

Backed by US, Israel threatens wider war after Golan Heights blast

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Fresh from receiving assurances of continued backing from the Biden-Harris administration in Washington, the Israeli regime immediately seized upon an alleged rocket attack in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights that killed 12 Arab Druze children to threaten an offensive into Lebanon that could trigger a wider US-backed war against Iran.

The circumstances surrounding the strike that hit a tiny soccer field in the occupied enclave remain unclear. Twelve boys and girls ranging in age from 10 to 16, were killed by Saturday's blast in the Druze village of Majdal Shams, and dozens more were injured and taken to hospitals.

Some residents blamed the Israeli regime for the atrocity. They questioned whether Israel's early warning system was working properly, because the strike came less than five seconds after the sirens sounded, giving the children no chance to escape into shelters.

Some residents shouted at the far-right Israeli Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich, who arrived to seek to exploit the deaths. In the hours after the strike, he had declared: "Lebanon as a whole has to pay the price." Residents yelled: "[National Security Minister Itamar] Ben-Gvir and Smotrich are the culprits here," accusing them of stoking further tensions.

Even while escalating their genocidal onslaught on the people of Gaza, Israeli leaders blamed Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed militia in Lebanon, for the Golan Heights blast, despite Hezbollah "categorically" denying it was behind the strike.

Hezbollah said a falling anti-rocket interceptor projectile from Israel's Iron Dome missile system was responsible for the deaths after Hezbollah had launched a number of attacks on Israeli military targets.

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dramatically cut short his US visit to travel to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) headquarters in Tel Aviv. He then convened a meeting with Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and military and intelligence chiefs, vowing that Hezbollah would "pay a heavy price for it, a price it has not paid before."

After the meeting, Netanyahu's office said the security cabinet had authorised the prime minister and defence minister to determine the "type" and "timing" of Israel's response.

In an initial attack, before that meeting, Israeli warplanes conducted airstrikes against Hezbollah targets "deep inside Lebanese territory" and along the border, according to a statement from the IDF on Sunday morning.

Netanyahu, a war criminal responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of children in Gaza, claimed to be "shocked" by the "murderous attack" in the Golan Heights. The hypocrisy was obscene. Netanyahu is responsible for the deaths of as many as 186,000 Palestinians in the last nine months, according to an estimate by the highly-respected *Lancet* medical journal.

On the same day as the Golan Heights blast, this bloodbath continued in another previous "safe zone" in Gaza. The IDF attacked a school and field hospital in central Gaza's Deir al-Balah, killing about 30 people, claiming, as always, that Hamas had fired rockets from inside the area.

Just as quickly as Netanyahu, US Vice President Kamala Harris, the presumptive Democrat presidential candidate, also blamed Hezbollah. So did the White House National Security Council and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Tokyo.

Harris's national security adviser, Phil Gordon, stated: "Israel continues to face severe threats to its security, and [Harris's] support for Israel's security is ironclad." He continued to insist that the US was working on a "diplomatic solution" to the Gaza conflict. But that claim has been made for months, while the genocide has intensified.

Gordon's remarks echoed what Harris said last week after her private meeting with Netanyahu at the White House, reiterating her lifelong support for the Zionist state and its continued ethnic cleansing campaign in Gaza. She specifically linked that support to a wider agenda against Iran.

"So I just had a frank and constructive meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu," Harris said. "I told him that I will

always ensure that Israel is able to defend itself, including from Iran and Iran-backed militias, such as Hamas and Hezbollah.”

Harris also condemned as “unpatriotic,” the thousands of protesters opposed to Netanyahu being hailed as he addressed a joint sitting of the US Congress. Her remarks could only be interpreted as a political green light to the Israeli regime to widen the conflict.

Smotrich was not alone in his bellicose declaration after the Golan Heights blast. Foreign Minister Israel Katz told *The Times of Israel* that Hezbollah had “crossed all red lines.”

Katz said Israel was “approaching the moment of an all-out war against Hezbollah and Lebanon,” pledging that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah would be destroyed along with his organisation, and that Lebanon would be severely damaged.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanani warned that any new Israeli military “adventures” in Lebanon could lead to “unforeseen consequences,” including “the broadening of the scope of instability, insecurity, and war in the region.”

Some 20,000 Druze Arabs live in the Golan Heights, an area Israel seized from Syria in 1967 during the Six-Day War and annexed in 1981. Considered occupied territory under international law and UN Security Council resolutions, the area is also occupied by about 25,000 Israeli Jewish settlers.

Most Druze in the area identify as Syrian and have rejected offers of Israeli citizenship. The Regional Council of Majdal Shams said on Sunday that none of the 12 children killed had Israeli citizenship.

Notably, the second half of Netanyahu’s fascist address to the US Congress was devoted to presenting the genocide in Gaza as a component part of a broader US-led war throughout the Middle East.

Declaring America “the guardian of Western civilization and the world’s greatest power,” Netanyahu stated: “Iran understands that to truly challenge America, it must first conquer the Middle East... Yet in the heart of the Middle East, standing in Iran’s way, is ... the State of Israel.”

This stands reality on its head. American imperialism sees the “final solution to the Palestinian problem” as a first step in a war against Iran, which itself is part of the escalating war against Russia and the confrontation with China.

A full-scale Israeli offensive against Hezbollah would dovetail with the Biden-Harris administration’s strategic aim in the Middle East to overturn the Iranian regime, which has long been regarded as an obstacle to US domination of the region. That is critical for the subordination of Russia and China, and control over the entire Eurasian landmass.

Since Israel launched its genocide in Gaza last October, it has been engaged in a relatively low-level conflict with Hezbollah, which has repeatedly edged closer to an all-out war. More than 350 people, including about 100 civilians, have been killed in repeated Israeli attacks on Lebanon, according to the UN.

Over 90,000 people have been displaced, forced to leave around 100 southern Lebanon towns and villages under threat of bombardment.

Any US-backed full Israeli offensive inside Lebanon would not simply be a repeat of Israel’s previous illegal and brutal invasions of the country, which date back to the 1980s. Just as it is doing in Gaza, Israel would not only seek to destroy Hezbollah’s military arm but also its social base among the impoverished Shiite population of Lebanon, laying waste to whole areas of the country.

Harris’s public statements are just the latest confirmation that a Democratic administration under her leadership would be no less aggressive than Biden’s in the genocide in Gaza or imperialist war against Iran in the Middle East, Russia in Ukraine or China in the Asia-Pacific.

As Netanyahu was delivering his diatribe to rapturous cheers in the US Congress, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party were holding a rally outside the Capitol, which advanced a program and perspective to oppose the genocide and imperialism.

In his remarks at the rally, David North drew the necessary conclusions that must flow from Netanyahu’s address, the genocide in Gaza and the support of the entire political establishment for it:

“The building of an antiwar movement requires the mobilization of the working class as an international force. It requires the establishment of the political independence of the working class. And it requires a perspective that has as its aim not protesting to the capitalists, appealing to them to adopt a peaceful policy, but explaining to the working class that if they want to put an end to these horrors, if they want to secure the future, they have to conquer power.”



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