

Israel continues Gaza genocide as Washington pushes “ceasefire” deal to pave way for region-wide war

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The far-right Israeli regime continued its genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza on Tuesday by bombing a school, a market and a mobile phone charging point, killing at least 25 people. Amid the ongoing slaughter, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken toured the region in order to finalise a deal that gives Israel everything it wants in Gaza, and paves the way for war in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East.

The Mustafa Hafez school building in the west of Gaza City was “flattened to the ground,” according to one civil defence worker, killing 12 people and injuring dozens. He explained that many of the bodies may never be recovered due to a lack of rescue equipment, suggesting that the real death toll could be higher. Like many schools across the enclave, the building had served as a place of refuge for displaced people until the Israel Defence Forces struck it without warning. The massacre follows by just over a week the bloody slaughter at the Tabeen school in the same city that killed over 100 people.

Although the official death toll recorded by the authorities in Gaza has just surpassed 40,000, the true number of fatalities is much higher. British medical journal *The Lancet* estimated last month that after nine months of the genocide, around 186,000 people or more have been killed by Israel’s assault.

American imperialism and its Zionist attack dog in the Middle East, the same forces responsible for the unending death and destruction across Gaza, are attempting to dictate the terms on which the more than 10-month barbaric onslaught could temporarily end. To call the arrangement Blinken was endeavouring to conclude during meetings with Egyptian and Qatari leaders Tuesday a “ceasefire agreement” would be a distortion of reality. Just three weeks ago, Israel assassinated with tacit US approval Hamas’ political leader and lead negotiator

in the talks Ismail Haniyeh, in Tehran.

Should a deal be reached, it is increasingly clear that it will be entirely on Israel’s terms, enabling them to restart the slaughter with bombs at a moment’s notice, and continue to inflict starvation and disease on the Palestinians through its stranglehold over aid supplies into the devastated enclave. Moreover, a pause in the fighting in Gaza would be aimed, above all, at allowing Israel to pivot to a war on its northern front with Lebanon, and, with the support of the US and its NATO allies, lay the groundwork for a region-wide conflict with Iran. As Israel’s Defence Minister Yoav Gallant put it Tuesday, Israel’s “centre of gravity” is moving from “south to north.”

Washington responded to Israel’s assassination of Haniyeh and the killing of Hezbollah commander Fuad Shokr in Beirut by deploying an additional aircraft carrier strike group to the region. For the American ruling class, Israel’s “final solution” of the Palestinian question is a component part of US preparations to open up the Middle East front in a rapidly emerging third world war to secure its unchallenged hegemony against its rivals. This was underscored by the decision to sell Israel \$20 billion worth of weaponry, including dozens of fighter jets to be supplied over the coming five years. While Iran represents a major regional obstacle to US ambitions for dominance over the energy-rich region, Washington’s main targets in its push to redive the world in its interests are Russia and China.

After delivering a speech Monday at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, to endorse fellow war criminal Kamala Harris as his successor in the White House, US President Joe Biden denounced Hamas for “backing away” from a ceasefire agreement that Israel was ready to accept. In truth, the Biden administration and

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have repeatedly shifted the goalposts in talks that have dragged on for many months to provide a cover for their blood-soaked regimes continued slaughter of Palestinians. When Hamas accepted a ceasefire proposal in early May that would have prevented the IDF's invasion of Rafah, Israel flagrantly disregarded the offer, launching an offensive that drove a million people from Gaza's southernmost city and brought aid to a virtual standstill.

In comments Tuesday, Netanyahu made clear that Israeli forces would not withdraw from Gaza under any agreement accepted by his government. "Israel won't leave the Philadelphi Corridor and Netzarim Corridor under any circumstances," he said, referring to a strip of land between Gaza and the Egyptian border, and the line dividing the enclave into north and south imposed by the IDF.

Hamas has stated its opposition to a deal that permits the continued presence of IDF soldiers in Gaza and indicated that it would support an original proposal attributed to Biden that would see Israeli soldiers withdraw entirely in two phases. But Washington has apparently abandoned this offer, proposing instead this week a so-called "bridging" agreement that takes into account Israel's demand for a continued military presence. Commenting on Israel's latest demands, senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan stated, "It means a big military force will remain in the Philadelphi Corridor and stay in the Rafah crossing, which means restricting aid to Israeli approval."

Israel is persisting in its use of aid as a weapon of war. Although figures for trucks reaching Gaza through the Kerem Shalom border crossing were up somewhat in July compared to June, only 8 percent of all supplies consisted of humanitarian aid, equating to a mere 37 trucks per day. Prior to the war, Gaza received about 500 aid trucks each day. For the period May to July, aid reaching Gaza through Kerem Shalom dropped 61 percent compared to the period January to April.

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported on 16 August that between 1 and 15 August, only 46 out of 109 attempted aid missions to northern Gaza were approved by Israel. The rate of rejected aid missions rose compared to the previous month from 15 percent to 29 percent.

Arwa Damon, founder of the Inara charity, told Al Jazeera that even if aid reaches Gaza, it is proving increasingly impossible to distribute. Citing one example, she noted that Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital is running out of

bandages. "And what that has meant is that a 13-year-old child who has 50 to 60 percent burns on his body was not able to get sufficient bandage changes for wound cleaning, which then resulted in him having blood poisoning and exhibiting signs of early sepsis," Damon added.

The threat of a major polio outbreak that could spread beyond Gaza also looms after a child was diagnosed with the disease in central Gaza last week. The World Health Organisation has stressed that a major vaccination campaign is necessary in two rounds during late August and September to prevent the further spread of the debilitating condition, which can cause lifelong paralysis. But such an initiative will prove impossible to implement if the genocidal onslaught continues.

Another expression of the Zionist regime's barbarism is the systematic torture of Palestinian prisoners, which has been exposed in a series of revelations. The latest came from 33 Palestinian detainees released from the Ofner Prison, where torture similar to that practiced at the notorious Sde Teiman facility has been reported. One freed detainee told Al Jazeera,

I was tortured day and night. My ribs were broken, shoulders dislocated. We were subjected to all types of torture, beyond anybody's imagination.

All detainees lost at least 90 percent of their physical capacity. I was blindfolded and handcuffed for 70 days in a row. All of us were abused, humiliated and tortured.

The threat of a region-wide war and the barbaric practices of the imperialist-backed Zionist regime can be stopped only by an international anti-war movement led by the working class. This movement must combine its opposition to genocide and war with a socialist programme to end imperialist world war and capitalism through the fight for workers' power.



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