

Israel's Gaza "truce": A pause to reload the guns for the next stage in the genocide against the Palestinians

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The brief lull in Israel's savage onslaught on the defenceless civilian population of Gaza scheduled to begin at 10:00 a.m. local time Thursday is widely being presented as a "ceasefire," or at least a "humanitarian pause."

Assuming the agreement is fulfilled, which is by no means assured, it will amount to little more than an operational pause in Israel's military offensive to ethnically cleanse Gaza by carrying out a genocide against the Palestinian people.

The terms of the agreement, mediated by Qatar and the United States, include the release by Hamas of 50 women and children among the approximately 240 Israelis captured by Hamas fighters during the October 7 incursion into Israel. In return, Israel will release 150 Palestinian detainees, halt fighting in the Gaza Strip for four days, and permit 200 trucks carrying aid to enter the enclave each day. The number of Palestinian detainees being released is minuscule compared to the over 10,000 Palestinians held in detention by Israel under the most brutal conditions, including routine torture.

The agreement remains highly unstable, illustrated by the announcement late Wednesday by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's national security adviser that the release of the first hostages would be delayed by up to 24 hours and only take place Friday. During the four-day pause, Israel will refrain from operating aircraft and drones over southern Gaza, but in the north they will only do so during a short window between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. each day.

All Israeli ground forces will remain in place, ready to resume battle at a moment's notice. As Netanyahu put it at a press conference Wednesday evening, "When the pause is done, we resume the war. It may be that we are forced to do so much earlier." He also rejected any suggestion that the pause applied to Israel's northern border, where the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have been striking Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon. Underlining the point, War Cabinet Minister Benny Gantz told the same press conference,

"What's happening now in northern Gaza can also happen in southern Lebanon and Beirut."

Even if the pause in fighting holds, it will strengthen Israel's military position. Some military analysts have claimed that since Israel has used about 2,500 joint direct attack munition smart bomb kits in Gaza since the bombardment began six weeks ago, it only retains stockpiles of precision-guided munitions for 10 days of fighting. With daily C-17 flights arriving in Israel from the US Ramstein Air Base in Germany carrying much needed military supplies, the four-day period could give the IDF time to replenish its stocks.

The military situation on the ground could also allow Israel to use the pause to prepare the next stage in its genocidal onslaught. As the *Wall Street Journal* wrote in a Wednesday editorial, the timing of the agreement "isn't bad for Israel. Having assumed a dominant position in Gaza's north, it needs to prepare to turn south."

The crisis-ridden Netanyahu government is far less enthusiastic about the agreement. Netanyahu has repeatedly stressed that his main goal in the Gaza war is to "eliminate" or "destroy" Hamas, meaning, in reality, the expulsion of the Palestinians from Gaza. Jewish Power, Netanyahu's fascistic coalition partner, voted to reject the hostage deal at a Tuesday night cabinet meeting.

However, Netanyahu came under increased pressure from the families of the hostages over recent days to do more to secure their release. He is a deeply unpopular figure in Israel, with broad sections of the population holding him at least partially responsible for the deaths of Israeli civilians on October 7. Netanyahu's increasingly precarious position makes it all the more likely that he will endeavour to resume and intensify the war at all costs, since the alternative would almost certainly be the end of his premiership, followed by criminal prosecution.

In the six weeks since Israel's air bombardment began, well over 14,000 Palestinian civilians have been killed, and

half of Gaza's buildings have been destroyed or damaged. Just 10 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are functioning. Al-Shifa Hospital, formerly the enclave's largest, has been occupied by Israeli troops, with parts of it turned into a military barracks. Malnutrition and disease are rampant among the population due to the deliberate targeting of bakeries, which have all stopped operating, and lack of fuel to power water treatment facilities.

Oblivious to this human catastrophe, the corporate-controlled media would have everyone believe that the Biden administration twisted Netanyahu's arm and intervened in the negotiations with Qatar to secure a "humanitarian pause." Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders wrote in an opinion piece for the *New York Times* that the "pause" is a "promising first step that we can build upon." Sanders, who just two weeks ago rejected any talk of a ceasefire out of hand, proceeded to call for a "significant, extended humanitarian pause" and work towards a "two-state solution," all of which could be achieved "if the United States uses the substantial leverage we have with Israel."

The suggestion that US imperialism, after more than three decades of uninterrupted wars in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa, acts as some sort of moderating influence on the Israeli regime is preposterous. Throughout the entire six-week bombardment of Gaza, the unconditional support of Washington and its European imperialist allies for the Israeli military has emboldened the Netanyahu government to carry out war crimes on a daily basis. These have included the devastation of hospitals, schools, and critical public infrastructure, the killing of over 100 United Nations aid workers, and the cutting off of electricity, fuel and water to Gaza's 2.3 million residents.

As for the "two-state solution," the Israeli regime has openly declared its genocidal intentions against the Palestinians, with Biden administration officials proclaiming all the while that they would not impose any "red lines" on Israel's conduct of the war. A leaked Intelligence Ministry document in October revealed plans to drive Gaza's population into tent camps in Egypt's Sinai Desert. More recently, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called for the "voluntary migration" of the Gaza population to "the countries of the world."

The imperialists' endorsement of methods of warfare not seen since the Nazis can only be understood in the context of a rapidly developing third world war. Israel's imperialist-backed onslaught on Gaza is part of a Middle East front incited above all by Washington with the aim of retaining its regional hegemony. The Biden administration has deployed two aircraft carrier battle groups and a nuclear-capable submarine to the region to prepare for military conflict with Iran.

At the same time, Washington continues its backing for the far-right Ukrainian regime in the US-NATO war on Russia, which is aimed at subjugating the country to the status of a semi-colony and plundering its natural resources. In the Asia-Pacific, regular provocations by American imperialism and its regional allies against China continue. The callous indifference shown by Biden, Germany's Scholz, France's Macron and Britain's Sunak to the deaths of over 14,000 Palestinians underscores that in this new redivision of the world between the major powers that is well underway, human life is cheap and expendable.

The only way to stop the genocide in Gaza is through the development of a global anti-war movement led by the working class. The demonstrations involving millions of people around the world over the past six weeks have shown that there exists widespread disgust and outrage in every country over Israel's savage onslaught and the support it has received from the imperialist powers.

What is required is a decisive turn to the working class, which must be mobilized in struggle to halt military operations in Gaza and throughout the region. Military supplies to Israel should be blocked, and the production of military equipment and other critical products must be halted through the active intervention of workers into political life. Preparations should be made for a political general strike on an international scale in opposition to the imperialist powers backing the Israeli regime, which are themselves deeply despised because of decades of attacks on workers' wages and conditions and the prosecution of bloody wars. The success of this struggle depends above all on the development of a mass movement of workers fighting for a socialist and internationalist program.



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