

Israel carries out new strikes on Gaza

By James Cogan
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The Israeli air force launched waves of strikes on Wednesday and Thursday against up to 150 purported “military targets” in the besieged Palestinian enclave of Gaza. The targets included manufacturing facilities, alleged weapons depots and a five-storey cultural centre in a densely-populated area.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health named three people who were killed: Ali Ghandour, 34, Inas Khamash, 23, and her 18-month-old daughter, Bayan Khamash. At least 30 more people suffered injuries.

The strikes were carried out in purported retaliation for the firing of mortars and rockets into Israel—most of which were destroyed by Israeli defences or fell in open fields. Seven people were reportedly injured by a rocket that landed in a residential area of Beer Sheva.

The Palestinian strikes were themselves retaliation for an earlier incident on Tuesday, in which an Israeli tank fired on a Palestinian border post, killing two Palestinian security personnel. The Israeli military later claimed it had “mistaken” a training exercise for a sniper attack.

By Thursday afternoon, a ceasefire was agreed between the Hamas-led authorities in Gaza and Israel, but tensions remain high. On July 14, Israel launched the most intense air strikes on Gaza since the seven-week, one-sided “war” in 2014.

The latest Israeli assault follows weeks of repeated threats by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government to launch yet another full-scale military intervention if Hamas does not agree to end ongoing popular protests along the border.

Since late March, at least 160 people have been killed and some 15,000 injured by Israeli forces during demonstrations to demand the right of Palestinians to return to the homes from which their families were driven in 1948.

Antagonisms in the Palestinian territories have been fueled by the passage within Israel of the “Nation-State

Law,” which institutionalises discrimination against non-Jewish citizens, sanctions state-supported segregation and the exclusion of Arabs from exclusively Jewish communities, and removes Arabic as an official state language.

The Israeli security cabinet met Thursday evening to plan further attacks on Gaza. Among the measures reportedly being considered is the targeted assassination of Hamas leaders. According to Israel Radio reports, Hamas political and military officials turned off their cellphones and went into hiding.

The Trump administration nevertheless immediately blamed the violence exclusively on Hamas. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert declared the US “fully supports Israel’s right to defend itself, and to take actions to prevent provocations.”

Conditions for the two million people in Gaza are horrific and desperate. Since 2007, they have been subjected to an Israel economic blockade. Electricity is unavailable for up to 18 hours per day, while at least 56 percent of the workforce is unemployed. The health and education systems are dysfunctional. Access to many essential food items is restricted. Most of the water system is contaminated with untreated sewerage or salt.

Last month, Jamie McGoldrick, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, condemned additional measures imposed by Israel to prevent all goods passing through the Kerem Shalom border crossing, except medical and food supplies.

On July 17, McGoldrick stated: “Should they continue, these additional restrictions risk triggering a dramatic deterioration in an already fragile situation and desperate humanitarian conditions, particularly for the health sector.”

The UN agency noted that humanitarian aid is only 23 percent funded and \$4.5 million was urgently

needed for emergency fuel, which would run out in early August.

An aid worker told *Haaretz*: “They [the people of Gaza] currently have no purchasing power. They have no money to spend on anything except food, and there too it’s the most basic items.”

The impact of the Israeli siege is aggravated by sanctions imposed by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank, headed by President Mahmoud Abbas. Abbas and his government are demanding that Hamas surrender control of Gaza. Last year, the PA slashed the salaries of Gaza-based state employees by 30 percent in a calculated attempt to worsen the poverty and deprivation in the tiny territory.

Talks about “reconciliation” between Abbas’s authority and Hamas, a ceasefire with Israel and some relaxation in the economic blockade of Gaza have taken place in Cairo, Egypt over the past two weeks, presided over by the UN Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Nickolay Mladenov. Little progress had been made, however, before this week.

In a statement yesterday, Mladenov warned that if the tensions were not “contained immediately, the situation can rapidly deteriorate with devastating consequences for all people.”

The protracted 2008–2009 Israeli onslaught against Gaza killed some 1,400 Palestinians and left much of the territory in ruin. The 50-day assault in 2014 claimed close to 2,200 Palestinian lives, overwhelmingly civilians.

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