

Israel intensifies bombardment of Gaza ahead of 4-day “pause”

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In the hours leading up to Friday morning’s 7:00 a.m. planned commencement of a four-day pause in fighting, Israeli air and ground forces intensified their vicious bombardment of the Gaza Strip. Attacks on hospitals and dozens of residential buildings continued, underscoring just how tenuous the brief lull in the Israeli regime’s genocidal onslaught on the Palestinians is.

The agreement has more the character of a pause for Israel to reload its weapons for the next stage in its ethnic cleansing of the enclave than with any effort to alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe and bring an end to the war. Initially set to begin Thursday but delayed without explanation, the deal is supposed to see 50 Israeli hostages released by Hamas in exchange for the freeing of 150 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody.

Israeli warplanes will continue to fly over northern Gaza, apart from a six-hour window between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. each day but are supposed to refrain from flying over southern Gaza for the four-day period. The agreement says that some 200 aid trucks and four fuel trucks will enter Gaza each day, less than half of the 500 trucks that supplied the enclave daily prior to the beginning of Israel’s bombardment.

One of the main targets of Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) attacks Thursday was the Indonesian Hospital in the north of the Gaza Strip, where some 200 patients and 10 medical staff are effectively trapped. Strikes took place on the hospital’s main gates and power generator.

Dr. Marwan Sultan, medical director of the Indonesian Hospital, told the BBC during the day that the facility was under “heavy fire” from Israeli tanks. As the day progressed, he reported that shells were fired into the building’s third floor. “We miraculously survived certain death—shrapnel fell on us and the ceiling is damaged,” he said.

Israeli forces also detained the medical director of Al-Shifa Hospital, Mohamed Abu Salmiya, after presenting spurious allegations about the discovery of an underground Hamas tunnel powered by the hospital’s electricity. The intensified bombardment of the Indonesian Hospital was similarly

justified with unsubstantiated assertions about a “terror infrastructure” under the building.

The systematic targeting of hospitals is just one among many war crimes under international law perpetrated by the ultra-right government led by Benjamin Netanyahu with the unrestrained support of the imperialist powers. Another is the collective punishment meted out to Gaza’s 2.3 million people by cutting off electricity, water and fuel following the 7 October mass uprising led by Hamas against 75 years of brutal Israeli oppression.

Unrelenting air strikes continued across Gaza throughout Thursday. The Gaza Health Ministry reported the deaths of 27 people at a school run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the Jabaliya refugee camp. The Abu Hussein School was hosting displaced Palestinians forced from their homes by the Israeli assault on Gaza. Over a dozen civilians were also killed in various strikes in northern Gaza and the southern city of Khan Younis, where civilians have been ordered by the IDF to flee. The Israeli military stated it had targeted “300 Hamas targets” on Thursday alone. Violence also continued in the West Bank, where a 12-year-old boy shot by Israeli soldiers became the 52nd child and 229th Palestinian fatality since 7 October.

Summing up the horrendous toll extracted by over six weeks of sustained Israeli bombardment, Gaza’s Government Media Office reported an increase of the civilian death toll since October 7 to 14,854, including more than 6,100 children. Thursday’s report also noted that over 7,000 Palestinians are missing, either because they are buried under the rubble, on the road fleeing their homes or their fate is “unknown.” Some 36,000 Palestinians have been injured, 75 percent of them women and children.

Underscoring the indiscriminate character of Israel’s bombing campaign, the figures confirmed the deaths of 207 medical workers and at least 65 journalists. In a bombing on Sheikh Nasser neighbourhood in eastern Khan Younis Thursday that killed five, a Reuters photo journalist was injured, according to the Palestinian Wafa news agency.

On Israel’s northern border with Lebanon, exchanges of

fire also intensified. Hizbollah reportedly fired some 80 rockets and missiles into northern Israel Thursday, one of the largest numbers during a single day since 7 October. The IDF reported Israeli air strikes late Thursday evening. On Wednesday, an Israeli air strike killed five Hizbollah members, including Abbas Raad, son of the head of Hizbollah's Loyalty to the Resistance group in the Lebanese parliament, Mohammed Raad.

Under these conditions, the fate of the four-day pause hangs in the balance. Qatar, which played the leading role in mediating the agreement with support from the US, has only confirmed the details for hostage releases on Friday. At 4:00 p.m., 13 Israeli hostages are supposed to be handed over to the Red Cross in Gaza, while 39 Palestinians are expected to be released from Israeli detention. Asked briefly on Thursday by a reporter to comment on the agreement, US President Joseph Biden replied that he would not give an update on the deal "until it is done."

On top of the uncertainty surrounding hostage exchanges after Friday, the commitment by Israel to allow 200 aid trucks into Gaza could also prove a dead letter. The *Times of Israel* reported that senior Biden administration officials believe the Rafah border crossing cannot accommodate this level of aid, and Israel has refused to reopen its Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza. The report continued that El-Arish airport, the only facility in Egypt accepting aid for ground transportation into Gaza, has just one runway and limited parking facilities, making it logistically impossible to supply adequate aid for Gaza's population through Rafah alone.

Israel's hardline stance on this issue is motivated by its explicitly declared intention to drive a large portion, if not the entirety, of the Palestinian population out of Gaza and into the Sinai Desert. A leaked document from the Intelligence Ministry last month confirmed such plans exist. Earlier this month Foreign Minister Eli Cohen vowed that Kerem Shalom, which was the main commercial route into Gaza prior to 7 October, would never be reopened. "There won't be a connection of goods, and there won't be a connection of people, including workers," Cohen said when he made the announcement on 13 November.

The Netanyahu government's intention to further escalate the war following the pause, however long it lasts, was laid out Thursday by Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. The pause, according to Gallant, is a "brief respite ... at the end of which the fighting will continue intensely." Gallant, who infamously labelled Palestinians "human animals" at the outset of the war, added, "At least another two months of fighting is expected." For his part, military spokesman Daniel Hagari remarked, "In the coming days, we will focus on planning and completing the preparations for the next

stages of combat."

US imperialism and its European allies have emboldened the Israeli government in its genocidal policy throughout the conflict. This support will continue throughout any pause in the fighting, with arms and military equipment pouring in on US transport planes from the US Ramstein Air Base in Germany and on ships passing through the Mediterranean.

The unconditional backing given to the IDF's onslaught by Washington takes place in the context of a rapidly developing third world war in which the entire Middle East is viewed as a critical front. Biden has sent a nuclear-capable submarine and two aircraft carrier battlegroups to the region to menace Iran, which Washington sees as a major obstacle to the consolidation of its regional hegemony. The willingness of the imperialist powers to accept the brutal slaughter in Gaza underscores that in the looming war with Iran, not to mention the already raging US-NATO war with Russia in Ukraine aimed at subjugating Russia to a semi-colonial status, there is no limit to the number of human lives they intend to sacrifice in pursuit of their geostrategic and economic interests.

However events play out in the coming hours and days, the decisive question remains the development of an international anti-war movement led by the working class to stop the Gaza genocide. The millions of young people and workers who have protested around the world for more than a month must turn to the working class and build support for a mass mobilisation to halt all supplies to and production of military equipment for Israel, and oppose the imperialist governments in the US and Europe facilitating the genocide against the Palestinians.



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