

Egypt building camps to host Palestinians expelled from Gaza as Israel prepares for Rafah onslaught

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Confirming the genocidal statements issued over recent months by Israel's far-right government, reports released Thursday revealed that Egypt is constructing a massive walled enclosure in northern Sinai to host Palestinians forcibly expelled from Gaza. The news comes as Israel makes the final preparations for a bloody ground offensive into Rafah, where some 1.5 million people are crammed together and being denied the basic necessities for human life.

According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, the eight-square-mile compound is a "contingency plan" in the event Palestinians succeed in breaching the reinforced border. Egypt has constructed a concrete wall along the border and deployed additional troops and tanks over recent weeks as Israel's brutal onslaught has moved further south.

The Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, a London-based organisation monitoring developments in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, noted Wednesday that construction of the camp began on Monday and is expected to take 10 days. The goal of the construction project, which is being overseen by military intelligence officials, is to "build a gated area, surrounded by 7-meter-high walls."

The Egyptian dictatorship of General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi has long been publicly hostile to accepting Palestinian refugees in Sinai. The Cairo regime fears they could become a security risk as it combats Islamist militants in the region, and that Hamas, whose origins were in the Muslim Brotherhood, could strengthen the Brotherhood in Egypt. More fundamentally, the al-Sisi regime fears the consequences for social stability of its complicity in the expulsion of the Palestinians becoming public in a country where the plight of the Palestinians enjoys broad sympathy among Egyptian workers, who remain bitterly hostile to the bloody dictatorship that

drowned the Egyptian revolution in blood.

The far-right Israeli government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has, more or less openly, been declaring for months its intention to forcibly expel the Palestinians from Gaza, a war crime under international law. In October, just two weeks after Israel launched its bombardment of Gaza, a leaked document from the Ministry of Intelligence called for Israel to "evacuate the civilian population to Sinai."

A paper entitled "Options for a policy regarding Gaza's civilian population" released on 13 October suggested that the mass expulsion of the Palestinians to Sinai could be accompanied by the creation of a "sterile zone" on the Egyptian side of the border. "The return of the population to activities/residences near the border with Israel should not be allowed. In addition, a security perimeter should be established in our territory near the border with Egypt," the report stated.

In November, far-right Finance Minister Bezalil Smotrich appealed for "the voluntary emigration of the Gaza Arabs to the countries of the world," describing this as the "right humanitarian solution."

Israel has sought to achieve its goal of depopulating Gaza both by the use of ruthless military force and the denial of humanitarian aid to produce mass hunger and the rampant spread of disease. This is culminating in the looming ground assault on Rafah, which Israeli officials once proclaimed a "safe zone" for the Palestinian population.

US imperialism is working behind the scenes to facilitate the transfer of the Palestinians to the Sinai. Head of the CIA William Burns was in Cairo before travelling on to Israel this week, ostensibly to discuss the release of the remaining hostages. President Joe Biden urged Netanyahu on Sunday not to launch a ground invasion of

Rafah until a “credible” plan for the evacuation of the civilian population was in place. The news that Egypt is building a massive walled compound reveals that Biden’s professed concern for civilian casualties in Rafah was much more likely a declaration of US support for the Palestinians’ mass expulsion from Gaza to Sinai.

American imperialism’s unreserved support for Israel’s genocide, which has included the supply of the 2,000-pound bombs that have devastated Gaza, is bound up with its geopolitical ambitions. The destruction of Gaza has provided Washington with a useful pretext to substantially expand its military operations throughout the Middle East in preparation for a direct military clash with Iran.

Over the past month, Washington and its allies have launched missiles against the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen and Tehran-aligned militias in Iraq and Syria. The US ruling class aims, with the resort to imperialist barbarism, to consolidate its dominance over the energy-rich and strategically important region against its rivals, China and Russia. For their part, the European imperialist powers, led by Germany and France, have deployed their own military resources to the region as they seek to secure their share of the booty.

Washington has given Israel a free hand to attack and destroy all infrastructure necessary for human life in Gaza, including water treatment facilities, schools and universities, and hospitals and medical facilities.

Israeli soldiers stormed the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis Thursday, effectively putting out of action the largest medical facility in the southern Gaza Strip. The brutal scenes of tanks firing on patients and soldiers forcing medical personnel and the injured into one part of the hospital provide yet further confirmation of the savagery and criminality of the Israeli regime, which has already repeatedly assaulted hospitals in the course of its four-month genocide on the Palestinians.

The raid follows similar barbaric actions at the Al-Nasser and Al-Shifa hospitals in Gaza City in November, and Amal Hospital in Khan Younis last week. On each occasion, Israel has justified the murderous attacks, which are crimes under international law, with bogus claims about the presence of “terrorists” or “terrorist infrastructure” within the medical facility.

Having surrounded and bombarded the facility for many days, the Israeli forces confined hundreds of people, including over 90 medics and 190 patients, into an old building at the medical complex. Hundreds of patients and displaced people were driven from the site by the Israel

Defence Forces (IDF), which fired on them and demolished parts of the hospital building. According to Palestinian Health Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qudra, “The Nasser Medical Complex is witnessing a catastrophic, worrying situation because of the dwindling medical capacity as fuel is set to run out in the next 24 hours, which directly threatens the lives of patients, including six on respirators in intensive care and three children in incubators.”

As it presses ahead with its genocide in Gaza, Israel is also recklessly escalating the war on its northern border with Lebanon. Thursday was the deadliest day for the conflict between the two countries, which has included daily exchanges of fire between the IDF and Hezbollah since 7 October. A total of 10 civilians and three Hezbollah members were killed in a dozen Israeli air strikes on various targets south of the Litani River.

In the most provocative action, Israeli troops unleashed sustained machine gun fire on the village of Kfar Kila in a “sweep operation.” The drastic intensification of fire across the border increases the danger of an all-out war between the two countries, which would mark a further escalation of the regional conflagration between US imperialism and its allies on the one side, and Iran and its regionally aligned forces on the other.

If Israel and its imperialist sponsors get away with the mass expulsion of the Palestinians to Egypt, it will go down in history as one of the 21st century’s greatest crimes and represent a major step towards a bloodbath engulfing the entire Middle East. However, the past four months have not only demonstrated the savagery of the imperialists and the Israeli regime, but also the widespread hostility to war and genocide among the millions of workers and young people around the world who have participated in demonstrations. The urgent task is to provide this movement with the socialist and internationalist programme necessary to mobilize the working class in the major imperialist centres and throughout the Middle East in political struggle against war and capitalist barbarism.



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