

# As Israel prepares assault on Rafah, US mouths meaningless humanitarian concerns

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As the Israeli regime prepares to unleash a barbaric offensive on the southern Gazan city of Rafah, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held two hours of talks yesterday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Blinken's only objection to the military assault was that Israel had not yet provided a humanitarian plan.

"We cannot, will not support a major military operation in Rafah absent an effective plan to make sure that civilians are not harmed and no, we've not seen such a plan," Blinken told reporters after the meeting. He claimed that there were other ways of dealing with Hamas that do not require a major military operation in Rafah.

What hypocrisy! US imperialism has politically backed, bankrolled and armed Israel's genocidal onslaught in Gaza that to date has claimed more than 34,500 lives, the majority of which were women and children. Biden has just signed legislation that provides a further \$26 billion in aid to Israel, more than half being military weaponry.

It is patently obvious that any Israeli operation, whether "major" or not, into Rafah where more than a million Palestinians are jam packed will result in thousands, even tens of thousands, more civilian casualties. UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned on Tuesday that a military assault on Rafah "would be an unbearable escalation, killing thousands more civilians and forcing hundreds of thousands to flee."

Blinken's purely verbal expressions of humanitarian concern, like Washington's involvement in protracted talks in Egypt over a ceasefire, are simply to obscure the fact that the US is the chief enabler of the Zionist regime's monstrous crimes.

Following his discussion with Blinken, Netanyahu

reiterated what he had stated on Tuesday that the Israeli offensive into Rafah would proceed, regardless of whether a deal was reached with Hamas over a prisoner exchange. The Prime Minister's Office stated that Netanyahu had told Blinken a Rafah operation "was not contingent on anything" and that he rejected any truce proposals that would end the Gaza war.

In his comments yesterday, Blinken promoted the limited Israeli improvements in allowing aid access into Gaza where Palestinians confront extreme shortages of all the basics—food, water and shelter as well as medicines and medical equipment. After noting that aid trucks from Jordan had passed through the Erez crossing for the first time, he declared: "So the progress is real, but given the need... it needs to be sustained."

In reality there is no let up in the Israeli policy of killing Palestinians through hunger and disease as well as through military operations. Much of Gaza, particularly in the devastated north of the enclave, is on the brink of being declared in famine by UN agencies as defined by severe food shortages, levels of acute malnutrition and daily deaths from starvation.

In a comment published on Reliefweb yesterday, Mari Carmen Viñoles, head of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) emergency programs, blasted Israeli claims that there were not limits on the supply of humanitarian aid to Gaza. She explained that Israeli authorities had refused MSF's requests bring essential biomedical equipment such as an oxygen concentrator into Gaza where the major hospitals have been devastated. "Without this simple device, our medical teams in Gaza are forced to witness their patients die from entirely preventable causes," she said.

Viñoles said that MSF had made a request in early November to bring fridges and freezers essential for storing medicines and vaccines into Gaza, which were

only approved in April and are yet to arrive. “We are still waiting for approval to bring in generators, oxygen cylinders, ultrasound scanners, external defibrillators, intravenous sodium chloride solutions, essential for rehydrating patients and diluting drugs. The list is as long as it is alarming,” she commented.

Twenty seven percent were impeded, 10 percent were denied, and 8 percent were cancelled due to logistical constraints.

The latest OCHA update released yesterday highlighted reported that more than 10,000 people were estimated by the Palestinian Civil Defense (PCD) to be missing under rubble in Gaza. “PCD added that they are facing enormous challenges in recovering dead bodies, including lack of equipment, heavy machinery and personnel, warning it could take up to three years to retrieve the bodies using the primitive tools they have on hand.”

The fact that Gaza has been transformed into a war zone posing great dangers to the population is underscored by UN estimates that there is some 7,500 tonnes of unexploded ordnance (UXO) scattered throughout Gaza. A UN assessment team visiting Khan Younis in April reported that streets and public spaces were littered with UXO, with “unexploded 1,000-pound bombs lying on main intersections and inside schools.”

Even more sinister is a report on Monday by the government media office in Gaza that a 14-year-old boy was seriously injured and sustained limb amputations after opening a booby-trapped can of food he found inside his house that had been shelled by Israeli forces. The media office noted that others had been injured recently by booby-trapped canned goods.

Israeli military operations involving tanks and air strikes are continuing. According to the health ministry in Gaza, 80 Palestinians had been killed and 118 injured in the period from Monday afternoon to 11 a.m. yesterday. Since October 7 at least 34,568 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and 77,765 injured.

UN aid chief Martin Griffiths warned on Tuesday that an Israeli ground operation in Rafah was “on the immediate horizon.” He stressed that Israeli improvements to aid access in Gaza “cannot be used to prepare for or justify a full-blown military assault on Rafah.” A military onslaught on Gaza would be “nothing short of a tragedy beyond words,” he said.

Griffiths stated that a ground operation would deal a disastrous blow for “agencies struggling to provide humanitarian aid despite the active hostilities, impassable roads, unexploded ordnance, fuel shortages, delays at checkpoints, and Israeli restrictions.” It would bring even more trauma and death for “the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled to Gaza’s southernmost point to escape disease, famine, mass graves and direct fighting.”



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