

Blinken pledges Washington's full support to Israel and pittance for Palestinians

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US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, speaking alongside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem Tuesday, reiterated Washington's wholehearted support for Israel in the aftermath of the criminal bombing of Gaza.

Blinken said the US was committed to Israel's security and "fully supports Israel's right to defend itself." In practice this means that Israel has the right to do whatever it likes, in defiance of international law, to expand its control of the Palestinian territories, occupied since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and carry out ethnic cleansing in East Jerusalem and within Israel itself. By implication, wars of conquest are now the order of the day.

President Joe Biden has already promised to "replenish" Israel's arsenal of Iron Dome interceptors that repulsed many of the rockets launched from Gaza. He has also asked Congress to approve a new \$735 million package of weapons that Israel will use against the Palestinians.

While Blinken mentioned that the "hostilities" had resulted in the death of "many civilians, including children," he did not utter a word of condemnation of Israel's airstrikes against civilians, which killed far more people than the rockets fired from Gaza.

The massive aerial bombardment killed at least 253 Palestinians, including 66 children and 39 women, and injured around 2,000 more, contradicting Israel's claims to have solely targeted Hamas arsenals, weapons manufacturing facilities and underground infrastructure network. In contrast, 13 people, including two children and three foreign nationals, were killed and 357 injured in Israel by rocket fire from Gaza.

Blinken said the US would help rebuild Gaza "as part of its efforts to consolidate the ceasefire."

Speaking later in the day in Ramallah, after meeting

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas, he said the Biden administration would ask the US Congress for \$75 million in development and economic assistance for Palestinians, provide \$5.5 million in immediate disaster assistance for Gaza and \$32 million to United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

This trifling sum is less than one quarter the estimated \$322 million damage inflicted on Gaza by Israel, with Washington's full political and diplomatic support. Gaza is already suffering from the devastating consequences of Israel's 14 year-long blockade and wars waged in 2008-09, 2012 and 2014. It is a drop in the ocean compared to the annual \$3.8 billion Washington provides in aid to Israel.

This comes as the UN is set to announce a \$100 million appeal for Gaza, far less than the international aid pledged for reconstruction following the 2014 war, amid concerns that it is unlikely to meet its target.

While Blinken said it was necessary to tackle the grave humanitarian situation to prevent a return to violence, he emphasised that Washington would ensure that the Islamic bourgeois party Hamas, which controls Gaza, did not benefit. Instead, any aid is to be channeled through the PA, run by Fatah-affiliated Abbas in the West Bank, so as not to enable Hamas—the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated group that controls Gaza—to rebuild its military arsenal.

The 85-year-old Abbas and his corrupt and despised Palestinian Authority are widely seen as Israel's subcontractor. Washington has all but admitted the Oslo Accord, with its so-called two state solution and the PA as a transitional step, is dead and buried.

Blinken had earlier told CNN's *Fareed Zakaria GPS* programme, "We'll be re-engaging with the Palestinians—of course continuing our deep engagement

with the Israelis—in trying to put in place conditions that allow us over time, hopefully, to advance a genuine peace process. But that is not the immediate order of business.”

He added, “We have a lot of work to get to that point.”

Last month, Abbas was forced to cancel elections, last held in 2006, using Israel’s refusal to ensure the Palestinians in East Jerusalem could vote as a pretext, when it became clear he would suffer a resounding defeat at the hands of Hamas. He offered only pro-forma verbal support for Hamas and the Palestinians in Gaza at the receiving end of Israel’s bombardment.

Neither did he offer any resistance to Israel’s crackdown on Palestinian protests against the storming of the al-Aqsa mosque compound, the planned evictions of the Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem. Neither did he resist the violent attacks of far-right Zionist groups, overseen by the police, against Palestinians within Israel that have left towns and cities with mixed populations looking like war zones. More than 30 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed by Israel’s security forces in the last few weeks.

Israel’s 11-day war on Gaza has increased Hamas’ prestige, at the expense of both Abbas and the Jordanian monarchy, which is by international agreement the guardian of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound. It has enabled Hamas to pose as the defender of Muslims’ right to worship unmolested at the mosque and of the Palestinians threatened with evictions in the Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan and Isawiya neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem as part of the Netanyahu government’s plans to expand Jewish settlements in the city.

Netanyahu’s provocations against the Palestinians, which precipitated the war, may have achieved his own personal objective of torpedoing any chance that opposition leader Yair Lapid could form a coalition government, which was dependent upon support of Arab legislators, potentially leaving him facing jail for corruption. But his actions threaten to provoke a social explosion in both Israel and the occupied territories.

Underlying this crisis is the mounting social inequality within Israel which has seen the poverty rate increase to 29 percent, while its richest families have accumulated wealth of more than \$61 billion. By far

the poorest section of Israeli society are its Palestinian citizens, who have the highest rate of unemployment and face a myriad official and unofficial forms of discrimination in the budgetary allocations for public and social infrastructure.

Blinken’s task is to stabilize this disastrous political situation in “the Middle East’s only democracy,” via Washington’s longstanding interlocutors in the region, Abbas in Ramallah, King Abdullah of Jordan, and Egypt’s General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, all of whom are sitting atop economic and social powder kegs in the wake of the pandemic.

Netanyahu for his part thanked the US for its firm support during Israel’s war and warned, “If Hamas breaks the calm and attacks Israel, our response will be very powerful.” He has previously threatened that Israel would respond to any balloon or rocket attacks from Gaza by assassinating Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar and the chief of Hamas’ Qassam Brigades, Mohammed Deif.

Netanyahu then turned to the issue of the revival of the Iran nuclear deal, saying, “I hope that the United States will not go back to the old [agreement]. We believe that the deal paves the way for Iran to have an arsenal of nuclear weapons with international legitimacy.” Furthermore, regardless of how the talks currently under way in Vienna go, he insisted, “Israel will always reserve the right to fight regimes committed to getting weapons of mass destruction.”

Put another way, no other country in the region except Israel could become a nuclear power and challenge its military superiority.



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