

US gives Israel blank check to massacre civilians in Rafah

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In multiple statements over the past 24 hours, US officials have made clear that they will take no action against Israel no matter how many civilians it massacres in its planned assault on Rafah, where one million displaced people are sheltering. These statements effectively give Israel a blank check to commit unrestrained war crimes in its assault on the city.

On Monday, US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby was asked whether the United States will reduce its military aid to Israel if it assaults Rafah without taking into consideration “what happens to civilians.”

To this, Kirby replied, “We will continue to support Israel. They have a right to defend themselves against Hamas, and we will continue to make sure they have the tools and capabilities to do that.”

To drive this point home, *Politico* reported on Tuesday, based on statements by three US officials, that “The Biden administration is not planning to punish Israel if it launches a military campaign in Rafah without ensuring civilian safety.”

Politico continued, “No reprimand plans are in the works, meaning Israeli forces could enter the city and harm civilians without facing American consequences.”

Over one million Palestinians have been forced into Rafah, the southernmost city in Gaza, as a result of Israel’s ethnic cleansing campaign throughout the Gaza Strip. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made it clear on Sunday that Israel intends to proceed with a full-scale military assault on Rafah, pledging “final victory.”

On Sunday, Biden declared, “The major military operation in Rafah should not proceed without a credible plan for ensuring the safety and support of more than 1 million people sheltering there.”

The statements by Kirby and the officials who spoke on background to *Politico* made it clear that this declaration is meaningless, and that the United States will endorse Israeli actions no matter how many people it massacres.

In a testament to how brazenly American imperialism is endorsing the genocide, Kirby was asked again on Tuesday, “What happens if Israel does not provide this plan and moves into Rafah?”

Kirby dismissed the question as a “game,” declaring, “I’m not going to get into a hypothetical game.”

The question is, however, neither a game nor hypothetical. Israel is killing between 100 and 200 people every single day in Gaza, and the death toll stands above 35,000. These victims were killed by US bombs, launched with US logistical support, and given political cover by the Biden administration.

The open support for Israel’s genocidal actions is all the more striking given statements by figures within the US political establishment that Israel is committing war crimes.

Speaking on the Senate floor on Monday, Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen accused Israel of committing a war crime by withholding food from the population of Gaza. “Kids in Gaza are now dying from the deliberate withholding of food. ... That is a war crime. It is a textbook war crime. And that makes those who orchestrate it war criminals.” This did not stop Van Hollen from voting for a bill that includes billions in additional funding for Israel.

If these words apply to the Netanyahu government, they apply with even greater force to the Biden administration.

Israel continued to pound Rafah with airstrikes on Tuesday, killing dozens of people in the city even before the planned full-scale invasion. According to

Gaza's Ministry of Health, 133 people were killed between Monday and Tuesday afternoon.

On Monday, Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, warned that a "potential full-fledged military incursion into Rafah—where some 1.5 million Palestinians are crammed into a tiny area—is terrifying, given the prospect that an extremely high number of civilians, again mostly children and women, will likely be killed and injured."

On Tuesday, the World Food Program said in a statement that its efforts to feed starving people in Gaza were "constantly hampered" by the Israeli government. "WFP is deeply concerned about an expanded military offensive in Rafah, where over a million people are crammed into a tiny area. WFP has expanded our distribution points, but efforts to reach people in need throughout Gaza are constantly hampered," it added. "There is nowhere safe."

United Nations humanitarian affairs chief Martin Griffiths warned that the looming offensive against Rafah would be a "slaughter," declaring, "Today, I am sounding the alarm once again: Military operations in Rafah could lead to a slaughter in Gaza. They could also leave an already fragile humanitarian operation at death's door."

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), meanwhile, confirmed that it received a request by South Africa to intervene to stop the assault on Rafah. In its filing, South Africa "calls upon the Court to consider as a matter of the greatest urgency whether the developing circumstances in Rafah require that it exercise its power to prevent further imminent breach of the rights of Palestinians in Gaza."

Last month, the ICJ ruled that Israel could "plausibly" be committing genocide in Gaza. But in the wake of the ruling, Israel, with the support of the US, has only intensified its bombing of civilians, summary mass executions and deliberate starvation of the population of Gaza.

On Tuesday, Israeli forces targeted *Al Jazeera Arabic* correspondent Ismail Abu Omar, seriously injuring him and photojournalist Ahmed Matar. In a statement, *Al Jazeera* wrote that the attack is "a full-fledged crime added to Israel's crimes against journalists, and a new part in the series of the deliberate targeting of *Al Jazeera's* journalists and correspondents

in Palestine."

Israeli officials, meanwhile, have threatened to expand the geographic scope of the war. On Tuesday, the Israeli military carried out strikes in southern Lebanon. Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant declared that there is "a realistic possibility" that the Israeli army will have "to return the northern residents to their homes forcefully," implying a broader military offensive against Lebanon.

He added, "This means creating a different security situation by force, and that could lead to anything ... we can reach anywhere we decide to go in Lebanon and beyond that."



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