

Israeli forces bombard Al-Shifa Hospital, as finance minister calls for ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from Gaza

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The Israeli government's genocidal onslaught on the Palestinians in Gaza escalated Tuesday with an all-out bombardment launched on the Al-Shifa Hospital, the largest in Gaza. The operation was clearly given the go-ahead in Washington and came as Israeli government officials used increasingly explicit language to describe their intention to ethnically cleanse Gaza.

Late Tuesday night, reports emerged of intensified Israeli firing and shelling around the Al-Shifa Hospital. One doctor reported a direct hit on the fourth floor, resulting in a hole in the wall of the building. Other reports described patients being moved into corridors for protection and medical staff manually pumping oxygen to keep patients alive. An Israeli attack destroyed the intensive care unit's ventilation and air conditioning systems. At least 40 people died inside the hospital Tuesday.

Doctors at Al-Shifa reported that over 170 bodies were being buried in a mass grave on the compound. No other option was left open to the medical personnel to deal with the decomposing bodies, which had begun to attract the attention of stray dogs looking for food. An evacuation of patients and medical staff was organised at Al-Quds Hospital, which is also located in Gaza City and was under siege for 10 days. This option is not currently possible at Al-Shifa, which is totally surrounded by Israeli troops.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians remain trapped in Gaza City in the north of the Gaza Strip, where Israeli bombardments and ground fighting are most intense. "Desperate calls and urgent appeals are being made by civilians who are unable to move from the buildings where they are sheltering because of the presence of Israeli troops, ongoing ground battles, or who have been caught in collapsed buildings," reported the UN Human Rights Office.

The horrendous scenes of human suffering resulting from the striking of hospitals, schools and other places of refuge are intended to facilitate the Netanyahu government's "final solution" for the Palestinians. The fact that 22 of the enclave's 36 hospitals are no longer functioning due to bombardment and a lack of fuel, that the waste water treatment system has

virtually ceased to function, creating the conditions for the rampant spread of disease, and that well over 12,000 civilians have been indiscriminately slaughtered since the assault began are seen by the Israeli regime as necessary steps in its genocide against the Palestinians.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich declared explicitly Tuesday what has become increasingly clear to millions of people around the world: The far-right Netanyahu regime is carrying out a vicious campaign of ethnic cleansing in Gaza. Smotrich appealed for "the voluntary immigration of Gaza Arabs to the countries of the world," which was the "right humanitarian solution." He added, "The reception of refugees by the countries of the world that really want their interests, with the support and generous financial assistance of the international community, and within the state of Israel is the only solution that will bring to an end the suffering and pain of Jews and Arabs alike."

Underscoring that Smotrich's views are widely shared within Israeli ruling circles, his comments were a response to an opinion piece published in the *Wall Street Journal* by Knesset members Danny Danon and Ram Ben-Barak that called for parts of Gaza's population to be relocated to other countries. Danon was formerly Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, while Ben-Barak was deputy director of the Mossad intelligence agency. Last month, a leaked report from Israel's Ministry of Intelligence revealed plans to forcibly displace Gaza residents to camps in Egypt's Sinai Desert.

The Israeli military has cynically sought to justify its trashing of international law with the targeting of hospitals by asserting that Hamas is using them for military purposes. This unsubstantiated allegation has been seized upon over recent days by the ever pliant mainstream media in Europe and the US, which dutifully echoed the Netanyahu regime's talking points.

At a press briefing Tuesday, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby invoked the dubious authority of US intelligence to back up the Israeli military's propaganda—the same source whose claims of "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq were used to justify the destruction of

the country two decades ago in an invasion that led to the deaths of over a million people. Washington “has information that Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad use some hospitals in the Gaza Strip, including Al-Shifa and tunnels underneath them, to conceal and support their military operations and to hold hostages,” declared Kirby, before adding with consummate cynicism that this did not justify Israel targeting hospitals. Just a few hours later, reports emerged of the stepped-up bombardment of Al-Shifa, specifically identified by Kirby as hosting a “command and control node” for Hamas.

At a rally supporting Israel’s genocide in Washington that mobilized Zionists, right-wing Christian fundamentalists and forces close to the Democrats and Republicans, speakers sought to equate all opposition to Israeli war crimes with “antisemitism.” Chants included “No ceasefire,” i.e., a continuation of the massacring of defenceless men, women and children.

While US imperialism as always takes the lead in its brazen defence of Israeli war crimes, which mirror the crimes committed by successive American governments in wars over the past three decades in Iraq, Afghanistan, Serbia, Libya and Syria, the European imperialists are just as unyielding in their support for Israel’s massacre of the Palestinians. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz responded to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s description of the Netanyahu regime’s actions in Gaza as “fascism” by telling a press conference Tuesday that Israel “is a democracy” and “a country that is bound to human rights and international law and acts accordingly.”

Such preposterous statements are made by the head of the government of a country where protests against the Israeli genocide have been repeatedly prohibited. When the authorities in Germany permit protests to proceed, they are approved only under strict rules enforced by a heavy police presence. Robert Habeck, Scholz’s deputy chancellor, recently declared in a video that “Muslims living here” would lose “their right to protection from right-wing extremist violence” if they fail to “clearly distance themselves from antisemitism,” a term used by the German ruling class to smear anyone who dares to criticise the far-right Netanyahu government. Meanwhile, Germany has increased its arms deliveries to Israel ten-fold.

The unconditional support from Washington and European capitals is emboldening the far-right Israeli government to go even further in its ruthless onslaught. In a nationally televised speech Tuesday evening, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said that Israel was in the second phase of the war, a reference to his three-phase plan outlined earlier in the conflict. Phase Two includes extensive ground operations in Gaza, combined with air strikes to eliminate Hamas, while the final Phase Three was described as the “creation of a new security regime” and the “removal of Israel’s responsibility for day-to-day life.”

That this means a vast reduction, if not the complete elimination, of the Palestinian population in Gaza was

underscored by an announcement Monday from Foreign Minister Eli Cohen that Israel does not intend to open its two border crossings with Gaza after the war. The Kerem Shalom crossing is the main route for commercial goods in and out of Gaza, while the Erez crossing was used by Palestinian workers entering and leaving Israel. The only other land crossing into Gaza, the Rafah crossing with Egypt, is not designed for heavy commercial use and could not supply the pre-war level of goods into Gaza. There “won’t be a connection of goods, and there won’t be a connection of people, including workers,” Cohen commented, making clear that the Israeli government expects a significant depopulation of Gaza. The permanent closure of the two border crossings with Israel would also remove the possibility of economic links between Gaza and the West Bank.

The Israel Defence Forces continues to bomb all parts of Gaza, including in the south where Palestinians were ordered to flee for “safety.” Several air strikes were reported in Khan Younis on Tuesday. According to the United Nations, the Rafah water treatment plant in the south has ceased to function, and a lack of fuel is preventing waste disposal trucks from operating. “Coupled with the shutdown of municipal sanitation work, this is posing a serious threat to public health, increasing the risk of water contamination and the outbreak of diseases,” noted the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees. Netanyahu agreed to a limited fuel delivery late Tuesday, but its restriction to UN aid trucks means that this will have little impact on the sanitation crisis.

While Gaza is bearing the brunt of the Israeli regime’s brutal onslaught, residents in the West Bank also face growing deadly violence. Daily raids by the IDF are resulting in fatalities, dozens of detentions and the destruction of homes and businesses. In one of the bloodiest raids to date, seven people died and 31 were seized in the northern West Bank town of Tulkarem early Tuesday, when Israeli bulldozers destroyed five houses and several businesses. At least 196 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since October 7, and 2,570 have been detained.



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