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Israeli army kills one, wounds hundreds during latest round of Gaza protests

One Palestinian protestor was killed and at least 700 wounded by the Israeli military on the seventh consecutive Friday of demonstrations at the Israeli border fence with Gaza.

The latest victim of the Israeli assault on unarmed, peaceful protestors was identified as 40-year-old Jaber Salem Abu Mustafa, who died after being shot in the chest by an Israeli sniper. The Gaza Health Ministry reported that among the hundreds of protestors who were wounded 143 were shot with live ammunition.

More than 300 were taken to hospitals, and three protestors remain in critical condition, including a 16-year-old who was shot in the head by an IDF sniper as he attempted to plant a Palestinian flag on the border fence. Two journalists and a paramedic were injured when they were struck in the legs by tear gas cannisters.

A statement released by the IDF justifying the carnage claimed its soldiers were “firing in accordance with the rules of engagement.” The use of live ammunition by heavily armed soldiers entrenched on the other side of a fortified border fence was deemed necessary to counter protestors burning tires and allegedly throwing rocks.

Further attacks were promised against any Palestinian who might have the audacity to approach or damage the much hated border fence. The IDF stated that it “will not allow any harm to the security infrastructure or security fence and will continue standing by its mission to defend and ensure the security of the citizens of Israel and Israeli sovereignty, as necessary”.

The latest bloody attack by Israel came only a few days after President Donald Trump

announced that the US was pulling out of the Iran nuclear accord and would enforce punishing economic sanctions against Iran. Trump's announcement was a green light for the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to launch a barrage of missile strikes on Iranian targets in neighboring Syria and to continue the assault on the Palestinian protesters.

The Trump administration has openly endorsed the IDF massacre on the border with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo telling reporters earlier this month after being questioned about Israel's clear use of excessive force: "We do believe the Israelis have the right to defend themselves, and we're fully supportive of that."

Friday's protest was part of the "Great March of Return," a series of protests which are set to culminate on Tuesday, May 15, in a demonstration against the foundation of Israel, which is commemorated by Palestinians as Nakba Day, or Day of Catastrophe.

The demonstrations have been called by a broad range of Palestinian organizations in the lead up to the 70th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel to demand the end of the crushing blockade of the Gaza Strip, enforced by Egypt and Israel since 2007, as well as the right of return for Palestinian refugees who were expelled from their lands in 1948.

Since the protests began on March 30, at least 48 Palestinians, including five children, have been killed by Israeli snipers and nearly 8,000 wounded by live fire, tear gas and "non-lethal" rubber bullets fired by Israeli soldiers. A report released by Save the Children on Friday estimated that among the 700 children injured over the last six weeks of protests 250 were shot by Israeli live fire.

Over the last month and a half, tens of thousands of people have participated in the demonstration with approximately 5,000 Palestinians gathering near the border wall east of Khan Younis on Friday, according to Israel Defense Forces estimates.

The protests have attracted broad participation and support among the 1.8 million residents of the open-air prison known as Gaza who have suffered for more than a decade under the brutal Israeli-Egyptian blockade, which has resulted in the shortage of critical medical supplies and frequent power outages. As a result of the embargo the overwhelming majority of Gaza's residents live in poverty and 43 percent of the population is unemployed, the highest jobless rate in the world.

On top of this the population is effectively barred from leaving the 141-square-mile territory, even under the gravest circumstances. Even as hospitals have been overwhelmed by casualties, Israel has denied permission for grievously wounded Palestinians to seek treatment outside Gaza, a callous form of collective punishment that has resulted in deaths

and amputations among those hit by fire from the IDF.

The war crimes committed by Israel on the Gaza border over the last six weeks have elicited no critical response from the US corporate media; in fact the killing and wounding of thousands of Palestinians has been treated as a virtual non-event. If such a mass shooting had been carried out by government forces in Russia, Syria, Iran or Venezuela it would have been met with screaming banner headlines demanding US intervention to stop the violence and non-stop television coverage.

However, unsurprisingly, Friday's attack did not make it to the online front page of either the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, which both only carried brief wire reports of the day's events. Israel is a critical ally and bulwark of US imperialism in the Middle East; therefore, as the Trump administration prepares to launch war against Iran, the media is playing its dutiful role in covering up the crimes of the Israeli government.