

Israel expands attacks throughout Rafah, intensifying catastrophic humanitarian conditions

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Israel's attacks on the southern city of Rafah continued Thursday amid reports that talks between Israeli and Hamas representatives on a ceasefire in Cairo have broken down. The long-planned attack on the last refuge for Gaza's Palestinians, where some 1.5 million people are crammed together, has blocked the main border crossings for aid into the enclave, further worsening the humanitarian catastrophe.

The Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza and the Karem Abu Salem crossing from Israel into the enclave have been closed since the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) began bombarding eastern Rafah. Israel claimed that the Karem Abu Salem crossing was reopened Wednesday, but there are no confirmed reports of aid deliveries reaching Gaza. According to Gaza's Government Media Office, Israel has blocked some 400 trucks from delivering supplies in the past 48 hours.

Martin Griffiths, head of the UN's relief agency, commented, "The closure of the crossings means no fuel. It means no trucks, no generators, no water, no electricity and no movement of people or goods. It means no aid." The remaining hospitals in southern Gaza will be forced to close in a matter of two to three days due to a lack of fuel.

Late Thursday, an Israeli official told Reuters that talks in Cairo between Israeli and Hamas officials on a possible ceasefire had broken down and that the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) would proceed with its Rafah operation. The White House acknowledged that CIA Director William Burns, who traveled to the region over the weekend to try and secure a deal, was leaving. However, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby asserted that talks were continuing.

Media reports provided extensive coverage to comments by US President Joe Biden late Wednesday that the US would not provide large bombs or artillery shells for offensive operations in Rafah. However, Kirby made clear in his remarks Thursday that what is at stake are merely tactical differences over how best to proceed with the onslaught. Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government favours a rapid escalation of the onslaught on Gaza to intensify the genocide against the Palestinians, with Israel's prime minister reportedly demanding that any deal to secure the release of the remaining hostages be "walled off" from the IDF's military operations in Rafah.

Biden administration officials, meanwhile, feel that a temporary

pause in fighting to secure the release of the remaining hostages would still leave open the possibility of a future massacre in Rafah. As Kirby put it:

Any kind of major Rafah ground operation would actually strengthen Hamas' hands at the negotiating table, not Israel's. That's our view.

He added:

Everybody keeps talking about pausing weapons shipments. Weapons shipments are still going to Israel. They're still getting the vast, vast majority of everything that they need to defend themselves.

According to an *Al Jazeera* report Thursday:

The CIA chief, William Burns, was in Israel yesterday. He met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other members of the security establishment. It's been reported in Israeli media that Burns said to his counterparts that this should not be considered an end to the war, but that this should be considered a pause to the war—a positive development—and that further actions can be negotiated afterwards.

Reports on the ground indicate that Israel expanded its murderous assault to broader areas of Rafah on Thursday. Over 100,000 civilians have already been displaced from Rafah, many of whom have already fled multiple times since October 7.

Al Jazeera's Tariq Abu Azzoum, reporting from Deir el-Ballah in central Gaza, noted that "mass destruction, lethal force" is "being used on the ground against not only the eastern areas but also ... in the middle and western parts" of Rafah. One of the areas those sheltering in Rafah have been ordered by the IDF to flee to is

al-Mawasi, where some 400,000 people are already located. Abu Azzoum reported, “Bombardment there continued without any kind of letup.”

A major bombardment was also reported in the Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City in the north, where at least 25 targets were struck and dozens of civilians were reported dead.

In occupied East Jerusalem, a group of armed far-right Israelis set fire to the headquarters of the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), which is the central coordinating agency for the delivery of aid into Gaza. Although no casualties were reported, UNRWA was forced to close the location.

“Our director with the help of other staff had to put out the fire themselves as it took the Israeli fire extinguishers and police a while before they turned up,” commented UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini.

Matthew Holloway, country director for the World Food Programme’s Palestine operations, said that the aid organisation’s main warehouse in Rafah is inaccessible and only one bakery is operating in the city. “Supplies of food and fuel in Gaza will only last 1–3 days. Without them, our operations will go into standstill,” he added.

Israel’s war cabinet met Thursday, with sources indicating that there is overwhelming support for escalating the attack on Rafah. “Israel must continue the operation in Rafah more vigorously, expand it and occupy the city,” an official told the newspaper *Israel Hayom*. “There is unanimity in the cabinet on this matter.”

At a press conference Thursday, IDF spokesman Daniel Hagari declared that the military has the arms it needs to conduct its onslaught on Rafah, regardless of the widely reported suspension of a shipment of 1,800 2,000-pound bombs and 1,700 500-pound bombs by the US.

“The army has armaments for the missions it plans and for the missions in Rafah too. We have what we need,” Hagari said. Itamar Yaar, a former deputy head of Israel’s National Security Council and chief executive of Commanders for Israel’s Security, a group representing the views of former security officials, backed up this assessment, describing the suspension of the shipment as “symbolic.”

Yaar added:

It’s not some kind of American embargo on American munitions support, but I think it’s some kind of diplomatic message to Mr Netanyahu that he needs to take into consideration American interests more than he has over the last few months.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained from the outset of Israel’s devastating bombardment of Gaza, American interests revolve around exploiting the genocide of the Palestinians to escalate towards a region-wide war targeting Iran.

Washington views Israel’s “Final Solution” of the Palestinian question as a key component of its push to consolidate its domination over the energy-rich and strategically important Middle East by subjugating Tehran and defeating China and

Russia. The Middle East is for US imperialism one front in a rapidly evolving third world war in which the major imperialist powers are determined to redivide the world in their interests.

Viewed in this context, the Biden administration’s apparent attempts to temporarily restrain Israel’s onslaught by pushing for a short-term ceasefire are bound up with broader considerations of timing in escalating the world war on all fronts.

The massive \$95 billion military support package, which included \$61 billion for the US-NATO war on Russia in Ukraine, \$26 billion for Israel, and some \$8 billion to turn Taiwan into a US military base against China, enabled the sending of long-range missiles to the far-right Kiev regime capable of striking well inside Russia.

The vast sums for arming Israel were not only aimed at helping the Zionist regime to exterminate the Palestinians in Gaza, but also to act as Washington’s lead attack dog in a looming war with Iran. Kirby referred to the aid package Thursday, stressing that the full sum set aside for Israel would be spent.

Evidently, US imperialism hopes that the billions in additional military assistance will strengthen its ally for a war with Iran that would be a far less one-sided conflict than the seven-month massacre of defenceless civilians in Gaza.

Only the intervention of an international anti-war movement led by the working class can stop the imperialist-backed Gaza genocide and the escalating third world war. The protests by students around the world against the complicity of US and European governments in Israel’s bloody onslaught must turn to the working class, which must mobilise to halt the supply and manufacturing of all military equipment destined for Israel.

Workers must come to the defence of the protesting students, who face ruthless state repression, and build a unified movement to fight imperialist war and genocide by putting an end to the capitalist social order that is plunging humanity into barbarism.



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