

Under cover of US-Iran negotiations, Israel steps up effort to annex Gaza

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While the US and international press are focused on the terms of negotiations between the Trump administration and Iran, Israel is massively expanding its rampage across the Middle East—moving to permanently occupy Gaza and escalating its bombardment of Lebanon.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Thursday that he had ordered the Israeli army to seize control of 70 percent of the Gaza Strip—well beyond the 53 percent Israel was allowed to hold under the cease-fire that took effect in October.

“We now control 60% of the territory in the strip. You know, we were at 50, we moved to 60. My directive is to move to ... 70%,” Netanyahu told a conference in an occupied West Bank settlement. The directive would confine the strip’s 2.1 million Palestinians to less than a third of the territory.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz on Wednesday reiterated his calls for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. “We committed that Hamas will not rule Gaza civilly or militarily, and so it shall be, and also the voluntary emigration plan from Gaza will be implemented,” Katz wrote on X.

In Lebanon, an Israeli air strike on the Southern Beirut suburb of Choueifat killed a woman, her infant daughter and a Syrian child on Thursday—the first Israeli attack near Beirut in three weeks. The Lebanese Health Ministry put Thursday’s countrywide death toll at 14 killed, including a strike on a vehicle near Sidon that killed six people, among them a mother and her two children.

The Israeli army Wednesday ordered the entire city of Tyre to evacuate, declaring all areas south of the Zahrani River—about 15 percent of Lebanese territory—to be a combat zone.

Israel is systematically breaking the ceasefires it

agreed to. A Gaza “ceasefire” took effect October 10, 2025. The Gaza Health Ministry says Israeli attacks have killed more than 900 Palestinians since the ceasefire took effect.

In Lebanon, a US-brokered ceasefire that took effect November 27, 2024, required Israel to withdraw from the south within 60 days; Israel never withdrew and continued bombing throughout. A further ceasefire that took effect April 16 is being broken by Israeli air strikes on a near-daily basis.

What Israel is doing in Gaza and Lebanon, with full support of the Trump administration, demonstrates the actual content of any US agreement made with Iran. It will not mean peace but only serve as the prelude for further attacks by the imperialist powers and Israel, aimed at expanding their domination of the Middle East.

Axios reported Thursday that US and Iranian negotiators had agreed on the draft of a 60-day memorandum of understanding to extend the April 8 ceasefire, gradually reopen the Strait of Hormuz, lift the US naval blockade and open second-phase talks on a moratorium on Iranian uranium enrichment.

Iran would commit in writing not to develop a nuclear weapon. Axios also reported that the agreement includes a \$300 billion “reconstruction fund” for Iran, to be financed by Gulf Arab states, with China expected to contribute.

The deal awaits final approval from US President Donald Trump and Iran’s Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei. Vice President JD Vance told reporters in Colorado Springs on Thursday: “We’re going back and forth on a couple of language points ... We’re not there yet, but we’re very close, and we’re going to keep on working at it.”

The US military bombed a drone ground-control

station at Bandar Abbas overnight Wednesday—the second US attack on Southern Iran in three days. US forces had earlier shot down five Iranian drones over the Strait of Hormuz. Iran’s Revolutionary Guards retaliated by firing a ballistic missile at a US air base in Kuwait, which Kuwaiti air defenses intercepted.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said any further US aggression would draw a “more decisive response.” Iran’s foreign ministry denounced what it called “continuous ceasefire violations” by the United States.

The war launched by the United States and Israel on February 28 has killed thousands of Iranians and inflicted hundreds of billions of dollars in damage to Iran’s infrastructure, according to Reuters. Acting Pentagon Comptroller Jules Hurst put the direct US cost at \$29 billion; the administration is preparing a supplemental request of as much as \$100 billion to backfill expended munitions.

Despite the massive violence unleashed against Iran, the United States has failed in its central war aims. It has not overthrown the Iranian government, broken the resistance of the Iranian population or gained control of the Strait of Hormuz.

The war has triggered a deepening political crisis in Washington. Democrats and Republicans alike have attacked Trump from the right for what they cast as his insufficient defense of the interests of US imperialism.

On the ground in Gaza, Israeli forces have steadily advanced past the so-called “yellow line” marking the supposed ceasefire boundary. Israeli-aligned militias have evicted Palestinian families on threat of death.

A 26-year-old displaced Palestinian, Wael Nayef Abu al-Ajeen, told the *Guardian* that armed men entered his neighborhood at 1 p.m. and gave residents until 10 that night to abandon their homes. Muhammad Shehada of the European Council on Foreign Relations told the newspaper the Netanyahu directive “would be a death sentence for a lot of people who physically have no place to go.”

In Lebanon, Israeli artillery on Wednesday struck the 12th-century Beaufort Castle, a UNESCO-protected Crusader-era fortress, drawing condemnation from Lebanon’s culture minister.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, reacting to the killing of an Israeli soldier in Northern Israel, wrote on X: “For every drone that hits one of our soldiers, 100 buildings must be taken down.”



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