

# Israel withdraws soldiers from Khan Younis to regroup ahead of assault on Rafah

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted Monday that “there is a date” for an onslaught on Gaza’s southernmost city of Rafah, one day after the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) withdrew troops from Khan Younis. After a brutal four-month campaign of death and destruction in what was once the largest city in southern Gaza, IDF soldiers left Khan Younis in ruins.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant commented Sunday that the military would “regroup” and prepare for “follow-up missions.” Israel’s Channel 13 reported Monday that the evacuation of the more than 1.5 million people currently crammed into Rafah could begin as early as this week, with the process taking “several months.” Referring to the Rafah operation, Netanyahu stated, “It will happen. There is a date.”

Even as it withdrew the 98th Division from Khan Younis, the IDF made clear it was retaining two brigades in the enclave to “preserve the IDF’s freedom of action and its ability to conduct precise intelligence-based operations.”

White House and State Department spokesmen sought to portray the move as a step towards a ceasefire. Both National Security Council spokesman John Kirby and State Department spokesman Matthew Miller claimed that the US has not been briefed on a start date for a Rafah offensive. They placed considerable emphasis on a new round of ceasefire talks that opened Sunday in Cairo, where a proposal to implement a ceasefire during the Muslim Eid al-Fitr holiday was reportedly discussed.

Washington and its pliant tools in the corporate media apparently want to create the impression of a genuine effort on the part of Israel and the US to reach a ceasefire, when the fact of the matter is that what was presented to Hamas was more akin to an ultimatum. Kirby bluntly declared, “At the end of the weekend, a proposal was submitted to Hamas, and now it’s going to be up to Hamas to come through.”

In other words, if Hamas fails to “come through” by accepting total surrender to the IDF and releasing all hostages with no guarantees of a permanent ceasefire, they will be to blame for the bloody onslaught on Rafah. The Biden administration will say it did all it could to prevent the assault, while hoping that nobody remembers the 1,800 2,000-pound bombs delivered by the US recently to Israel just in time to be dropped on Rafah.

Late Monday, a senior Hamas official announced the rejection of the terms, insisting on its March 14 proposal that included a permanent ceasefire, the return of all displaced Palestinians to their homes, and the withdrawal of all IDF troops from Gaza. However, another source said that the proposal is still being studied. Israeli officials have made clear that the war will continue even if all hostages are returned home. Netanyahu has repeatedly referred to three goals of the onslaught: releasing the hostages, eliminating Hamas, and establishing security control over all of Gaza.

The devastation that awaits Rafah, which has already repeatedly been targeted with air strikes, was graphically underscored by reports from residents who returned to Khan Younis Monday to a city in ruins. Numerous high-rise blocks have been reduced to rubble, while the Nasser hospital, formerly the largest in the city, was devastated by sustained IDF raids. At least 84 bodies were discovered in the rubble on the first day alone. “It’s all just rubble,” Ahmad Abu al-Rish told Al Jazeera. “Animals can’t live here, so how is a human supposed to?”

Yet that is precisely what Israel’s government is proposing. The withdrawal from Khan Younis would allow civilians to return to their homes from Rafah, a military official told *Haaretz*. “There’s no need for us to remain in Khan Younis,” they stated. “The 98th Division dismantled Hamas’s Khan Younis brigades and killed thousands of its members. We did everything we could

there.”

The troop withdrawal will bring no letup in the desperate humanitarian situation confronting Gaza’s population, which is dealing with developing famine conditions due to the deliberate blocking of aid by Israel. Israeli authorities announced Monday that 322 trucks were approved to enter Gaza, the highest number for a single day since the genocidal onslaught began. Even this number falls well short of the estimates by the UN and other aid agencies for the amount of aid needed to supply the population.

An Al Jazeera correspondent based in Rafah reported that none of the trucks were allowed to travel to the north of Gaza, further compounding the use of starvation as a weapon of war. Last week, Oxfam reported that residents of the north are living on just 245 calories a day, a mere 12 percent of the recommended food intake for an adult.

Sean Carroll, head of the American Near East Relief Agency (ANERA), one of the organisations that suspended operations following the murder of seven World Central Kitchen aid workers by Israel last week, commented, “To make up ground to meet the extreme gaps in food and other essentials for living, we need to see more than 500 trucks a day. The real issue is, who is going to deliver all this aid.”

A no less horrific expression of Israel’s brutality toward the Palestinians is the cruelty being meted out to detainees. According to a *Haaretz* report, a doctor at the Sde Teiman medical centre addressed a letter to lawmakers last week describing how detainees brought in from Gaza routinely have their limbs amputated due to complications arising from being tightly handcuffed and shackled. “Just this week, two prisoners had their legs amputated due to handcuff injuries, which unfortunately is a routine event,” the doctor wrote. Other sources said the center typically restrains and blindfolds prisoners for 24 hours a day, feeding them through straws.

Over six months after the beginning of Israel’s genocide against the Palestinians, the Zionist regime is blatantly displaying its barbarism for all to see. The indiscriminate bombing of Gaza has pushed the official death toll to over 33,000 men, women and children, with well over 40,000 dead if the missing are included. Israel’s “final solution” to the Palestinian question has been made possible due to the unstinting support extended by the imperialist powers. The Biden administration has repeatedly refused to impose any “red lines” on Israel’s savagery, while supplying over 100 shipments of armaments and other military equipment to ensure the

machinery of genocide can operate.

Another key imperialist backer of the Gaza genocide is Germany, which is supplying Israel with approximately half a billion dollars of weaponry each year. At an International Court of Justice hearing in The Hague Monday, Nicaragua accused the German government of “facilitating the commission of genocide” due to Berlin’s weapons supplies to Israel and unconditional declarations of support for its war in Gaza. Germany had failed to “differentiate between self-defence and genocide,” according to Nicaragua’s delegation head, Carlos Jose Francisco Arguello Gomez. Daniel Mueller, another lawyer representing Nicaragua, told the court that it is “a pathetic excuse to the Palestinian children, women and men to provide humanitarian aid, including through air drops, on the one hand and to furnish the military equipment that is used to kill and annihilate them.”

The reason for the imperialist powers’ embrace of Israel’s barbaric treatment of the Palestinians is the deepening crisis of world capitalism. The horrendous crimes being carried out against the Palestinians by Israel will be replicated on a much broader scale if the imperialists get their way. With their simultaneous backing for the Gaza genocide, reckless escalation of the US-NATO war on Russia, and preparations for war with China, the imperialist powers of America and Europe are demonstrating to the world that they will stop at nothing to achieve their interests, including a global conflagration with nuclear weapons.

The task facing the working class is to put an end to capitalist barbarism by taking up the struggle for a socialist and internationalist programme. The mass protests that have swept the world against the Gaza genocide must be unified with the eruption of workers’ struggles against attacks on their jobs and living standards to fund militarism and war in all of the major imperialist centres. An international anti-war movement led by the working class must be built to stop Israel’s onslaught and the rapidly emerging third world war.



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