

Israel expands Rafah slaughter

Jordan Shilton
17 May 2024

Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant announced Thursday that the bloody onslaught on Gaza will be expanded. With over 600,000 people having fled Gaza's southernmost city since the ground operation began on 6 May, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) is taking its genocide of the Palestinians to a new stage of brutality with the full backing of the US and European imperialist powers.

"This operation will intensify and Hamas is not an organisation that can regenerate itself now," Gallant declared in a statement released by his office after a visit to the Gaza border near Rafah Wednesday. "It has no reserves, it has no ability to manufacture weapons, it has no supplies, it has no munitions, it has no ability to properly treat terrorists who are injured, and this means we are wearing it down."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu struck a similar tone, describing the "battle" of Rafah as "critical." He commented, "It's not just the rest of their battalions, it's also like an oxygen line for them for escape and resupply. Its completion advances us a huge distance to defeating the enemy."

Coming from a government for which "terrorists" and "the enemy" are synonymous with the entire population of Gaza, these remarks are chilling. They underscore that the IDF is preparing to butcher a defenceless civilian population and drive the survivors into other areas of Gaza that have been reduced to rubble by over seven months of constant Israeli bombardment. These areas will by no means be exempted from ongoing IDF attacks. Major military operations continued in the north Thursday, where an air strike hit an ambulance in the Jabalia refugee camp, killing two paramedics; a pregnant woman was among four fatalities when an Israeli missile struck a house.

Gallant's ability to declare an expansion of the slaughter in Rafah is due above all to the green light given by the imperialists in Washington, Berlin, and

elsewhere to the Netanyahu government. Late Tuesday, the Biden administration confirmed that it plans to dispatch over \$1 billion of weaponry and other military equipment to Israel.

German Foreign Minister Analena Baerbock shed crocodile tears about the fate of civilians in Rafah Thursday, but refused to even suggest that Israel could consider halting its ground offensive. Outrageously laying the blame on Hamas for Israel's barbaric assault, which went ahead even though Hamas initially acceded to a ceasefire proposal, she pontificated, "It's clear that Hamas can immediately end the suffering of the people in Gaza. But it's also clear that the war against Hamas can't be won by military means alone."

A letter initiated by Baerbock and signed by 12 other foreign ministers, including all members of the G-7 apart from US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, reportedly warned against a "major military operation" in Rafah and called for border crossings for humanitarian aid to be opened. The letter, which was not made public but reported on by the German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, included a declaration of Israel's "right" to "defend itself" and a condemnation of Hamas' 7 October attack. In other words, the humanitarian phrases are little more than cover for the German government, which was responsible for some 30 percent of Israel's arms supply between 2019 and 2023, and has been brought before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for its complicity in the genocide.

The expansion of the Rafah onslaught came the same day as South Africa testified at the ICJ to seek the urgent issuing of provisional measures to halt the Gaza genocide. Introducing the petition, South Africa's ambassador to the Netherlands stated that Gaza has been "largely wiped off the map."

Blinne Ni Ghralaigh, a lawyer for South Africa, stated that a child has been killed or wounded in Gaza every 10 minutes since Israel launched its genocidal

assault. During the hearing, a video was shown with an Israeli reservist who testified that evacuation areas given out by the IDF are considered “extermination zones” by soldiers.

“The evidence before the court indicates that the extent of the carnage in Gaza is of a much-greater magnitude than that pertained to Ukraine and Russia,” Gralaigh told the court. “Indeed, the carnage in Gaza is in an order which exceeds by far the necessities of war and the limits imposed by the laws of war.”

The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stated Thursday that it is “nearly impossible” to distribute aid in Gaza. Israeli forces remain in control of the Rafah border crossing, and although the Kerem Shalom crossing into Israel is formally open, it is virtually inaccessible for aid deliveries due to military operations.

The World Food Programme, which was forced to suspend its operations in Rafah on 11 May, reported Thursday, “The threat of famine in Gaza never loomed larger.” The organisation noted that acute malnutrition among children aged under two in northern Gaza doubled from 15 percent in January to 30 percent in March. The WFP added, “We have seen the impact of prolonged closures in northern Gaza, and despite recent improvements in access to help mitigate a famine there, we are now also deeply concerned about the fate of hundreds of thousands in the south, if a full-scale operation and closures continue.”

In addition to using starvation as a weapon of war, the far-right Zionist regime has demonstrated its genocidal intent by systematically destroying the basic infrastructure for civilised life in Gaza. Seventy percent of residential housing units have been damaged or destroyed, while 24 out of 36 hospitals have stopped operating. The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor drew attention Thursday to Israel’s targeted destruction of schools and clinics during a recent six-day raid on the Zeitoun neighbourhood in Gaza City and ongoing operations in Jabalia. The Zeitoun Medical Clinic and three schools were obliterated during the raid, while six schools have been targeted in Jabalia.

Gaza’s Government Media Office released shocking figures Thursday showing that the IDF has killed over 100 leading scholars, university professors, and researchers since 7 October. A total of 103 universities and schools have been totally destroyed, while some

311 schools and universities have been damaged. The statement appealed for “All universities and educational sectors in all countries of the world to condemn this crime, which comes within the framework of the crime of genocide.”

This genocide has been the stated goal of the Israeli regime from the outset. Guided by a fascist ideology rooted in Zionism, Netanyahu’s far-right government aims to carry out a barbaric “final solution” of the Palestinian question. It involves massacring as many men, women, and children as possible, and depopulating Gaza by means of ethnic cleansing and starvation in order to create the conditions for a greater Israel on Palestinian territory. The increased lawlessness in the West Bank, where vigilante settlers have a free hand to kill and assault Palestinians and attack aid trucks bound for Gaza, demonstrates that there is no safe place for the Palestinian people.

The only way to stop the genocide in Gaza is through the independent political mobilisation of the international working class. The imperialist powers, who are resorting to methods of ruthless state repression to crush anti-genocide protests and authoritarian forms of rule to contain growing worker opposition to war and austerity, are in alliance with fascists not just in Israel, but also in Ukraine. They are promoting the far right at home, because these are the political forces necessary to enforce their reactionary interests. Opposition to the genocide must be developed by workers around the world, in solidarity with anti-genocide student protesters, by mobilising their social power to halt all military supplies to Israel, and the manufacture of military equipment for the waging of imperialist war and genocide.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact