

Israel presses assault on Gaza as Netanyahu and Blinken reject ceasefire

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The Israeli military continued its bombardment Wednesday of Rafah, the southernmost city in Gaza where 1 million displaced people are sheltering, as US and Israeli leaders publicly rejected any cessation of hostilities.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, during a visit to Israel, said a proposal by Hamas to release all Israeli hostages in exchange for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza was “full of non-starters,” once again giving Israel a green light for its ongoing genocide.

“We’ve made it clear that Israel is fully justified in confronting Hamas and other terrorist organizations,” Blinken said, adding that the US has “done more than any other country to support Israel’s right to ensure that October 7th never happens again.”

Blinken will stay in Israel on Thursday, continuing to hold meetings and coordinate US support for the ongoing genocide.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was even more explicit in rejecting a ceasefire, declaring, “there is no other solution but a complete and final victory.”

“By giving in to Hamas’ demands, we will only invite another massacre,” Netanyahu said. “Surrendering to the delusional demands of Hamas ... will not only fail to bring about the release of the hostages, but it will also invite another massacre.”

Netanyahu told Israeli troops on Wednesday to “prepare to operate” in Rafah, declaring, “There will not be any sector in Gaza that will not be covered by the Israeli offensive.”

Last week, Miki Zohar, a minister from Netanyahu’s Likud party, explained that Israel would not accept any demand for a withdrawal from Gaza and would only accept a temporary cessation of “one month or 1½ months” because “we have no intention of stopping the fighting.”

In his remarks, Blinken effectively endorsed Israel’s stated goal of destroying Hamas and barring it from having any influence in Gaza. When asked if the US would accept a post-war Gaza in which Hamas played any role in the government, Blinken replied, “The short answer... is no.”

As US and Israeli officials condemned any cessation of hostilities, bombs continued to rain down in Rafah amid massive shortages of food, water and medical care. According to Gazan officials, two Israeli airstrikes destroyed houses in the city, killing seven people and injuring 11.

Between the afternoons of February 6 and 7, 123 Palestinians were killed, according to Gaza’s Ministry of Health. It said that the official death toll since the start of the invasion reached 27,708. Adding the 7,000 people who have been missing for more than two weeks, the death toll stands near 35,000, in addition to 67,147 wounded since October 7.

In remarks Wednesday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that “Israeli military operations have resulted in destruction and death in Gaza at a scale and speed without parallel since I became secretary-general.”

He added, “I am especially alarmed by reports that the Israeli military intends to focus next on Rafah—where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been squeezed in a desperate search for safety. Such an action would exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold regional consequences.”

Over 1 million people are sheltering in Rafah, which the Israeli military had previously designated a “safe zone” into which the displaced population of Gaza was told to move. On Tuesday, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs warned that the

offensive against Rafah would lead to “large-scale loss of civilian lives” and could constitute a war crime.

The ongoing mass murder is accompanied by the systematic destruction of civilian infrastructure. Gaza’s government media office said on Wednesday that the Israeli military had burned over 3,000 housing units throughout Gaza as part of a systematic policy of making the area uninhabitable.

“The burning operations took place and are being carried out according to clear and direct instructions and orders from the commanders of the ‘Israeli’ occupation army,” the Government Media Office said in a statement. The losses from the burnings alone “exceed tens of millions of dollars.”

On Wednesday, the UN’s Palestinian refugee agency said that Israeli forces have carried out 290 attacks on its premises, and that 389 displaced people have been killed while taking shelter at its facilities.

The intensification of Israel’s genocide is accompanied by an expansion of the US’s regional war throughout the Middle East, targeting Iran. On Wednesday, US forces once again carried out an illegal airstrike in Iraq, killing three people.

In a menacing statement announcing the strike, US Central Command threatened, “The United States will continue to take necessary action to protect our people. We will not hesitate to hold responsible all those who threaten our forces’ safety.”

The Pentagon claimed that the target of the strike was the commander of the Iraqi militia group Kataib Hezbollah, and that US President Joe Biden approved the strike last week. Iraqi officials said that the strike had targeted a civilian car, killing everyone inside.

Iraqi officials were not informed ahead of time about the strike on Iraqi soil, and Maj. Gen. Tahseen Al Khafaji, an Iraqi military spokesman, called the strike “a clear aggression and violation of Iraqi sovereignty.” He added that Iraq would “hold the American side and the coalition forces responsible for the repercussions of these dangerous actions that threaten the security and safety of the country.”



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