

Hamas admits kidnapping Israeli teens

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A top Hamas official admitted the three Israeli teenagers whose deaths in June caused the current spiral of violence were taken by the military arm of the organisation.

Hamas has until now refused to respond to Israeli accusations it planned the abduction and murder of the three boys, one a joint US-Israeli citizen, in Hebron.

Eyal Yifrach, 19, Gilad Shaer and Naftali Fraenkel, both 16, were abducted while hitchhiking in the Israeli occupied West Bank on 12 June and killed.

Their deaths were the final spark for the current violence, which has seen more than 2,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, killed. Israel has lost 67 people, all but three of them soldiers.



Palestinian mourners carry the body of one of three senior Hamas commanders during their funeral in the southern Gaza Strip town of Rafah, yesterday. Top Right, A man grieves over the body of his son at Gaza city's Al-Shifa; placards show anti-Israeli slogans.

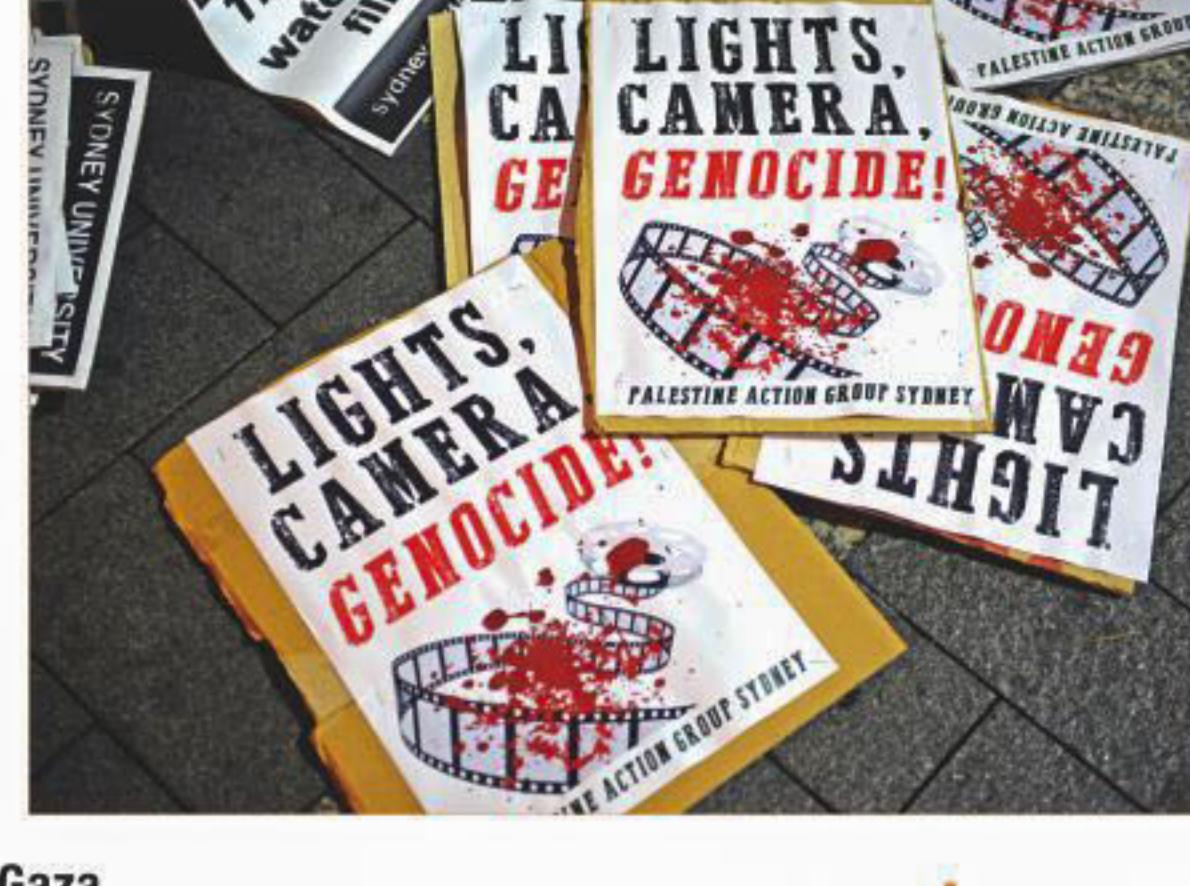


PHOTO: AFP

AFTERMATH OF JOURNALIST BEHEADING Obama urged to clear his strategy in Iraq

AFP, Washington

In calling for global action against the "cancer" of Islamic State militants, President Barack Obama puts the fight against them at the top of his agenda in a move that also raises questions about his military strategy in Iraq.

Obama made it clear. The beheading of American journalist James Foley at the hands of the group that has captured swaths of Iraq and Syria shocks the world's conscience, and only reinforces Washington's determination to fight "this kind of nihilistic ideologies."

Obama had already insisted for days that the struggle to rout out IS will play out over the long term, and that there was no timeline for targeted US airstrikes.

And Washington has highlighted encouraging results obtained in close collaboration with Kurdish and Iraqi forces since in the more than 90 air raids conducted since August 8, such as the recapture of Iraq's largest dam.

Defense policy expert Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations noted, however, that challenges remained ahead, despite the success of the initial air strikes two and half years after American troops withdrew from the country.

"In this kind of war, the early airstrikes have an immediate effect partly in destroying targets that haven't taken adequate precautions," he said.

But once the fighters adapt, spread out their military equipment and mix in the civilian population, it's a major game-changer. He called for a medium- and long-term strategy to be clearly defined.

While the Pentagon insists its goals are clearly defined, the definition itself -- delivering humanitarian aid and protecting US assets and personnel -- is open to interpretation.

Nearly two weeks after the first US air raids in northern Iraq, many questions remain on how it is being carried out -- and about the scope of US military actions in the weeks and months to come.

"That, of course, remains the big unknown -- how far will President Obama go?" Max Boot of the Council on Foreign Relations wrote in *Commentary* magazine.

"Beyond protecting the Yazidis and retaking Mosul dam, we still need a strategy to annihilate ISIS. It can be done -- and if done right it will be the best, indeed the only worthy, response to James Foley's barbaric demise."

He called for sending 10,000 US soldiers and military advisors to Iraq, as well as for a significant reinforcement of the air raids.

On the domestic front, the release of Foley's execution video could make the American public sense a greater threat from IS, and the price it is willing to pay to confront it.

Senator John McCain told *The Arizona Republic* that Obama should attack the militants in Syria too.

"One of the decisions that he has to make is to attack ISIS in Syria because they are moving the captured equipment there and they are fighting there and their enclaves are there. They have erased the border between Iraq and Syria," he said.

US strikes IS after hostage horror

Reveals failed bid to rescue captives; jihadists demanded ransom for slain journo

AGENCIES

The United States sought to maintain pressure on jihadist militants in Iraq yesterday, launching air strikes after the murder of a journalist underlined the international threat posed by the Islamic State.

And, in the latest sign that a reluctant America could be dragged deeper into the fighting, officials revealed that US special forces had already carried out a failed hostage rescue mission inside Syria.

On Tuesday, the Islamic State released a video in which a militant with a British accent is seen beheading American journalist James Foley and threatening a second US hostage.

Separately, officials confirmed that in recent months US special forces

had carried out a raid inside eastern Syria to try to rescue people held hostage by IS militants, reportedly including Foley.

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