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Biden and Harris call for escalation of Gaza genocide following death of six Israeli hostages

The US political establishment responded to the deaths of six Israeli hostages in Gaza on Saturday with demands for an intensification of the genocide against Palestinians and expansion of war in the Middle East. After the Israeli military confirmed the six bodies retrieved from a tunnel in Rafah were hostages, President Biden issued a statement saying, “Make no mistake. Hamas leaders will pay for these crimes.”

Vice President and Democratic Party nominee for President Kamala Harris issued her own statement from the White House. She said, “Hamas is an evil terrorist organization” that has “even more American blood on its hands.” Harris continued, “The threat Hamas poses ... must be eliminated and Hamas cannot control Gaza.”



Displaced Palestinians inspect their tents destroyed by Israel's bombardment, adjacent to an UNRWA facility west of Rafah city, Gaza Strip, Tuesday, May 28, 2024 [AP Photo/Jehad Alshrafi]

The killing of the six hostages dominated US news media coverage all day on Sunday, the same media that largely ignores the far greater daily death toll from Israeli war crimes in Gaza and the West Bank. These reports uncritically echoed the statements of the Israeli military about the details of the deaths, although such statements have repeatedly been proven false in the past.

Speaking to Jonathan Karl on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday morning, Republican Senator from South Carolina, Lindsey Graham, called for an extension of the war into Iran. "If you want the hostages home, which we all do, you have to increase the cost to Iran. Iran is the great Satan here," Graham said.

The senator continued to say that specific acts of war to "hold Iran responsible" were required, including a target list of "oil refineries in Iran."

A mass protest of more than 500,000 people erupted in Tel Aviv on Sunday evening demanding that the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu end the war in Gaza. News organizations reported that this is the largest demonstration in Israel since the genocide began eleven months ago.

Chanting "Now, Now," the protesters called for an immediate ceasefire that would enable release of the remaining hostages. Israel's trade union federation Histadrut has called for a general strike on Monday that will shut down major sectors of the economy including banking, health care and transportation.

While Netanyahu accused Hamas of stalling ceasefire negotiations, the US-backed Israeli military operation has maintained its blockade of Gaza and continued to carry out targeted air strikes against Palestinians in pursuit of its barbaric goal of "total victory."

Through Friday, the Gaza Health Ministry that the death toll has reached 40,602 since October 7 of last year and another 93,855 have been wounded. Israel's ethnic cleansing operation has displaced the majority of Gaza's 2.3 million people and plunged the 141 square mile strip into a humanitarian catastrophe.

In northern Gaza, two Palestinians were killed and others were injured after Israel's military attacked a house in the al-Tawbah area of the Jabalia refugee camp. Earlier, an Israeli air strike hit the al-Ahli Arab Hospital in northern Gaza City, killing at least three people and wounding dozens. Israeli forces also targeted the Tuffah area, east of Gaza City.

Combing through the rubble after an attack on a hospital complex in northern Gaza City, a civil defense agency worker condemned the latest medical facility attack by Israel's army, in an interview with Al Jazeera.

“This constitutes yet another war crime, added to the many crimes committed by the military in the Gaza Strip,” the unidentified man said. “The Israeli warplanes targeted and destroyed the building end-to-end at the al-Alhi Arab Hospital. It remains the only medical facility catering to patients and the wounded in Gaza City since al-Shifa Hospital was flattened by the army.”

In southern Gaza, dozens of people were reported killed in Israeli raids, including 27 Palestinians who were taken to Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis.

Meanwhile, Israel has expanded its bloody military operations in the West Bank that began on Wednesday.

Since Friday, soldiers have concentrated raids on the city of Jenin and its refugee camp, long a bastion of Palestinian resistance to Israel’s decades-old illegal occupation of the territory.

Bashir Matahen, director of public relations and media in the municipality of Jenin, said Israeli forces have bulldozed more than 70 percent of the city’s streets. News reports say that 80 percent of Jenin and the entire refugee camp is cut off from water supplies because of the destruction of distribution networks, and repair crews are unable to access the affected areas.

A statement from the UN Human Rights Office on Saturday condemned the “use of unlawful force during militarized operations in the occupied West Bank and calls for an immediate end to the current attack on Jenin refugee camp. The ongoing ... operation in Jenin refugee camp and adjacent parts of the city has led apparently to unlawful killings, insecurity for Palestinian residents and enormous destruction of the camp, home to about 11,000 Palestinians.”

Kenneth Roth, former head of Human Rights Watch and long aligned with US foreign policy interests, called Israel’s attacks the West Bank a “flat-out war” with far-right members of the government aiming to expel all Palestinians from the territory.

“Even though there’s extensive combat between Israeli forces and militants in the Jenin refugee camp, that doesn’t mean there are no rules—the Geneva Conventions still apply,” Roth told Al Jazeera.

“One of the basic rules is Israel has to allow access to humanitarian aid. So it can’t just cut off food, water, electricity and medical care—as we’ve heard it’s doing. It has a duty to allow those for the civilian population. It can’t use the excuse of the fighters to starve civilians, and that’s what it did in Gaza.”

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