

Hostage/prisoner exchange used to prepare next stage of Israel's Gaza genocide

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24 November 2023

The first tranche of Israel's hostage prisoner exchange with Hamas proceeded Friday. It included the release of 13 Israeli women and children, along with 12 Thai nationals freed through separate agreement. In return, 24 Palestinian women and 15 minors were freed from Israeli prisons.

A special flight also evacuated over 100 Russian nationals from Gaza, bringing the total number of Russian evacuees to more than 750.

The hostage deal and four-day pause in aerial bombardment, mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the US, is planned to see Hamas return 50 women and children to Israel in exchange for 150 Palestinian prisoners. Any 10 further hostage releases would bring an additional day without bombing.

Anticipating what Israel insisted was not a ceasefire but an "operational pause", the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote Thursday that the agreement reached essentially gives Israel time "to reload its weapons for the next stage in its ethnic cleansing of the enclave."

Amid the blanket coverage of the hostage/prisoner exchange, Israel's top military and political leaders made clear that this was their sole intention.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was forced to be seen to do something to secure the release of hostages, faced with mounting domestic criticism and an insistence on the part of the Biden administration that a brief pause in the horrific assault on Gaza and a prisoner exchange would help Egypt, Qatar and other Arab regimes fend off popular anger at their refusal to come to the aid of Gaza. But this implied no shift in Israel's aim of mass murder and the ethnic cleansing of Gaza prior to its permanent annexation.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said Thursday that once the "short truce" with Hamas ends, the military campaign would resume "with intensity" for at least

two more months. "This respite will be short," Gallant told troops of the Navy's Shayetet 13 elite commando unit. "What is required of you in this respite is to organize, get ready, investigate, resupply arms, and get ready to continue."

Israel Defence Forces Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi later that day told commanders during a visit to Gaza, "We are not ending the war. We will continue until we are victorious, going forward and continuing in other Hamas areas."

Addressing the Palestinians, Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee said Friday in a message in Arabic posted on X, formerly Twitter, "The war is not over yet... The northern Gaza Strip is a dangerous war zone and it is forbidden to move north."

On Friday evening, War Cabinet Minister Benny Gantz told a Tel Aviv rally in solidarity with the families of the Israeli hostages in Gaza, "We will not stop, we will resume the efforts and the military action in Gaza to retrieve the hostages and restore deterrence." Gantz was a self-proclaimed leader of the mass opposition movement against Netanyahu, who has now joined the government.

Israel's actions prior to and throughout Friday were entirely in line with the preparations for an escalated military assault on Gaza.

The delayed start of the "pause" gave the IDF time to bomb and murder at will. In the hours leading up to Friday morning's 7:00 am commencement, over 300 targets were hit from the air, killing dozens. Gaza's health ministry said 27 people were killed in a strike on a school affiliated with the UN Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) in the Jabaliya refugee camp, with similar numbers killed in bombing raids in Nuseirat.

The Indonesian hospital in northern Gaza has been attacked with tanks for days and yesterday was raided.

The hospital was forced to cease operations, leaving an estimated 550 patients, 200 medical workers and at least 1,500 displaced Palestinians in desperate straits.

With a death toll now over 14,500, the director of Gaza's health ministry said another 6,000 people have been reported missing and are feared buried under the rubble.

Friday saw the IDF focus on violently attacking Palestinians to prevent them from returning to the North. Since Israel first issued evacuation orders in the northern Gaza Strip on October 13, an estimated 1.7 million people out of the enclave's 2.2 million residents have been displaced.

Israel wants no return that would complicate its plans to shift attention to the south and drive the Gazans into the desert. Yesterday there were reports of hundreds, possibly thousands returning from Khan Younis with children and pets in their arms in defiance of IDF instructions. At least two Palestinians are reported to have been killed by the Israeli military, and 11 wounded, mostly shot in the leg. Several have been taken back to hospitals in the south.

The IDF has also stepped up operations on the West Bank. According to the health ministry, at least 225 Palestinians have been killed and around 2,850 others injured by Israeli forces in the West Bank since October 7.

In addition, around 2,070 have been detained, according to the Palestinian Prisoners Society figures. Before October 7, the number of Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails was estimated at around 5,200, including more than 1,000 held without charge or trial in administrative detention. That figure is now over 8,300, with 3,000 in administrative detention.

The promised release of 150 is a drop in the bucket. Around 40 were arrested on Wednesday alone in IDF actions.

It initially appeared that fighting would also continue on the Lebanon border despite the "pause". But a warning siren in the morning appears to have been a false alarm.

Some of the most revealing statements on how far Israel is prepared to go were made jointly by Netanyahu and Gallant. During a press conference Wednesday, Netanyahu said that he had "instructed the Mossad [intelligence agency] to act against the heads of Hamas wherever they are."

Gallant added that all Hamas leaders "are living on borrowed time." He continued:

"The struggle is worldwide: From gunman in the field to those who are enjoying luxury jets while their emissaries are acting against women and children, they are destined to die."

Gantz stated earlier that Israel would kill Hamas leaders "in Gaza and around the world." He added, "We will reach the heads of [the Hamas] government just as we reached the centre of [that] government."

These are clear threats to assassinate former politburo chief Khaled Mashaal and others in exile in Qatar.

Meanwhile, there is little or no respite from starvation, water shortages and lack of power. In total, Egypt has said that some 200 trucks of humanitarian aid, 130,000 litres of diesel and four trucks of fuel will enter the Gaza Strip daily throughout the course of the pause in fighting. But reports have only specified 137 trucks, when Gaza needs 400 per day under normal conditions.

This did not stop President Joe Biden making a televised address boasting of the US role in negotiating the "pause" and declaring his intention to engage "with leaders throughout the Middle East as we all work together to build a better future for the region... where all children... Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Israeli, Palestinian Arab, grow up knowing only peace."

Millions of people throughout the world have no illusions that the "operational pause" brings any possibility of an end to Israel's ethnic cleansing, or that "Genocide Joe" and his counterparts in Europe and internationally are anything other than accomplices to mass murder.

Everything depends on the mass global movement in defence of the Palestinians turning to the working class, which alone can halt supplies to and production of military equipment for Israel, and begin a political and industrial struggle to bring down the imperialist governments of war criminals.



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