounded.

Within Israel itself, the deranged and genocidal policies of Netanyahu’s government are producing growing alarm and opposition among the Jewish population. In the first large protest, at least 3,000 Israelis assembled in Tel Aviv on Saturday night to denounce the Gaza operation and call for peace and unity between Jews and Arabs.

The demonstration was confronted by a far smaller counter-demonstration, organised by the extreme right-wing layers on whom Netanyahu increasingly rests. Fascistic elements in the right-wing crowd called for the death of their Jewish opponents. In another sign of the social antagonisms building up inside Israel, two Arabs in Jerusalem were hospitalised after they were attacked by a right-wing Jewish gang and bashed with iron bars.

Tensions will only increase as Israeli troops resume their ravage of Gaza and the death toll continues to rise.

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