

Third day of Israeli attacks deepens anger of Arab masses

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The Israeli Air Force has waged its third day of bombing against Gaza, hitting the interior ministry and Islamic University. Also hit was a house near the abandoned home of a senior Hamas leader in the southern town of Rafah.

Israel has massed thousands of troops along the Gaza border and has declared the area a "closed military zone." Over 6,500 reservists have been called up. Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak on Monday said Israel was engaged in a "war to the bitter end" against Hamas. Speaking to a special session of the Israeli parliament, Barak said the current assault would continue and even intensify.

Hamas officials say that over 300 Palestinians have been killed and more than 1,400 others wounded. The UN relief agency in Gaza says 62 civilians have been killed by Israeli fire so far, with five girls dying in Jabaliya refugee camp after Israel bombed a mosque near their home.

Khaled Meshaal, the political leader of Hamas, called on Palestinians to wage a new intifada against Israel, including a revival of suicide missions. Hamas has not carried out a suicide attack on Israel since January 2005.

The BBC cited a Palestinian doctor in Gaza as saying that nearly all the casualties he saw overnight and on Monday were civilians. Bloomberg.com reported Monday that the Shifa Hospital morgue in Gaza City was overflowing with the bodies of Palestinians killed in the Israeli air attacks. The article noted: "The refrigerated compartments at Shifa Hospital's morgue in Gaza City were filled three bodies to a drawer.

"Dozens more corpses wrapped in sheets lay on stretchers in the white-walled morgue yesterday as grieving parents identified sons who were killed in Israeli's most punishing aerial assault on the Gaza Strip in more than 40 years. Hospital corridors were jammed with wounded, many screaming as they waited for a doctor.

"Gaza is saturated in death on the second day of Israel's bombardment with brief funerals taking place in cemeteries throughout the 40-kilometer-long seaside territory."

Humanitarian aid groups warned on Sunday of a growing humanitarian crisis in the densely populated territory. They described a deteriorating medical situation and urged the opening of Gaza's borders to allow supplies to flow to hospitals.

The Washington Post quoted Iyad Nasr, a spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross in Gaza, as saying, "There are hundreds of wounded in the hospitals in the Gaza

Strip, and what we have received so far has only been a fraction of our need. Our supplies have been depleted, and we are in desperate need of supplies.”

The Israeli offensive against Gaza has sparked demonstrations around the world, which in many Arab nations have become political protests against the ruling regimes.

Over 2,000 rallied Sunday in Copenhagen. Police arrested a man after he threw a petrol bomb at officers.

On Monday, British riot police made 10 arrests as demonstrators gathered for a second day outside the Israeli embassy in London. Protests were also held in Paris, where about 200 people gathered on the Champs Elysees, while the northern district of Barbes saw at least 1,300 mount an anti-Israel protest.

In Spain, hundreds demonstrated outside the Israeli embassy in Madrid. In Turkey there were demonstrations involving thousands in a dozen cities.

Over 2,500 people rallied on Monday afternoon in Sydney, Australia. The protestors marched from the Sydney Town Hall to the US consulate in Martin Place blocking peak-hour traffic. Several hundred people also demonstrated in Lakemba, a south-western Sydney suburb. Demonstrations will be held today in Melbourne and Adelaide.

The regime in Egypt is particularly threatened by the rising tide of anger at its collaboration with Israel. Together with Jordan it has signed peace agreements with Israel. Egypt borders the Gaza Strip and the government of Hosni Mubarak has kept Palestinians penned in since June of last year.

The largest protests against the Israeli bombardment of Gaza were in Egypt, where 8,000 demonstrated in the southern city of Aysut, 4,000 protested in the capital Cairo and 4,000 in Alexandria. In total, more than 50,000 demonstrated in Egyptian cities on Sunday, led by the Islamist opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, out of which Hamas first emerged.

On Sunday, Palestinians breached the Rafah border fence with Egypt in four places along its nine-mile length. Hundreds of desperate Palestinians crossed over. Clashes with Egyptian security personnel saw one Palestinian shot dead and four wounded.

An Egyptian major was shot twice in the stomach, killing him. Five other border guards were injured and an eight-year-old Egyptian child was wounded by a stray bullet. Tear gas was used extensively. Gunmen briefly took control of several Egyptian checkpoints, after which 300 additional border guards were dispatched to the area.

In January, a similar breach saw hundreds of thousands enter Egypt to stock up on food.

Egyptian security had pulled back ahead of Sunday’s Israeli air strikes on tunnels between Gaza and Egypt, underscoring that they had been warned in advance by Jerusalem.

Gamal Abdel Gawad, head of the international relations unit at the Cairo-based al-Ahram Center for Strategic and Political Studies, warned, “The Egyptian public cannot tolerate a massive Israeli military operation in Gaza in which Palestinians will be hurt, particularly civilians... If you expose the Egyptian government or any government to pressure, to criticism, this could be destabilising.”

Spontaneous demonstrations and riots have broken out across the West Bank and in Arab parts of Israel. In the Bedouin village of Rahat in the Negev desert some 400 residents protested the attacks. Palestinian protestors from West Bank towns and refugee camps marched on Israeli checkpoints and Israeli settlements. Many were injured by rubber bullets and tear gas shot by Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers.

