

Official Gaza death toll tops 25,000 as Israel threatens to invade Lebanon

Alex Lantier

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The confirmed death toll in the Israeli government's genocidal onslaught against Gaza officially passed 25,000 this weekend, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health. Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qudra said on Sunday that 178 people had been confirmed killed in the last 24 hours, bringing the confirmed death toll to 25,105. A further 8,000 Palestinians are missing and believed to be dead, and at least 62,681 people have been wounded.

Israeli air strikes and tank shelling hit the southern city of Khan Younis, bombing Nasser hospital, the largest operational hospital in the Gaza Strip since Israeli troops destroyed Al-Shifa hospital. "Snipers have taken positions in high-rise buildings, shooting people on the street below. People in hospital have no place to go," Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud reported from Khan Younis. "It's street-to-street, house-to-house fighting."

There were also reports of heavy bombings across the northern Gaza strip, including of Gaza City. Five people were killed in an air strike that destroyed a civilian car in Rafah, near the Gaza Strip's southern border with Egypt.

The past week since South Africa filed suit against Israel for genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was one of the bloodiest yet, according to Euro-Med Monitor. The humanitarian organization reported that Israeli forces had killed 1,108 people in the last week, including 208 women and at least 390 children. Of the 1,934 people confirmed injured by Israeli attacks this last week, at least 70 percent were women and children.

The Israeli regime is waging a genocidal onslaught against defenseless civilians, aiming to destroy the Palestinian population and render Gaza uninhabitable. Over 1 percent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million

people have been killed, and over 4 percent are dead, wounded or missing. Over 60 percent of its residential buildings are badly damaged, according to reports by the World Bank and the *Times of Israel*, and 45 percent are unlivable. According to UN reports, at least one quarter of Gaza's population face extreme hunger and over 85 percent have fled their homes.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres criticized the Israeli onslaught yesterday at a summit of Chinese, African and Latin American officials in the Ugandan capital of Kampala. He said, "Israel's military operations have spread mass destruction and killed civilians on a scale unprecedented during my time as secretary-general. ... This is heartbreaking and utterly unacceptable. The Middle East is a tinderbox. We must do all we can to prevent conflict from igniting across the region."

The imperialist powers are, however, signaling their unstinting support for Israel's genocide in Gaza, delivering arms without which the Israeli war effort could not continue. Last month, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken invoked emergency powers to force through the delivery of \$147.5 million worth in 155mm heavy artillery shells from US arsenals to the Israeli armed forces, bypassing Congressional authorization.

Last week, moreover, the German government approved the supply of 10,000 tank shells to Israel for use against the population of Gaza, while filing a brief at the ICJ denouncing South Africa's charge of genocide against the Israeli government.

All the major European powers are implicated in the Gaza genocide. The British government has sold £442 million in arms to Israel since 2015. France, which sells Israel €20 million in military equipment per year and whose president Emmanuel Macron hailed Netanyahu as his "friend" after the Israeli attack on Gaza began, is

sending its Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu to Israel for friendly talks.

There is, however, mounting concern among the NATO powers that, despite Israel's unparalleled brutality, its forces have not succeeded in destroying the Hamas government in Gaza. On Sunday, the *Wall Street Journal* cited US intelligence briefings on the war in Gaza, writing: "Israeli forces have killed 20 to 30 percent of Hamas's fighters, US intelligence agencies estimate, a toll that falls short so far of Israel's goal of destroying the group and shows its resilience after months of war that have laid swaths of the Gaza Strip to ruin."

Confident in the backing of Washington and its imperialist allies, Israeli officials are boasting that they will ignore appeals from the UN and the former colonial countries, and escalate the war.

Over the weekend, they again spelled out their intention to conquer all the occupied Palestinian territories. In a post Saturday on X/Twitter, Netanyahu dismissed empty and cynical calls by US President Joe Biden for a "two-state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, involving the creation of a Palestinian state. He wrote: "I will not compromise on full Israeli security control over the entire area west of [the] Jordan [river]—and this is contrary to a Palestinian state."

Also on Saturday, Israeli forces bombed Syria's capital, Damascus, targeting Iranian forces allied to the Syrian government in NATO's 13-year war for regime change in Syria. Iran's Mehr News Agency reported that "the Revolutionary Guards' Syria intelligence chief" and four other Iranians were among the dead. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-backed group active in Syria, said the Israeli strike killed 12, including four Syrians, two Lebanese and one Iraqi citizen.

An article Friday in the *Washington Post* confirmed that US and Israeli officials are intensively discussing plans for a large-scale Israeli assault on Lebanon for the end of the month. The main target of this assault would be the powerful Hezbollah militia allied to Iran.

"Israel told Washington in late December that if a long-term border agreement cannot be reached with Lebanon over the next several weeks, according to a Western diplomat and three Lebanese officials, Israel will escalate its fight with Hezbollah ... The officials

familiar with the talks understood that Israel was eyeing the end of January as a target for coming to an agreement," the *Post* wrote. It cited a "senior US official" as saying that "the window for negotiations is narrowing."

The *Post* admitted that Israeli officials, not Hezbollah, are pressing for military escalation. It cited "two US officials" as saying that "Hezbollah's leaders do not want a full-blown war with Israel," but added: "There is significant support within Israel's defense establishment for a bigger fight with Hezbollah, which senior officials have said may be critical to containing Iranian ambitions in the region."

It cited former Israeli deputy national security adviser Chuck Freilich who advocated rapidly launching a full-scale war with Lebanon: "If you believe that war with Hezbollah is inevitable, as many in Israel do, then now is as good a time as any to do it."

The force that can stop the escalation being planned by the NATO imperialist powers and Israel's Zionist regime is the international working class. Mass protests by millions have erupted against the genocide in Gaza, with mass marches in London, New York, Washington and in cities across the Middle East, Asia, Europe and the world. Only the mobilization of this social force, in a struggle against imperialism and the Zionist regime, can halt the catastrophic war they are setting into motion.

The signs of growing popular opposition to the war inside Israel itself are of particular significance. On Saturday, thousands marched in Tel Aviv, criticizing Netanyahu's policies and calling for new elections.

Several hundred Jewish and Arab Israelis also organized an anti-war protest in Israel's third-largest city, Haifa, after appealing a police ban on their demonstration to the Supreme Court of Justice. Protesters marched peacefully and chanted, "Refuse to kill, refuse to fight, refuse to murder." Israeli police assaulted the demonstration and arrested one protester.



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