

As Gaza death toll tops 7,000

US surges troops to Middle East in threat against Iran

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Amid the largest US naval buildup in the region in decades, the United States is continuing to surge troops, warships and aircraft to the Middle East in an overt threat against Iran. The US military escalation takes place as Israel continues its unrelenting airstrikes against civilians sheltering in Gaza, bringing the death toll of its genocide against the Palestinians to over 7,000.

On Thursday, Pentagon spokesman Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder announced that another 900 US troops had been deployed or were deploying to the Middle East, joining the more than 10,000 sailors, airmen and soldiers that have been sent to the region since Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel.

On Wednesday, Biden publicly threatened Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, "My warning to the Ayatollah was that if they continue to move against those troops, we will respond. And he should be prepared." On Tuesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken threatened, "If Iran or its proxies attack U.S. personnel anywhere, make no mistake. We will defend our people."

On Thursday, the US officials claimed that US troops had come under attack 12 times in Iraq and four times in Syria. As a result, the US claimed, 21 American troops have suffered minor injuries from these attacks. Under conditions in which the United States has declared a vast array of political forces throughout the Middle East to be Iranian proxies, these alleged attacks could serve as a direct *casus belli* for a US attack on Iran.

On Wednesday, retired Gen. Joseph Votel, whose final posting was as head of U.S. Central Command, urged Biden to use military force against Iran in

response to the alleged attacks. "We will have to do that," Votel said. "I think we are at the point where we can probably do that now, and we should." He added, "We can and should respond more directly to these threats on our troops."

Iran's foreign minister, meanwhile, warned at the United Nations Thursday that Iran would be drawn into a war with the US if Israel's genocide of the Palestinians continued.

Hossein Amirabdollahian warned Thursday at the United Nations, "I say frankly to the American statesmen, who are now managing the genocide in Palestine, that we do not welcome expansion of the war in the region. But if the genocide in Gaza continues, they will not be spared from this fire."

USNI News, the official publication of the US Navy, wrote Thursday, "The Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group is more than halfway across the Atlantic on its way to join the mass of U.S. naval forces in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East." It added, "Within the next few days, the carrier and its escorts are expected to transit the Strait of Gibraltar." The Eisenhower's carrier strike group includes two Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, a Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser, as well as its carrier air wing.

The Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group, meanwhile, is stationed in the Mediterranean, providing support for Israel's massacre of the Palestinians. *USNI* wrote, "Initially tasked to operate in tandem with the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group, Ike will instead travel through the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal to the Middle East to operate in U.S. 5th Fleet."

Haaretz speculated, however, that the true destination of the Carrier strike group may be the Persian Gulf.

It will be operating alongside the US amphibious warships, effectively mini-carriers, USS Bataan and USS Carter Hall, which are currently in the Gulf of Aden and approaching the Red Sea. Another amphibious assault ship, the USS Mesa Verde, arrived in the eastern Mediterranean last week.

USNI News reported, “The collection of ships will be among the largest mass of U.S. ships in the region in decades,” citing the comments of Adm. James Foggo, who said it was “probably more ships that we’ve had in that area since 1993.”

This massive US armada is joined by the French Mistral-class amphibious warship Tonnerre, along with two other French guided-missile frigates. The British Royal Navy has also sent two warships to the region.

On Thursday, *Haaretz* reported, “Over the past two weeks, close to 80 U.S. military cargo planes have landed in the region, in addition to dozens of civilian aircraft retained by the U.S. and Israeli defense establishments.”

The Israeli newspaper continued: “Open-source information reveals even larger numbers of U.S. military transport aircraft being used to deploy troops, equipment and armaments throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. They show that eight heavy-cargo planes that took off from supply depots in the United States and Europe have landed at a Jordanian base. Two U.S. fighter squadrons of F-15E fighter-bombers and A-10 attack planes have also been deployed at the base, as have Florida-based special forces.”

On October 16, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned, “The dispatch of an armada of over a dozen warships to the Middle East is not simply to threaten Hamas, which has no navy. The United States is preparing for a much broader conflict in the Middle East, including war with Iran.” We added, “The US is using the present crisis to put into effect longstanding plans for a war with Iran, as the Middle Eastern front of the US war with Russia and war plans against China.”

The rapid escalation of US threats against Iran takes place amid a dramatic acceleration of Israel’s bombing campaign, whose aim is the ethnic cleansing of Gaza and the genocide of the Palestinian people.

On Wednesday, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres accused Israel of carrying out the “collective punishment of the Palestinian people.”

The next day, Martin Griffiths, the UN’s

humanitarian aid chief, warned that “20 days on, heavy bombardments on Gaza continue and are getting worse, even in areas supposed to be safer... The world itself is failing to meet the bare entitlements of a part of humanity. The rules of war are clear: Civilians must be protected and have the essentials to survive.”

On Wednesday, the international charity Oxfam condemned Israel for using mass starvation as a “weapon of war.” Sally Abi Khalil, Oxfam’s regional Middle East director, said, “The situation is nothing short of horrific—where is humanity? Millions of civilians are being collectively punished in full view of the world, there can be no justification for using starvation as a weapon of war.”

And in response to the statement of President Joe Biden Wednesday, declaring he did not have any confidence in the numbers of dead in Gaza being reported by the health ministry, because it was run by Hamas, the agency released a list of 6,747 people killed so far by Israeli bombing, with their age, gender and ID number. Another 281 bodies had been recovered which could not be identified, the ministry said, bringing the total to 7,028. Of these, 2,931 were children.



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