

# The assault on Rafah and the ethnic cleansing of Palestine

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Defying Friday's order by the International Court of Justice, Israel has carried out more than 60 bombings in the city of Rafah over the past two days. On Sunday, millions of people around the world were horrified by footage of an Israeli massacre at a refugee camp in one of the "safe" areas of Rafah that killed at least 35 people, including women and children.

Rafah has been under continuous bombardment for three weeks, with Israeli tanks advancing into the city street by street every day. The intensity of the bombardment and ground attacks has led to the total suspension of humanitarian food distribution in the city, and Israel has shut off nearly all food aid into the territory.

In contrast with what millions of people see with their own eyes, the US and British governments have publicly declared that there is no large-scale offensive in Rafah. They claim that, to the extent that Israel is carrying out "limited" military operations in the city, it is, in the words of Biden, doing "all it can to ensure civilian protection."

This preposterous and absurd lie was the subject of a highly revealing exchange Tuesday in the British House of Commons.

UK Deputy Foreign Secretary Andrew Mitchell was asked by opposition Labour MP Andy McDonald how the government could declare that there is no "significant" military offensive in Rafah when 800,000 people have been forcibly displaced from the city.

To this, the deputy foreign secretary replied that the 800,000 displaced people had "chosen" to go.

McDonald asked, "What choice did they have to move? Was this just, 'I think I want to go and live somewhere else'? Is that not a preposterous suggestion to make?"

The declaration that the Palestinians had "chosen" to

flee, while certainly preposterous, carries with it immense historical resonance.

It is a restatement of what the world-renowned Israeli historian Ilan Pappé (who was interrogated for hours upon a recent trip to the US) called the "foundational myth" of Zionism: that the 1948 "Nakba," in which 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes, was a voluntary resettlement on the part of Palestinians, unprompted by the actions of Israeli forces.

Pappé's 2006 book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, is a devastating exposure of all the lies of official Israeli historiography. It demonstrates that the 1948 displacement and mass killing of Palestinians was the outcome of a detailed and conscious plan.

In a chilling parallel to the events of the present day, Pappé explained that Israel cloaked its plans as a response to attacks by an Arab militia, noting, "The Zionist policy was initially based on retaliation against Palestinian attacks in February 1947, but it eventually evolved into an initiative to ethnically cleanse the entire country in March 1948."

He added:

Once the decision was taken, it took six months to complete the mission. When it was over, more than half of Palestine's native population, close to 800,000 people, had been uprooted, 531 villages had been destroyed, and eleven urban neighbourhoods emptied of their inhabitants. The plan decided upon on 10 March 1948, and above all its systematic implementation in the following months, was a clear-cut case of an ethnic cleansing operation, regarded under international law today as a crime against humanity. (P. 14)

The Gaza genocide marks a culmination of what Pappé explained were the goals “set by the Zionist movement very early on, when it had appeared in Palestine: to have as much of Palestine as possible with as few Palestinians in it as possible.”

That the present genocide is the expression of a conscious plan is not a secret. On September 22, 2023, one month before the onslaught on Gaza, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu displayed a map at the United Nations General Assembly of the “new Middle East.” The map showed Israel encompassing all of the Palestinian territories, as part of a geopolitical framework with the US-aligned Middle Eastern states of Egypt, Sudan, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Netanyahu made this provocative display just two days after meeting with President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Washington. During that meeting, Biden declared that “the dream of generations will be fulfilled” in the US-led reorganization of the Middle East, adding, “You’ve heard me say many times: Were there no Israel, we’d have to invent one.”

That meeting took place three weeks before the events of October 7, in which Hamas forces overran the Gaza border following the deliberate withdrawal of Israeli troops from the area, in execution of a Hamas plan the Israeli government had in its possession for over a year. The events of that day set into motion what Israeli security cabinet member and Agriculture Minister Avi Dichter called “Nakba 2023.”

Last week, Blinken made what appeared to be two identical verbal slips in two separate Senate committee hearings, which revealed the underlying genocidal intent of American imperialism. In testimony on May 21 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Blinken declared:

There’s an opportunity for Israel to become integrated in the region, to get the security, fundamental security it needs and wants, and to have the relationships that it has sought going back to its founding. But in order for that to actually go forward, there has to be an end to Gaza.

At another Senate committee hearing the same day, Blinken used the same formulation, declaring that “normalization” requires an “end to Gaza.”

Every day, the actual US-Israeli policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing is becoming clearer. Securing the US-dominated reorganization of the Middle East, what Biden called the “dream of generations,” does, in fact, require the “end of Gaza,” i.e., the systematic crushing of organized resistance by the Palestinian people to Israeli domination.

The outbreak of global war, with the imperialist powers targeting Russia, China and Iran, is giving Israel and its imperialist backers the occasion to carry out the “Final Solution” of the Palestinian question.

For decades, every war launched by the United States and all the imperialist powers has been justified as an operation for preserving “human rights” and stopping genocide. Everything from the bombing of Yugoslavia to the regime-change operation in Libya was sold as the only way to prevent an imminent genocide. Even the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine was sold to the public as an effort to stop what Biden called a “genocide” in which “Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being able to be Ukrainian.”

The events of the past seven months have made it clear, however, that the greatest state sponsors of genocide and ethnic cleansing are the United States and its imperialist allies.



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