

Israel steps up ethnic cleansing of Gaza with expansion of ground and air onslaught to the south

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Israel's military reported Tuesday it had reached the centre of Khan Younis in southern Gaza amid what a top general labelled "the most intensive day" of combat since the start of the Netanyahu regime's genocidal onslaught on the Palestinians. The ground offensive on the city, whose population has swelled over recent weeks by hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fleeing from northern Gaza, was accompanied by indiscriminate air strikes.

On the fifth day of the Zionist regime's savage onslaught, after it unilaterally declared an end to the week-long pause in fighting, the United Nations said it was impossible to ensure "so-called safe zones" for civilians anywhere in Gaza due to the ferocity and scope of air and ground attacks. UNICEF spokesperson James Elder stated that the "safe zones" proposed by the Israeli military "are not scientific, they are not rational, they are not possible, and I think the authorities are aware of this." Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), said that aid operations are at a "breaking point" and that Israel's ongoing siege of Gaza could become "a major source of death."

A series of devastating air strikes Tuesday in Khan Younis and the surrounding area underscored the fact that civilians have no place of refuge. At least 45 men, women and children were slaughtered in an attack on what eye witnesses said was "an entire residential block" in the town of Deir el-Balah just north of Khan Younis. A further 50 civilians were reported killed in strikes prior to the advance of Israeli troops into Khan Younis on Tuesday.

Tens of thousands have already fled Khan Younis for the southernmost city of Rafah. Home to some 280,000 people prior to Israel's onslaught, estimates predict that over a million people could soon be crammed into the city on the Egyptian border. The UNRWA warned that there were inadequate resources to provide humanitarian aid for all displaced people, many of whom were already displaced once before from the north to Khan Younis and its

surroundings earlier in the bombardment.

Adnan Abu Hasna, a UNRWA representative, described the hellish conditions already prevailing in Rafah: "We have tens of thousands of families in the streets. They are already [sheltering] under random things – pieces of nylon and wood. It's raining now. We will see the disaster."

On top of the danger posed by air strikes and the heavy weaponry used by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) on the ground, the threat posed by untreated diseases is growing rapidly. The UN reported Tuesday an outbreak of hepatitis A at one of its refugee facilities. Just nine out of Gaza's 35 hospitals continue to function, and there is a chronic lack of medical equipment, medications, and clean drinking water.

The Gaza Government Media Office on Tuesday placed the death toll since the Israeli bombardment of Gaza began at 16,248 people. More than 7,000 people are reported missing, most likely buried under the rubble produced by air strikes. The death toll includes 7,112 children, 4,885 women, 286 medical workers—including paramedics and doctors, and 81 journalists and media workers. The bombardment has injured at least 43,616 people.

In the same statement, the Media Office described the virtual halt to aid deliveries into Gaza following Israel's resumption of military operations as a "death sentence" for 2.3 million people. Reports indicate that only around 100 aid trucks are making it into Gaza through the Rafah crossing each day, just 20 percent of the pre-war daily total of 500 trucks.

The development of Israel's military operations is following a clear plan: ethnically cleanse most of Gaza and force a large portion of its residents, if not the entire population, into Egypt's Sinai desert. This approach has been outlined in Israeli government documents and in comments by far-right figures within Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government. The Zionist regime's strategy has the unconditional backing of the imperialist powers, above all the United States, without

whose military and political support Israel could not carpet bomb Gaza and indiscriminately massacre civilians.

In language that could have been used by any Nazi leader during World War II, Netanyahu outlined his regime's intentions for Gaza Tuesday evening at a press conference alongside Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and War Cabinet Minister Benny Gantz. "We are settling accounts with all those who kidnapped, participated, murdered, slaughtered, raped and burned the daughters of our people," Netanyahu fumed. "We will not forget and we will not forgive." In Khan Younis and Jabalia, he continued, "the ground shook" during IDF operations, "we surrounded both... there is nowhere we do not get to."

Outlining his vision for an end to the onslaught, Netanyahu declared, "There will be no forces that support terror, educate for terror, finance terror and the families of terrorists." Gaza "must be demilitarized," he added, "and the only force that can ensure this is the IDF. No international force can be responsible for this."

Referring to the flattening of the vast majority of residential buildings in northern Gaza, Gallant added in a similar vein, "What happened in Gaza City is happening now in Khan Younis... with impressive results." For good measure, Gantz emphasised that Israel would not be bound by any restrictions on its operations, asserting, "Only Israel will determine its fate." Even after the official end of hostilities, he said there would be "months and years" of IDF operations aimed at "stabilising the reality."

Speaking at a fundraiser in Boston on Tuesday, President Joe Biden made clear his full endorsement of the Netanyahu regime's genocidal plans. Blaming Hamas for ending the pause in fighting because it refused to release some female hostages, Biden declared, "We're not going to stop — we're not going to stop until we bring every one of them home and it's going to be a long process."

Biden is the leading representative of US imperialism, which has waged bloody wars that have destroyed entire societies and killed millions across the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia over the past 30 years. The last thing he is concerned about is the lives of an estimated 138 hostages still in Gaza.

American imperialism is determined to use Israel's ethnic cleansing operation in Gaza, the culmination of the Zionist project's 75-year-long dispossession and oppression of the Palestinian people, as an opportunity to lay the groundwork for a region-wide war. The Biden administration dispatched two aircraft carrier strike groups and a nuclear-capable submarine to the region early in the conflict to menace Iran and its rivals for domination over the oil-rich and geostrategically critical Middle East.

Biden's acknowledgement of Israel's forcible expulsion

of the Palestinians being a "long process" underlines that in order to consolidate its hegemonic position in the region as part of a redivision of the world at the expense of its rivals, above all China and Russia, Washington has no qualms about allowing the IDF to continue massacring innocent civilians for weeks and months to come.

The threat of an escalation towards a regional conflagration remains imminent. Since the IDF's resumption of its assault on Gaza, hostilities have also intensified on the northern border with Lebanon. On Tuesday, the Lebanese army reported that one of its soldiers was killed in an Israeli strike supposedly aimed at a Hezbollah position. The fatality was the first reported by the Lebanese army during the cross-border conflict since 7 October, which has seen Israel strike numerous targets in southern Lebanon and Hezbollah fire rockets into northern Israel.

The IDF released a rare statement claiming, "Lebanese army forces were not the target of the attack." UNIFIL, the UN agency tasked with monitoring the border since Israel's withdrawal in 2000, described the stepped-up exchange of fire in recent days as "alarming."

Stopping the unfolding genocide in Gaza and preventing a region-wide war depends on the independent political intervention of the working class, in the major imperialist centres, in Israel and throughout the Middle East. The urgent task facing the millions of young people and workers who have joined protests around the world against the Gaza genocide is to turn to the working class by appealing for a broad mobilisation to stop the supply and production of all conceivable military equipment to Israel.

Workers should respond to the call of the Palestinian trade unions for solidarity strikes in every country, building towards an international political general strike to oppose the genocidal policies of the Netanyahu regime and its imperialist backers with an internationalist and socialist programme to put an end to war and all forms of oppression.



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