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Biden administration approves “emergency” sale of howitzer shells to Israel amid intensification of ethnic cleansing in Gaza Strip



Mass destruction of Palestinian housing and infrastructure is seen as Israeli soldiers take up positions near the Gaza Strip border, in southern Israel, Friday, December 29, 2023. [AP Photo/Ariel Schalit]

Israel’s relentless onslaught on the Gaza Strip is leaving residents with the choice of “death or displacement,” Palestinian envoy to the United Nations Majed Bamyia said Friday.

Bamyia’s concise summation of the horrendous conditions on the ground produced by the genocidal assault received fresh confirmation as Israeli forces bombarded an aid convoy in northern Gaza, stepped up attacks in Khan Younis, and killed several displaced people in

an air strike in Rafah. American imperialism once again demonstrated its complicity in the genocide by announcing the sale of thousands of howitzer shells to Israel.

The Rafah strike hit a residential building Thursday, claiming at least 20 lives. Earlier the next day, a UN aid convoy came under fire while traveling along a route designated for humanitarian supplies to northern Gaza. Over 800,000 people in northern Gaza have been left without any access to medical care and only extremely limited aid deliveries by the Israeli military. Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), stressed that the agency “coordinates its movements with the Israeli authorities,” underscoring that the attack was intentional.

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry in the West Bank released a statement accusing Israel of deliberately restricting aid supplies into Gaza. Current aid “does not even meet the bare minimum of what is required,” which alongside indiscriminate bombing is part of its policy of “genocide.”

According to the international aid group Mercy Corps, around half a million people in Gaza currently face “catastrophic hunger and starvation.” “The amount of lifesaving goods being allowed inside Gaza is a drop in the ocean and has not yet increased to the level necessary to meet Gazans’ basic and critical needs, even after the opening of the Kerem Shalom border crossing,” commented Kate Phillips-Barrasso, vice president of global policy and advocacy for Mercy Corps. “Once trucks reach their destination, the safe delivery of any kind of assistance is almost impossible due to the ongoing and unstopping security risks.”

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A further warning from the World Health Organisation illustrates how Israel is also using disease to implement its genocidal policy. WHO president Tedros Ghebreyesus stated that records show almost 180,000 cases of upper respiratory infections, 136,400 cases of diarrhea, half of which are in children under the age of 5, and 55,400 cases of lice and scabies. There were also 5,530 cases of chickenpox, 42,700 cases of skin rash, 4,683 cases of acute jaundice syndrome, and 126 cases of meningitis.

As the onslaught on Gaza continues unabated, the Israel Defence Force has also expanded its attacks in southern Lebanon against Hezbollah. Underscoring the remark by Defence Minister Yoav Gallant that Israel is in a “multi-front war,” the IDF carried out air strikes and fired shells at targets across southern Lebanon, including locations some 10 miles from the border. Speaking later at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council, Israel’s UN envoy Gilad Erdan denounced “Iranian-backed attacks from Lebanon” and vowed to wage a “full scale war” if Hezbollah continues firing at Israel. IDF spokesman Daniel Hagari told the media that the military conducted “widespread strikes by fighter jets, tanks, and artillery” and vowed that Hezbollah in southern Lebanon “will never be the same again.”

The far-right government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu can only proceed with such aggression because it knows it enjoys the unconditional support of US imperialism and its European allies. In the latest example of this fact, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken declared an emergency situation to bypass the requirement to obtain congressional approval for the sale of M107 155mm shells worth close to \$150 million to Israel. The shells are typically fired from howitzer guns and will enable the IDF to continue its indiscriminate bombardments of densely populated areas.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose government supports the censorship and outright banning of pro-Palestinian protests across Germany, spoke Friday with Israel’s War Cabinet Minister Benny Gantz to reiterate Berlin’s backing for the war.

The imperialist powers’ endorsement of Israel’s genocide is part of preparations for a region-wide war against Iran that will aim to consolidate US hegemony over the energy-rich and geostrategically important Middle East. Amid a deepening world capitalist crisis that is reviving all of the great power conflicts of the 20th century, the imperialists are making clear with their backing for Israel that they are prepared to resort to any means necessary, genocide included, in pursuit of raw materials, markets, and spheres of influence.

Friday’s deliberate targeting of an aid convoy is in line with Israel’s systematic violation of international law. War crimes, including attacks on hospitals, medical workers, and children, and the use of food and other basic necessities as weapons of war, have become a daily occurrence. This has been accompanied by open declarations of genocidal intent against the Palestinians by numerous Israeli government officials. Its ever more explicit policy is to force Gaza’s Palestinian population into Egypt’s Sinai Desert.

This agenda was outlined in an application filed by the South African government with the International Court of Justice Friday. Israel's actions are "genocidal in character because they are intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group," it declared.

In a further indication of the unrestrained lawlessness pervading the Israeli onslaught, Gaza's Government Media Office reported that 200 out of 325 heritage and archaeological sites across the enclave have been targeted for destruction. The sites include mosques, churches, ancient archaeological houses, and museums. Some sites date back to the Phoenician era, between 1,100 and 200 BC. The attacks are "a failed attempt to obliterate the Palestinian cultural and heritage presence" in Gaza, the ministry's statement said.

According to the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, extensive evidence exists of Israeli soldiers looting Palestinian homes across Gaza. The theft of personal belongings and "looting of valuable possessions" is occurring on a mass scale, with the organisation describing the amounts involved as "tens of millions of dollars." Reports of stolen items include money, gold, laptop computers, and other electronic devices.

Palestinians in the West Bank also face increasingly deadly violence from the Israeli occupiers. In a briefing to Friday's UN Security Council meeting, the death toll in the West Bank since 7 October was confirmed as 304 Palestinians, including 74 children. During 2023, 504 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank, making it the deadliest year since the UN began keeping records in 2005. In addition, 4,785 Palestinians have been arrested by Israeli forces since 7 October.

Israeli soldiers assaulted Al Jazeera journalist Montaser Nassar and his photographer Friday in Wadi al-Shajna near the town of Dura. The soldiers reportedly beat the two men and confiscated their equipment as they were preparing to film a report from a rooftop. Since 7 October, 48 journalists have been arrested in the West Bank.

In Gaza, 106 journalists and media workers have been killed and a further eight arrested. Another journalist, Jabr Abu Hadros, with the al-Quds TV station was reported killed late Friday in an air strike on his Nuseirat home.

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