



SOS Gaza #8 Israel Invades Rafah

As we write our eighth SOS concerning the situation in Gaza, we at the Lemkin Institute find ourselves speechless and profoundly dismayed at the lackluster effort to end Israel’s devastating war and genocide. Any hope of the international community stepping up and putting even the slightest modicum of pressure on the Israeli state has yet to materialize. Now, famine has set in, over 80% of civilian infrastructure has been destroyed, and virtually every Palestinian in Gaza has been displaced. Despite Rafah previously being designated a safe zone for Palestinians fleeing from mass atrocities and war crimes inflicted by the Israeli Defense Force, the Israeli military is moving forward with their invasion of the city, with approval from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his War Cabinet. In recent months, Netanyahu has maintained a firm stance that Israel’s victory over Hamas cannot be achieved without initiating operations in Rafah to “eliminate” the terrorist group. Refuting his Israeli counterparts, on 21 March, Antony Blinken called an operation in Rafah a “mistake” the United States “couldn’t support” that would result in further civilian death while failing to uproot Hamas. Nevertheless, the United States has thus far refused to take any real action to stop Israel’s plans.

In our sixth Gaza SOS, published in late March, we warned of the impending tragedy should the invasion of Rafah occur. Since then, the city has been pounded with air and artillery strikes, with women and children comprising an overwhelming proportion of those killed. One airstrike in particular shocked international media as an Israeli precision-guided missile killed eleven children playing foosball in a crowded market. Such airstrikes and the accompanying deaths have become an everyday occurrence in Israel’s genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, claiming innocent lives daily. As thousands of Palestinians attempt to flee for refuge, Israeli military tanks and infantry continue to invade and target civilians in already affected areas or in “safe zones.” Palestinians have fled Rafah en masse as Israeli forces push toward the city center.

In an attempt to stop the invasion of Rafah and facilitate further humanitarian aid to Gaza’s decimated population, the United States, Egypt, and Qatar jointly collaborated on a ceasefire agreement to gradually end Israel’s assault on Gaza. On Friday, 3 May, US outlets reported that

CIA Director [Bill Burns was in Cairo](#) amid Egyptian-Qatari crafting of a ceasefire proposal that US Secretary of State Blinken called “very generous.” The proposed deal between Hamas and Israel entailed three phases that would each consist of a halt in fighting for forty days, during which Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners would be exchanged. In addition, Hamas has stressed that this was contingent upon it leading to a permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, which would allow displaced families to return to their homes.

Hamas [accepted the terms of the ceasefire](#) agreement on Monday, 6 May, which appeared to shock Israel. Israel issued an evacuation order that same day and continued with its invasion of southern Gaza on Tuesday, 7 May, seizing the Philadelphi corridor and the Rafah border crossing. Now, the entry point for the overwhelming majority of humanitarian aid entering Gaza is under Israeli control.

Videos [posted by Israeli soldiers](#) show IDF tanks entering the area of the crossing, running over civilian infrastructure, and firing tank rounds at tents housing Palestinians displaced by the Israeli assault. According to Israeli leaders, the terms listed within the proposed ceasefire did not fulfill Israel’s demands, therefore warranting military operations to expand into Rafah. The invasion of Rafah was intended to exert pressure on Hamas to renegotiate already agreed-upon terms that would meet Israel’s primary demand of returning all of the hostages. However, the invasion arguably allowed Netanyahu and the Israeli government to continue their genocidal acts against the Palestinian people. Netanyahu and his war cabinet have [reiterated](#) that even if Hamas were to release all hostages, the war against Hamas would continue.

The invasion of Rafah has simultaneously seen the [re-invasion of northern Gaza](#), specifically the refugee camp of Jabalia, following intense bombardment of the camp and surrounding neighborhoods. Seizing the Philadelphi corridor, taking the Rafah crossing, and beginning an invasion of Rafah City, while continually bombing and re-invading northern Gaza demonstrates the IDF’s complete disregard for civilian and human life. Israel’s re-entry into northern Gaza illustrates the flaws inherent to its plan to “destroy Hamas,” displaying the IDF’s inability to uproot Hamas and its complete disregard for Palestinian life.

The Israeli Defense Forces have failed to provide a “credible plan” for protecting Rafah’s civilians and the thousands of Palestinians seeking refuge in an area the IDF instructed them to flee toward. Palestinians continuously suffer from an Israeli-imposed humanitarian crisis that has threatened millions with famine and limited humanitarian aid as Israeli forces impede entry of aid with the seizure of the Rafah crossing. As such, on Sunday, 12 May, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, [urgently called upon Israel and the Palestinian armed groups to agree upon a ceasefire](#) to further prevent catastrophic consequences to civilian lives that Palestinians will endure for years. Hundreds of thousands are left with nowhere to go,

exhausted, distressed, and in constant fear for their lives, and as High Commissioner Türk stated, “A large-scale offensive on Rafah cannot take place.”

In addition to the direct killing of scores of civilians in and around Rafah, seizing Rafah crossing has reduced humanitarian aid entering Gaza to virtually zero. With all ports of entry into Gaza now controlled entirely by the Israeli military, there is no excuse for denying aid into the enclave. As we highlighted in our [seventh SOS for Gaza](#), we can no longer speak of a “risk” as famine has set in among residents in northern Gaza. With the continual lack of humanitarian aid, famine risks spreading to the entire surviving population in Gaza amid ongoing Israeli assaults and evacuation orders.

Since the Israeli incursion into Rafah began on Monday, 6 May, the UN estimates that [over 800,000 Palestinians have fled](#) the city, primarily fleeing toward the Deir-al-Balah in central Gaza. No aid trucks have entered Gaza since the invasion of Rafah. Likewise, renewed IDF incursions in northern Gaza have continued to render the entirety of the Gaza Strip an extermination zone. With nowhere to flee, Palestinians find themselves on the brink, trapped by an uncompromising and brutal military, an ambivalent Egyptian government, and the Sea.

Israel’s chief patron, the United States, has done little to prevent the invasion of Rafah. The Biden administration made a paltry effort to pressure Israel, temporarily [limiting](#) the delivery of multi-thousand pound bombs. However, this pause is rendered moot by the looming \$1 billion arms package the Biden administration is [preparing](#) for Israel. The package includes tank shells, tactical vehicles, and mortars; hardly a deviation from supporting Israel as it invades Rafah. This package further enables Israeli forces to push further into Rafah while also re-invading northern Gaza.

The Lemkin Institute calls on Israel’s allies, namely the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, to immediately halt all arms supplies to Israel until a permanent ceasefire is instituted for Gaza. We applaud the applications for warrants to arrest Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, as well as those for Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Diab Ibrahim al-Masri, and Ismail Haniyeh, made this week by Prosecutor Karim Khan in the International Criminal Court. It is an important step in the right direction. Now it is time for the International Court of Justice and UN bodies to impose and enforce a ceasefire in Gaza immediately. The Israeli genocide of Palestinians has shown the “rules-based international order” is in a precarious position that verges on total collapse. The international community and global leaders must take responsibility for taking immediate action on urgent matters concerning this humanitarian crisis and human rights violations. Enforcing international law, abiding by the tenets of genocide prevention, and pursuing justice for atrocity crimes are essential to save Palestinians from further genocide and, likewise, save the Israeli state from descending further into barbarism.