

As ICC reportedly prepares war crimes charges, Israeli officials call to bomb Rafah

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Yesterday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged that his troops will assault Rafah, where 1.5 million defenseless Palestinian civilians now live in refugee camps. He added that he would not under any conditions spare Rafah, whether or not a deal was reached on an exchange of hostages held by the Israeli government and Hamas authorities in Gaza.

“The idea that we will stop the war before achieving all its aims is not an option,” Netanyahu said. “We will enter Rafah, and we will eliminate the Hamas battalions there—whether or not there is a deal—in order to achieve total victory.”

The war on Gaza has exacted a truly horrific toll. At least 34,535 Palestinians have been confirmed killed, over 10,000 have died under the rubble of bombed-out buildings, and 77,704 have been wounded. Over 1 million Palestinians are suffering severe hunger as Israeli forces cut off Gaza’s access to food, medicine and other basic necessities. Yet Netanyahu declared that he would not under any conditions agree to Hamas’ appeals to halt the genocidal onslaught on Gaza.

Netanyahu said, “Hamas insists on one thing—the end of the war—but it will not get it. I am not ready to give it. Therefore, if this is the situation—and indeed this is, currently—[the deal] will not happen. There may be people saying they are ready to end the war and let Hamas return. I won’t accept that.”

Netanyahu’s pledge to continue the war and bomb more than a million defenseless civilians in Rafah was his government’s response to reports that the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague is preparing to issue arrest warrants against Israeli officials on war crimes charges. Comfortable in the knowledge that the major NATO powers support its atrocities in Gaza, the regime is brazenly proclaiming

its intention to commit genocidal war crimes.

ICC officials have warned for months that they were investigating Israeli officials’ conduct of the war and, in particular, their threats to destroy Rafah. “I am deeply concerned by the reported bombardment and potential ground incursion by Israeli forces in Rafah,” ICC prosecutor Karim Khan wrote on X/Twitter, adding: “As I have repeatedly emphasised, those who do not comply with the law should not complain later when my Office takes action pursuant to its mandate.”

Indeed, even NATO officials admit that attacking Rafah would mean committing war crimes against the Palestinian people. Yesterday, British Deputy Foreign Secretary Andrew Mitchell told the British Parliament: “Given the number of civilians sheltering in Rafah, it’s not easy to see how such an offensive could be compliant with international humanitarian law in the current circumstances.”

UN officials condemned Netanyahu’s remarks, with Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths saying: “The world has been appealing to the Israeli authorities for weeks to spare Rafah, but a ground operation there is on the immediate horizon. ... The simplest truth is that a ground operation in Rafah will be nothing short of a tragedy beyond words. No humanitarian plan can counter that. The rest is detail.”

By Sunday, *Le Monde* reported, citing sources in The Hague, ICC prosecutors had obtained the signatures of three ICC judges on arrest warrants for Israeli officials. This is the last step to validate the warrants, whose publication is now “imminent,” these sources told *Le Monde*. Israeli media have reported that names on the warrants include those of Netanyahu, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of the General Staff Herzl Halevi.

While the United States does not recognize the ICC,

the 124 countries that do—including most European countries, Japan and Australia—would be required by law to arrest any Israeli officials named on the warrants who came onto their territory. This exposes the role not only of Israel but also of the NATO powers. Both their support for the Israeli government abroad and their crackdown on anti-genocide protests are home are politically criminal.

The war and the genocide cannot be stopped with moral appeals to the NATO powers to pursue a more enlightened policy. Indeed, they are reponding to reports of potential ICC war crimes charges by doubling down in support of Netanyahu. Yesterday, French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné arrived in Jerusalem for talks with Israeli officials, and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken then arrived for talks with the Jordanian monarchy in Amman.

Séjourné assured his Israeli counterpart, Israel Katz, of continued French backing for Netanyahu. Stressing his “support” for Israel while claiming to have unspecified “disagreements” with plans to bomb Rafah, Séjourné discussed a proposed UN peace resolution on Gaza. French diplomats told AFP the plan “supports Israel’s strong demands, like calling the October 7 [Gaza uprising against Israel] terrorist, stressing the sexual violence committed that day but also gives parameters for a political solution to the conflict.”

In Amman, Blinken claimed negotiations for an Israel-Hamas truce and hostage exchange are a path to the UN peace resolution and denounced Hamas as an obstacle to peace, for opposing the resolution. “Now it’s on Hamas. No more delays, no more excuses,” he said.

When reporters pointed out to Blinken that Netanyahu had pledged to bomb Rafah, even if Blinken’s proposed hostage exchange proceeded, Blinken ignored them. A truce, he repeated, “is the best way, the most effective way, to relieve the suffering and also to create an environment in which we can hopefully move forward to something that is really sustainable and has lasting peace for the people who so desperately need it.”

The statements of Blinken and Séjourné amount to an endorsement of Israeli war aims, cynically masquerading as a peace plan. Hamas rejected the proposed UN peace resolution last month because it created conditions for Israel to permanently occupy Gaza, in defiance of international law. It would not

have guaranteed that Israeli troops would leave Gaza, let civilians return to what remains of their homes, or allowed food to reach Gaza.

As Netanyahu’s call to bomb Rafah and continue the war make undeniably clear, responsibility for the war lies not with Hamas but with the Israeli regime and its NATO allies. The NATO powers are spending billions of dollars or euros on arming Israel for the genocide in Gaza. They hysterically attack protests against the genocide, because they fear mass opposition not only to their complicity in Israeli policy, but all the imperialist wars they have waged across Eastern Europe and the oil-rich Middle East in recent decades.

This emerged in Republican US House Speaker Mike Johnson’s outburst Monday, denouncing the ICC’s investigation of Israel. Warning that “action by the ICC would directly undermine US national security interests,” Johnson said. “If unchallenged by the Biden administration, the ICC could create and assume unprecedented power to issue arrest warrants against American political leaders, American diplomats, and American military personnel, thereby endangering our country’s sovereign authority.”

Johnson demanded the Biden administration “immediately and unequivocally demand that the ICC stand down” and “use every available tool” to stop the ICC from issuing the warrants. Shortly afterwards, the Biden White House indeed attacked the ICC, with spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre stating: “We do not support it. We don’t believe that they have the jurisdiction.”

These events are exposing the criminality of imperialism, which is reaction all down the line. Stopping the Gaza genocide requires mobilizing the full strength of the working class, in the United States, Europe and across the Middle East, in an international, socialist anti-war movement to halt the arming of the Israeli state for genocide and oppose the governments complicit in it.



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