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Stop Israel's war on Gaza, ethnic cleansing in Jerusalem

The *World Socialist Web Site* emphatically condemns the Israeli onslaught against the population of Gaza, as well as the ethnic cleansing operation in Jerusalem which preceded the conflict and set a match to it. The workers of the entire world, including the Israeli working class, must oppose the ongoing aggression against the Palestinian people.

Dozens of Palestinians have been killed by Israeli bombs and missiles, which have rained down on at least 500 locations in an area no larger than the cities of Detroit or Philadelphia, with a population of more than two million.



This Israeli airstrike was the latest in a series of assaults on targets in the Gaza Strip following Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City, Wednesday, May 12, 2021. (AP Photo/Khalil Hamra)

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Some leaders of the Palestinian militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad have been killed, under circumstances that remain unclear. But it seems to be a combination of deliberate assassination using missiles and a more generalized bombing campaign to destroy buildings used by Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007.

The most prominent casualty is Bassem Issa, commander of the Gaza City brigade of the Hamas military force. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gloated: “We eliminated senior Hamas commanders and this is just the beginning ... We will inflict blows on them that they couldn’t even dream of.”

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) mobilized 5,000 reserve troops, including armored units and paratroopers, deploying them along the Gaza border, in positions to invade the enclave if given orders by the Israeli security cabinet, which was on a war footing Wednesday. It was the largest show of force since the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2014, which killed thousands of Palestinians in a monthlong slaughter.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz, visiting the southern city of Ashkelon near Gaza, which has been targeted by crude and largely ineffective rocket attacks by Hamas, indicated the Israeli operation would go on for some time. The military “will continue to strike and will bring complete quiet for the long term,” he said. “There is currently no end date.”

IDF spokesman Hidai Zilberman acknowledged Palestinian civilians were likely to be injured or killed by Israeli attacks but claimed that Hamas was deliberately using civilians as “human shields” for its operations, a phony justification used countless times by both US imperialism and the Zionist state for the slaughter of civilians.

More politically significant was the call-up of eight reserve border police battalions to be deployed within Israel against towns with sizeable Israeli Arab populations, rather than the usual targets on the West Bank. There have been widespread protests among Israeli Palestinians against the Israeli efforts to evict Palestinian residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, and against Israeli attacks on Palestinians engaged in religious services at the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Border police have been sent to Lod, in central Israel, where a state of emergency was declared, and to Acre, on the northern coast.

The threatened Israeli evictions in Sheikh Jarrah have a particularly provocative character, accompanied by marches through the neighborhood by far-right Zionists chanting, “Death to Arabs.” As noted in an op-ed in the *New York Times* by activist and filmmaker Rula Salameh, “The Sheikh Jarrah families who have faced eviction are Palestinian refugees who were driven from their homes in Haifa and Jaffa during the 1948 war.” They were later resettled in East Jerusalem by the government of Jordan, which controlled the area until the 1967 war.

Sheikh Jarrah directly adjoins the Damascus Gate, the main entrance to the Arab Quarter of the Old City, the historic walled portion of Jerusalem that includes both the Wailing Wall and the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest shrine of Islam. Israeli authorities closed the Damascus Gate last month and are now removing Palestinian families from the neighborhood outside it, in what could well be preparations for clearing out the Arab Quarter entirely.

The Netanyahu government is entirely capable of such drastic actions and may see such a provocation as a political necessity, given Netanyahu’s struggle to form a government and thus evade conviction in his ongoing trial on criminal corruption charges. After the prime minister’s initial failure to obtain a majority in the fractured Israeli parliament, Israeli President Ruben Rivlin has given opposition leader Yair Lapid a chance to form a coalition government.

A UN official, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland, warned that the crisis in Gaza is “escalating towards a full-scale war.” His calls for “de-escalation” fell on deaf ears, however, both in the Israeli war cabinet and in Washington, which is Israel’s principal backer internationally.

Wennesland presented a report on the crisis to the UN Security Council Wednesday, which was blocked by the United States from issuing a resolution, drafted by Norway and Tunisia, condemning Israeli evictions in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, and calling on Israel to “cease settlement activities, demolitions and evictions.”

This is typical of the role of the United Nations, a political talk shop that is only capable of acting when the imperialist powers deem it to be a suitable screen for their own

aggression. On the infrequent occasions when the Security Council has passed resolutions about the Middle East, Israel simply ignores them with impunity.

Since the crisis erupted, the Biden administration has been engaged in a frenzy of pro-Israel activity. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan have made repeated phone calls to their Israeli counterparts, offering the support of US imperialism for its principal client in the Middle East.

Blinken declared, “There is, first, a very clear and absolute distinction between a terrorist organization, Hamas—that is indiscriminately raining down rockets, in fact, targeting civilians—and Israel’s response, defending itself, that is targeting the terrorists who are raining down rockets on Israel.”

Austin called Gantz to convey the “ironclad support” of the United States, declaring, “he strongly condemned the launching of rockets by Hamas and other terrorist groups that targeted Israeli civilians.”

There is a still more dangerous aspect to the conflict that has exploded in Gaza. War is the mode of existence of the Israeli state, the only condition in which the social contradictions ripping apart the Zionist enterprise can be contained. At seven years since the last such war—the invasion of Gaza in July 2014—a military operation against the Palestinians is probably viewed by the Israeli leadership as an overdue necessity, and not necessarily confined to the Palestinians.

Particularly ominous is the column which appeared Tuesday in the *Jerusalem Post*, one of the principal press voices of the Israeli right wing, under the headline, “Is massive Hamas attack on Israel the assault Iran warned of?” The author suggests that the rocket barrage by Hamas is not really in response to Israeli actions in Jerusalem but is instigated by Iran, coordinated through Islamic Jihad and the Lebanese group Hezbollah, in response to Israeli attacks on Iran’s nuclear program.

The purpose of such commentary, without the slightest factual basis or evidence being presented, is to prepare public opinion for an Israeli military strike against Iran. This would likely target Iran's nuclear facility at Natanz, already hit by an Israeli operation last

month, involving the remote-controlled detonation of an explosive device smuggled into the plant.

Only a day before this commentary appeared, a US Coast Guard ship fired “warning shots” at Iranian boats in the Strait of Hormuz, the third such encounter in five weeks. The Coast Guard ship was escorting a Navy submarine armed with guided missiles, which was passing through the strait on the surface.

The crisis in the Middle East is on a knife’s edge. The United States is the principal sponsor of the Zionist regime, while Iran has developed economic, diplomatic and military ties with Russia and especially China. An Israeli strike against Iran could draw all the major powers into the cauldron of war, with incalculable consequences.

A new war in the Middle East, and the threat that it will escalate into a global conflagration, can be countered only through the development of a mass antiwar movement based on the international working class.

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