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Israeli mass murder of Gazans targets children

The Israeli army opened fire on Palestinian protestors in the Gaza Strip Friday, killing three people, including a 12-year-old boy.

Fares Hafez al-Sersawi died along with Mahmud Akram Mohammed Abu Samane, aged 24, after being shot in the chest during demonstrations east of Gaza City, while Hussein al-Rakab, aged 28, died after being shot in the head near the southern city of Khan Yunis. A further 376 people were wounded, seven of whom remain in a critical condition.

The previous Friday, following a relatively quiet period as Israel and Hamas discussed a now-stalled agreement brokered by Egypt, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) escalated its slaughter of unarmed civilians, shooting and killing seven Palestinians demonstrating near Gaza's border with Israel, and injuring 500.

The seven murdered included 12-year-old Naser Azmi Musbeh and 14-year-old Mohammed Naif al-Houm, while 90 children, four medics and four journalists were among those wounded by live fire. Not a single Israeli was hurt during this bloodbath.

According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, Friday's toll brings the total number of Palestinians killed to 197 and the number injured to at least 21,600 since the March of Return protests began on March 30. According to the United Nations, 77 Palestinians have required amputation, including 14 children and one woman, while 12 people have been left paralysed due to spinal injuries.

The most powerful military force in the Middle East faces an impoverished and essentially unarmed population. In the most brutal and cowardly fashion, it is slaughtering civilians

who have faced an economic siege, the destruction of their livelihoods, repeated bombardments, and military assaults over the last 11 years.

Originally scheduled to finish on May 15, the date of the establishment of the state of Israel Palestinians mark as Nakba (Catastrophe) Day, weekly rallies have demanded the right of Palestinians to return to the homes from which their families were driven in 1948. Demonstrations have continued, with mid-week beach protests in northern Gaza and the launching of incendiary kites and balloons into Israel, sparking fires that have destroyed forests, burned crops, and killed livestock.

Tensions in the occupied territories have risen following Israel's introduction of the "Nation-State Law" and Washington's ending of its financial support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency—the Palestinian refugee aid body. The law 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.

Of the 197 killed by Israeli forces since the protests began, a staggering number are children—some 44 or one quarter of the total, according to the group Defense for Children International, indicating that the murder of young children has become Israel's new weapon of terror against the Palestinians.

Human rights groups have told the United Nations Human Rights Council, which is carrying out an investigation into Israel's use of lethal fire against the protestors, that there is no evidence that a single protester in Gaza killed during the march was armed. This gives the lie to the government's claims that it faces armed terrorists who plan to rush the border with Israel.

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Fatou Bensouda, has warned Israel that its leaders may face trial for the killings of unarmed demonstrators. But this slaughter of men, women and above all children has largely been treated as a non-event by the major imperialist powers and the corporate media.

Secure in Washington's support, mass murder has been used repeatedly by the Zionist state since its foundation to terrorise the Palestinians and drive them from their villages, farms and homes. Israel's criminal political elite are now braying for more blood. A bitter battle of words has broken out between two of Israel's extreme right-wing parties, Israel is our Home and Jewish Home, as they position themselves for what is expected to be an early general election in the New Year, over whether Israel's deadly crackdown on the protests in Gaza has been harsh enough.

On September 29, Education Minister Naftali Bennett, leader of the far right religious-nationalist Jewish Home party, excoriated Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman's Gaza policy, calling it insufficiently aggressive. Lieberman, whose Israel is our Home party is in sharp decline, replied on *Israel Radio*, "Bennett is brazenly lying ... What softness is he talking about? Just last Friday seven rioters were killed and over 500 injured and not a single Israeli was hurt."

Later, Lieberman told *Army Radio*, "There is a real dispute here—that will remain with us as we enter the election process—between a bizarre, sleepwalking, messianic right, and a responsible right."

Bennett responded in his own interview on Army Radio by urging the IDF to shoot any Palestinians flying incendiary kites and balloons over the Gaza-Israel border, saying that Lieberman's policies were only encouraging Hamas, the Islamist party that controls Gaza: "The policy toward Gaza is a leftist policy that will ultimately lead to a full-on flare-up. The situation will be unbearable."

On Thursday, the IDF announced that it would ramp up its forces in the south and deploy Iron Dome air defence batteries in the Gaza area, claiming that its aim was to "thwart terrorism and prevent penetration into Israel along the Gaza border fence."

On Friday, Lieberman declared that Israel had in fact pulled back from responding harshly to the Palestinian protests to avoid a major conflict during the Jewish Holy Days season (September 9 to October 1), and tweeted, "The holidays are over, and I say to the heads of Hamas: 'Take that into account'."

He followed this up the next day with an announcement that Israel was reducing Gaza's fishing zone from nine nautical miles to six nautical miles, in further breach of the 20 nautical miles agreed under the Oslo Accords, citing Friday's "riots" as justification for this collective punishment.

In another move calculated to intensify the divisions between Hamas and Fatah, the rival Palestinian faction for control of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the occupied West Bank, Tel Aviv approved Qatar's purchase of fuel for Gaza from Israel, overriding the PA's objections. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened a further crackdown against the Palestinians in Gaza. Speaking alongside German Chancellor Angela Merkel at a press conference on Thursday, he warned that Israel's response to an attack by Hamas would be "very harsh."

Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' leader in Gaza, called for a ceasefire with Israel, telling an Israeli newspaper that he did not want another war. He said, "It's in no one's interest. We cannot

prevail in a confrontation against a nuclear power. And certainly [another conflict] is not in our interest. War gains nothing.”

Far from seeking to rein in its chief ally in the Middle East, the Trump administration believes that Tel Aviv can be used to further Washington’s own imperialist designs for global domination. Green-lighting the murderous offensive against Gaza by its Israeli attack dog is only a means to an end: the removal of the Syrian and Iranian regimes, by means of an economic and diplomatic blockade, subversion, and war as part of the broader aim of transforming the resource-rich region into a de facto colony of US imperialism.