

Israel continues Gaza onslaught and strikes on southern Lebanon

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Israel's savage bombardment of Gaza continued Thursday as a series of strikes on residential buildings in the southernmost city of Rafah and elsewhere throughout the enclave killed dozens of civilians. Gaza's Health Ministry reported 170 deaths and well over 300 injuries in 24 hours between Wednesday and Thursday.

The single bloodiest strike was on a three-floor residential building in Rafah, killing 16 people. One of the families living at the site had relocated three times since Israel's genocidal onslaught began on October 7, according to *Al-Jazeera*. In addition to the air strikes, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) reported that ground troops are operating further south in the Gaza Strip than ever since the genocide began.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, with reports Thursday that hepatitis C is spreading among children in Rafah. The city's population, which was 300,000 prior to Israel's onslaught, has exploded four-fold to 1.2 million. Tens of thousands of people are crammed into tents and under makeshift plastic sheeting amid heavy rain and the winter cold.

At a press briefing Thursday, UN special rapporteur for the Palestinian Territories Francesca Albanese accused Israel of "a number of things that are highly illegal, highly unlawful." She commented, "What has happened is over 100 days of relentless bombing—the first two weeks using 6,000 bombs per week, bombs of 2,000 pounds, in highly crowded areas."

Most Palestinians are now dying not only from the bombs, but "because there is not sufficient infrastructure to cure them from the wounds." She added, "The number of kids who get amputated every day is shocking, one or two limbs. During the first two months of this (war) 1,000 kids were amputated without anaesthesia. It is a monstrosity."

According to Sean Casey, a health emergency officer for the World Health Organisation, Gaza's health care network is "collapsing." After a five-week investigation throughout the enclave, he noted at a Wednesday press conference that only 15 of Gaza's pre-war 36 hospitals are functioning to some extent. Many of these facilities, however, have become extended refugee camps with a handful of medical staff struggling to treat injuries with few supplies.

Describing the scene at Al-Ahli Hospital in northern Gaza, which was bombed by Israel in October, killing hundreds, he said, "I saw patients who were lying on church pews, basically waiting to die, in a hospital that had no fuel, no power, no water, very little in the way of medical supplies and only a handful of staff remaining to take care of them."

Similar accounts came from Doctors Without Borders (MSF) staff working at the Al-Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, where conditions have rapidly deteriorated in the recent period. "There are populations sheltering in the hospital because they don't feel safe anywhere else. And when that population no longer feels safe in the hospital, it's an indicator for us that the situation for the hospital is becoming untenable," said MSF's Amber Alayyan.

"You've got patients who are being operated on the floor," she continued. "You've got patients who are sleeping on the floor. You have staff who are sleeping on the floor because they prefer to sleep in the hospital than to take the risk of going back and forth to their homes, which may or may not still exist."

On Wednesday, the IDF blew up the main campus of Israa University south of Gaza City, the last remaining university in the enclave. A report released by Hamas Thursday stated that Israel has destroyed 390 educational institutions since October 7. It described

this barbarism as an example of “the genocide and ethnic cleansing” of Gaza.

The unconditional backing given by US imperialism to the fascistic Netanyahu government ensures that Israel can carry out these war crimes and many others with impunity. The 2,000-pound bombs denounced by Albanese in her remarks have been supplied without interruption by Washington since the outset of Israel’s onslaught. American imperialism has also systematically prepared for a wider regional war aimed at Iran, which it is now realising through the bombardment of Houthi targets in Yemen in alliance with Britain.

Late Thursday, the Biden administration reported a fifth round of strikes on the Iranian-backed movement, which has launched missiles against commercial shipping in the Red Sea in support of the Palestinians. The real reason for Washington and London’s war is to consolidate American imperialist hegemony over the energy-rich Middle East against its rivals.

The European imperialist powers, led by Germany, are preparing their own naval operation to the region to join the conflict. The war in the Middle East is one front in a rapidly developing redivision of the world between the imperialist powers, who are determined to seize markets, raw materials, and geopolitical influence from their competitors, above all China and Russia.

Emboldened by the support from the imperialist powers, Netanyahu’s fascistic government is ever more openly declaring its genocidal intentions. At a press conference Thursday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made one of his most explicit statements to date in favour of Israel’s permanent responsibility for security over Gaza and the West Bank, and opposition to a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu said that a “vital condition” for any post-war arrangement was Israel maintaining “security control” over all territory west of the Jordan River, which includes Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank. Netanyahu stated, “Whoever is talking about the ‘day after Netanyahu’ is essentially talking about the establishment of a Palestinian state with the Palestinian Authority.”

In remarks earlier in the day at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Israel’s President Isaac Herzog underscored how Israel’s genocide in Gaza is part of an imperialist-backed regional war against Tehran. Herzog

railed against an “empire of evil” emanating from Iran that needs to be confronted by a “strong coalition” of states. The Gaza population is “entrenched in a network of terror,” continued Herzog, which is funded by Iran. This rhetoric chimed with Netanyahu’s statements at his press conference vowing to pursue the war until a “decisive victory.”

The IDF has stepped up its strikes against Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, including the use of white phosphorus shells in a strike Thursday, according to Lebanese authorities. In the West Bank, daily raids have claimed over 350 lives since October 7. In a raid in Tulkarem Thursday, Israeli forces killed eight people.

Fascist National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir declared in a speech to border police in the West Bank that they should shoot “terrorists” even if they don’t pose a threat, i.e., kill Palestinians en masse. In an attempt to save face, he later released a revised statement claiming that he was referring to “armed terrorists.”

A report from the Committee to Protect Journalists included Israel on its list of Worst Jailers of Journalists in the world for the first time, due to its detention of Palestinian journalists without trial during the Gaza onslaught. The 17 journalists in Israeli jails in December was on a par with Iran, the report noted. The number of detentions has since risen to 19. In Gaza itself, over 100 journalists and media workers have been killed in Israeli air strikes. In the latest example, Wael Fannouneh, manager of the Al-Quds Today television network, died in an Israeli air strike in Gaza City Thursday.



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