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Gaza death toll mounts to 18 as US backs Israel's massacre of Palestinians

The death toll from Israel's attack on unarmed demonstrators on Gaza's militarized border, employing snipers firing live ammunition, reached at least 18 on Monday when a Palestinian man succumbed to wounds suffered in the carnage unleashed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on Friday.

Fares al-Raqb, 29, died Monday from a gunshot wound to his stomach, the Palestinian news agency Wafa reported.

Like tens of thousands of others, he had joined the Great March of Return protest called by an array of Palestinian organizations to demand the right of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to return to the lands from which they were forcibly expelled in 1948 with the founding of the state of Israel.

The demonstrations are to continue until May 15, which will mark the 70th anniversary of Israel's founding, observed by Palestinians as the Nakba, or catastrophe. Washington is set to use the anniversary as the occasion for transferring its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a deliberate provocation by the Trump administration against the Palestinians, who claim Jerusalem as their own capital.

Driving the protest are the anger and desperation of Gaza's 1.9 million people, crammed into what is effectively a 140-square-mile open air prison, blockaded on all sides, denied adequate food, medicine and other basic necessities and subjected to unending acts of Israeli military aggression and provocation.

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While Israel and its supporters have tried to portray the mass outpouring as a “riot” organized by Hamas, which governs the enclave, many of those participating have expressed anger at both this bourgeois Islamist movement and the corrupt Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas, which functions as an adjunct police force for the Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

Among those shot dead by the Israeli snipers was 20-year-old Badr Sabbagh, who had gone to the demonstration with his entire family, including children and grandchildren. His brother told the *Washington Post* that he had asked him for a cigarette and had taken “two puffs, and then he was shot in the head.”

Another was Jihad Abu Jamous, 30, who went to the border protest in a taxi with his wife and four children. His widow told the *New York Times* that he was shot dead while holding an onion to counteract the effects of tear gas.

More famously, there was 19-year-old Abdel Fattah Abd al-Nabi, whose execution was videotaped as he was shot through the back by an Israeli sniper while running away from the border carrying a tire.

In addition to the dead, more than 1,400 people who had participated in the protest were wounded, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, more than half of them—773—struck by live ammunition.

These war crimes by the Israeli military enjoy the tacit support of the US government, which blocked a tame resolution put forward by Kuwait in the United Nations Security Council calling for restraint and an “independent and transparent investigation,” while affirming the right to peaceful protest. While the European Union backed the call for an investigation, Europe’s governments have made no significant protest over the mass shootings of civilians in Gaza.

The Israeli government has taken the response of the major powers as a green light to act with impunity in suppressing Palestinian protest and resistance. The IDF has made it clear that there will be no change in its “shoot to kill” order on the Gaza border, while threatening to carry out more extensive attacks on targets deep within the blockaded territory.

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman told Israeli radio on Sunday that the country’s right-wing government would not cooperate with any investigation and declared that the soldiers who shot down unarmed Palestinians “deserve a commendation.”

Smaller demonstrations continued through the weekend and on Monday, with dozens more Palestinians wounded by live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas. Within Gaza,

thousands turned out for angry funeral processions for last week's victims. Larger protests are anticipated on Friday.

Inside Israel, there were demonstrations denouncing the killings. Several hundred protested in Tel Aviv opposite the headquarters of the ruling Likud party of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. A smaller demonstration was held in Yad Mordechai, near Gaza's militarized border, by opponents of the IDF action, and Israeli Palestinians protested in Jaffa.

Kobi Meidan, a prominent host on Israel's Army Radio, posted a message on his Facebook page describing himself as "ashamed to be Israeli" after the mass shootings. The Israeli military responded swiftly, taking his program off the air and firing him.

The Arab League is set to convene a meeting today on the events in Gaza. Dominated by the Saudi monarchy, which has yet to say a word about the gunning down of unarmed Palestinian protesters, and the Egyptian dictatorship of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, which has joined with Israel in sealing off Gaza from the outside world, this body can be counted upon to do nothing. The various bourgeois Arab governments that comprise its members are not even bothering to send anyone outside of their permanent envoys to the league to attend the session.

While there is immense popular support for the Palestinians among the working class and oppressed masses of the Arab world and internationally, the bourgeois Arab regimes view their mass protest with thinly veiled hostility. Many of them have used similar deadly violence to suppress popular upheavals in their own countries and are pursuing a de facto alliance with Israel and the United States in their preparations for war against Iran.