

Israeli air strikes kill 22 women and children in Rafah

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Deadly Israeli air strikes on the southern Gazan city of Rafah continue on virtually a daily basis amid growing signs that the fascistic regime of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is about to give the green light for a ground assault. This will have disastrous consequences for the more than 1.5 million Palestinians crammed into the area without the essentials of life.

Palestinian health officials said on Sunday that two Israeli strikes overnight on the city had killed 22 people, including 18 children. As reported by the Kuwaiti Hospital in Gaza, the first strike killed a man, his wife and their three-year-old child. The second killed 17 children and two women from the same extended family.

Mohammed al-Beheiri told the Associated Press that his daughter, Rasha, and her six children, the youngest 18 months old, were among the dead. “These children were sleeping. What did they do? What was their fault?” a relative, Umm Kareem, said. The bodies of a woman and three children were still buried under the rubble.

Those killed are the latest casualties in Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza, which has claimed the lives of more than 34,000 Palestinians and injured nearly 77,000. At least two-thirds of those killed are children and women.

The bulk of the population of Rafah are refugees driven from other parts of Gaza by the Israeli military onslaught and clinging precariously to life amid acute shortages of food, clean water, medicines, shelter and other essentials.

Netanyahu, who has repeatedly declared the Israeli military would carry out a ground offensive into Rafah, strongly suggested on Sunday that the operation was imminent—again under the false banner of releasing the

remaining hostages seized by Hamas in its military operation on October 7.

“In the coming days,” he said, “we will increase the political and military pressure on Hamas because this is the only way to bring back our hostages and achieve victory. We will land more and painful blows on Hamas — soon.”

Netanyahu’s comments follow a high-level meeting last Thursday of US officials, including National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan with their Israeli counterparts which gave the go-ahead for the ground operation. As the official read-out declared: “The two sides agreed on the shared objective to see Hamas defeated in Rafah.”

The reported “concerns” expressed by US participants over “various courses of action in Rafah,” Israeli promises to “take these concerns into account,” are meaningless. Any major Israeli ground operation into crowded Rafah is going to lead to large civilian casualties, and will vastly compound the humanitarian disaster already taking place—as the “two sides” well know.

A report by UN agencies on the food situation facing Palestinians in Gaza released last week found that virtually everyone in Gaza is struggling to get enough food. Around 677,000 people or nearly a third of the population are experiencing the highest level of hunger.

Currently the most desperate situation is in northern Gaza where the report warned of famine between now and May—that is, an extreme lack of food in 20 percent of households, acute malnutrition in 30 percent of children, and people dying every day of hunger. That terrible situation will inevitably be replicated in Rafah in the wake of an Israeli ground offensive.

Egyptian officials are also expressing concern over an

Israeli ground offensive into Rafah which lies on the border with Egypt. As reported by the Israeli i24News, Mohammed al-Arabi, head of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs and former foreign minister, told a Saudi newspaper that Israel was seriously considering a military intervention in Rafah.

Fearful of the domestic political consequences of a Palestinian bloodbath, Al-Arabi declared that Egypt's goal is to restrain Israel through diplomatic means. He was echoed by Tarek Redouan, head of Egypt's parliamentary human rights committee in the Egyptian parliament, who warned that any Israeli incursion into Rafah would inflame regional tensions.

Like bourgeois governments throughout the Middle East, the brutal regime of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi fears that, notwithstanding its token expressions of concern and futile diplomatic gestures, its complicity in Israel's barbaric war in Gaza and impending invasion of Rafah will fuel anger and political opposition at home.

Even as it prepares for land operations in Rafah, the Israeli military is continuing its brutal attacks against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. Israeli soldiers killed two Palestinian teenagers at a checkpoint near the West Bank town of Hebron on Sunday, claiming they had been attacked. A 43-year-old Palestinian woman was shot dead by Israeli troops in the northern West Bank near Beka'ot settlement.

The Palestinian Red Crescent reported yesterday that its rescue service had recovered the bodies of 14 people killed in an Israeli raid into the Nur Shams refugee camp in the West Bank that commenced on Thursday. While the Israeli military claimed to have killed 14 "militants," only three were connected to the Islamic Jihad group. Another was a 15-year-old boy.

At least 469 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank since October 7, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

The genocidal war against Palestinians in Gaza is already part of a widening regional conflict with Israeli attacks on Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and air strikes against leading Hamas and Hezbollah figures in Lebanon and Syria. Israel's April 1 air strike on Iran's embassy in Damascus that prompted Iranian retaliation that was seized on and condemned by Israel, the US and its allies has further heightened tensions throughout the Middle East.

Approval for a \$26 billion aid package to Israel was passed by the US House of Representatives on Saturday, along with military and economic assistance to Ukraine in the US-NATO war against Russia. While the Israeli package includes around \$9 billion in unspecified humanitarian assistance, its prime purpose is to bolster the Israeli military and replenish its military stocks.

Biden has already declared that he will sign the legislation into law as soon as it lands on his desk. The Pentagon has announced that weapons and munitions from its stockpiles in the US and Europe will be dispatched within days—some of which will inevitably be rained down on civilians in Gaza, the West Bank and elsewhere in the Middle East.



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