In Ramallah, hundreds of protestors from the various Palestinian factions waved banners and flags and called for unity in support of the people of Gaza.

Several hundred Israelis marched through the streets of Tel Aviv toward the Israeli defence ministry headquarters, chanting, "No to war, yes to peace." Protestors carried signs saying, "Israeli's government is committing war crimes," "Negotiation instead of slaughter," and "Lift the siege on Gaza." Several Israeli protestors were arrested.

Several thousand marched in the Jordanian capital Amman to demand the closure of the Israeli embassy. They chanted, "No for peace, yes to the rifle." There were rallies in many of Jordan's Palestinian refugee camps.

Demonstrators in Amman rallied outside the Egyptian embassy to protest Cairo's refusal to open the border with Gaza. "The Egyptian regime has taken the decision to be part of a conspiracy against Gaza," the secretary general of Jordan's Islamic Action Front, Zaki Saad Beni Rasheid, said.

Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shia group, denounced Israel's offensive as a "war crime" that "represents genocide." In the capital Beirut, protestors tried to approach the barbed wire fence around the Egyptian Embassy offices. Policemen wearing gas masks hurled tear gas canisters and the protestors set fire to rubber tires. Protests were also staged in downtown Beirut and Tripoli, called by the Jamaa Islamiya, Lebanon's chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Ain el-Hilweh, Lebanon's largest refugee camp near Sidon, around 2,000 demonstrators urged Hezbollah to attack Israel.

Nawaf Mussawi, Hezbollah's chief of international relations, told Lebanon's New TV, "What is happening in Gaza today is an Israeli-US war, with Arab collusion, to deprive the Palestinians of their rights."

In a televised speech Sunday, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah urged Egyptians in their "millions" to take to the streets to force their government to open the country's border with Gaza. He called on the Egyptian people, government officials, the intelligentsia and political parties to exert pressure on their government to keep the Rafah crossing to Gaza open permanently and to send weapons and ammunition to the Palestinians.

"There are some who speak of Arab silence, but this is wrong," he said. "There is full Arab cooperation, especially by those who have signed so-called peace agreements with Israel."

He denounced Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, who said that Hamas must bear responsibility for the current situation in Gaza. "Yesterday we heard a high-ranking Egyptian leader cast the responsibility on the victim," he said. "Can we accept such things from Arabs?"

If Egypt does not open the Rafah crossing, he added, it will be accused of partnership in Israeli aggression. He described what is occurring in Gaza as "a Palestinian version of what happened in Lebanon in July 2006," referring to the Israeli war that led to the loss of 1,200

lives, mainly Lebanese civilians.

Israeli jets flew low-level sorties over south Lebanon Monday for a second day. They have carried out intensive mock air raids over Hasbaya, Nabatiyeh Khiam, Iqlim al-Tuffah and Marjayoun all the way to eastern Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. Jerusalem has pledged to attack Lebanese civilian locations in the event of renewed hostilities. Lebanese army troops and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon have stepped up security at the border with Israel and across south Lebanon.

Nasrallah urged those in southern Lebanon to remain vigilant in case of Israeli attacks, declaring, "Since the beginning of the Zionist attack on Gaza, Israeli officials have issued threats about another front, and they mean Lebanon."

In Syria, 5,000 demonstrated in central Damascus. Protestors waved the green flags of Hamas as well as Palestinian, Syrian and yellow Hezbollah flags.

Israel's assault on Gaza prompted Syria to rule out an early resumption of ongoing but indirect peace talks. A Syrian official declared on Sunday that Israel's action in Gaza "closes the door on the movement for a peaceful political settlement."

Turkey's foreign minister, Ali Babacan, who has mediated the talks, added, "It is not possible to carry on the negotiations under these conditions."

In Iran tens of thousands protested yesterday, burning Israeli and US flags and calling on Islamic countries to boycott "Zionist companies." Clerics were reported to be signing up volunteers to fight in the Gaza Strip. More than 1,100 people have registered for military service.

In the northern Iraqi city of Mosul a demonstration of some 1,300 people was organised by the Iraqi Islamic Party, the main Sunni Arab faction in parliament. A suicide bomber blew himself up among the crowd, killing one person and wounding 16. "Arab silence is behind the bombings," read a banner at a rally of several thousand people in the Sunni Arab city of Samarra north of Baghdad.

On Monday, about 1,000 supporters of the Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr chanted, "No, no to Israel" and burned Israeli and American flags during a demonstration in eastern Baghdad. The al-Dawa party of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki issued a statement calling on Islamic countries to cut relations with Israel and end all "secret and public talks" with it.

In the Yemeni capital Sanaa, tens of thousands joined a demonstration jointly organised by the ruling General People's Congress and opposition parties. One banner read, "How long will the silence last? Arabs wake up!" In Bahrain, over 2,000 people protested with many slogans attacking Egypt such as "Mubarak, you have embarrassed the Arabs."

Most Arab states have pledged aid to Gaza, but done little else. The treachery and complicity of the Arab bourgeois regimes were underscored by the decision of the Arab League to put off a meeting to discuss a common response to the Israeli attack until a summit scheduled for January 2 in Doha, Qatar. Arab foreign ministers were due to hold an emergency meeting on Sunday, but postponed the meeting until Wednesday.

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