

Israeli bombs kill nearly 600 Palestinians

Gaza death toll doubles in four days

By Patrick Martin
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The death toll from Israeli violence in Gaza approached 600 Palestinians as of Tuesday morning local time, according to reports from hospitals and emergency care workers in the beleaguered territory. The United Nations estimated that three quarters of the dead were civilians, including more than 100 children of all ages.

Over 120 people were killed on Sunday, most of the them in the Shujaiya neighborhood east of Gaza City, and as many or more on Monday, in what observers described as the most intense military onslaught since the 1967 war, in which Israel first seized control of the Gaza Strip.

Particularly horrific was the slaughter of entire family groups, including 28 members of the Abu Jami family killed by an air strike near Khan Younis in southern Gaza; only four members of the family survived. In Rafah, near the Egyptian border, 11 members of the Siyam family were killed, including seven children.

Israeli tanks fired on a hospital in central Gaza Monday, killing at least five people and wounding 60, half of them medical staff. Twelve shells hit the Al Aqsa hospital, smashing into the administration building, the intensive care unit and the surgery department, according to Palestinian health officials.

Given the number of shells fired into the hospital, this was clearly a deliberate war crime, not a “mistake” as claimed by the Israeli government and parroted by the US and international media.

A spokesman for Amnesty International condemned the Israeli action, saying, “Instead of targeting medical facilities, in violation of international law, Israeli forces must protect medics and patients and ensure that the injured can safely reach medical facilities in Gaza and, when necessary, outside the Strip.”

The French medical charity Doctors Without Borders

urged Israel to “stop bombing civilians trapped in the Gaza Strip,” noting that the majority of the injured at Al-Shifa hospital, where the victims of the Shujaiya massacres were taken, were women and children. “While the official line is that the ground offensive is aimed at destroying tunnels, what we see on the ground is that bombing is indiscriminate and that those who are dying are civilians,” the group said in a statement.

So hellish were the conditions in Shujaiya that even the secretary-general of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, until now an open supporter of the Israeli-US propaganda campaign against Hamas, denounced the Israeli attack as an “atrocious action.”

Eyewitness accounts from survivors who fled Shujaiya, reported on Al-Jazeera America, said “residents were holding whatever white cloth they could find—shirts, undershirts or tablecloths—to wave as white flags. They wanted to get out of the targeted area under constant heavy Israeli bombardment. But most white cloths were either ripped apart or covered in blood.”

“Nowhere was safe to run to,” Iman Mansour, a mother of three, told Al-Jazeera. Her three children were all injured and are now hospitalized. “We were forced to leave our house because tank shells were falling like hot raindrops,” she said.

The Al-Jazeera report continues, describing conditions at the hospital:

“The smell at Al-Shifa is of burned human flesh. The morgue is filled with all types of injuries—human body parts and limbs and burned bodies, including bad facial burns on dead children.

“The morgue has more bodies than it can hold. Many of the victims are unrecognizable. Those searching for their loved ones struggle to remember any specific physical detail—skin color, old scars, facial shape,

haircut or height and weight, scraps of clothing—to be able to identify an otherwise badly damaged body.”

The United Nations said that as many as 100,000 residents were taking refuge in 67 shelters, with a spokesman citing a “situation for civilians beyond imagining.”

Even the American television networks Monday night gave a glimpse of the terrible conditions in Gaza hospitals. NBC interviewed a visiting European doctor who pointed to a small child, a victim of Israeli bombing, and said angrily, “She is guilty of a great crime—being born Palestinian in Gaza.”

The logic of the Israeli invasion is that casualties will escalate exponentially on the Palestinian side, as the population of Gaza is pushed into a smaller and smaller area where they are targets for more and more Israeli shells, bombs and missiles. As for the claims that Israel seeks to minimize civilian casualties, it should be pointed out that half the entire population of Gaza is younger than 18—900,000 children in a tiny enclave facing attack by one of the most heavily armed military forces on the planet.

In an effort to deflect mounting popular opposition—including within the United States—US President Obama commented on the Gaza bloodbath Monday morning, before issuing a statement denouncing pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. He claimed to have “serious concerns about the rising number of Palestinian civilian deaths and the loss of Israeli lives” and confirmed that Secretary of State John Kerry had left for Egypt to conduct further talks on a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel.

Despite the crocodile tears about Palestinian dead, Obama is a full partner in the Israeli war crimes in Gaza, backing both the initial air strikes and the ground invasion. The US arms and finances the Israeli war machine, which has long been a spearhead for American imperialism in the Middle East.

The Israeli government continues to portray its one-sided slaughter of Palestinian civilians as a “self-defense” operation directed against Hamas rocket-launching sites and tunnels through which Hamas militants have launched cross-border attacks into Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with military leaders on Monday morning, then issued a statement that the “operation would be expanded in order to restore quiet to Israeli citizens.”

While Netanyahu claims the invasion of Gaza was a response to recent Hamas rocket attacks, the *New York Times* reported Monday that “Israel had a task force studying the tunnels for a year.” In other words, the Israel Defense Forces has been planning this operation for some time, and seized on the kidnapping and murder of three young Israeli settlers on the West Bank as a pretext for stoking up tensions with Hamas and provoking a full-scale war.

While press reports from the Israeli side are subject to military censorship and Israeli soldiers have been told not to discuss their experiences during the invasion, it is clear even from fragmentary accounts that the Hamas resistance in Shujaiya was far more intense than the Israeli military expected. This accounts, in part, for the ferocity of the Israeli bombardment of the neighborhood, as they sought to avenge themselves on the entire Palestinian population after 13 Israeli soldiers were killed on Sunday in that area.

The *Washington Post* quoted a senior Israeli military official saying, “It was a very hard battle there. I have to admit that we were facing good fighters from the other side.” He said the Hamas militants were “highly trained” and “very well equipped” with light weapons and a few mortars. The Hamas forces fought toe to toe with the IDF for more than seven hours. The *New York Times* reported that the house in Shujaiya used by the Golani Brigade, the Israeli unit that took most of the casualties, was hit by an anti-tank rocket and collapsed.

Meanwhile, on the West Bank, Palestinians began three days of mourning for the victims in Gaza, and the territory was shut down by a general strike. There were scattered incidents of stone-throwing by Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem. A 21-year-old Palestinian youth, Mahmud Shawamreh, was shot to death by Israeli troops near Ramallah.

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