

Blinken reportedly urged Qatar to censor Al Jazeera coverage of Gaza genocide

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Doha, October 26 (RHC)-- In a meeting earlier this week, Secretary of State Antony Blinken told a group of U.S. Jewish community leaders that he has urged the Qatari government to suppress coverage of Gaza from major Middle East outlet Al Jazeera, according to an Axios report.

Three people who attended the meeting told Axios that Blinken said that he has asked the Qatari prime minister to “turn down the volume on Al Jazeera’s coverage because it is full of anti-Israel incitement.” He

told them that he brought this up as an example of how the Qatari government could reconsider its relationship with Hamas, the attendees said, though Blinken didn't specify which coverage he specifically took issue with.

According to Axios, Blinken appeared to be talking about suppressing coverage from Al Jazeera Arabic, rather than Al Jazeera English. The news outlet has been a critical source of information amid Israel's genocide in Gaza and throughout much of the decades-long Israeli occupation and apartheid, featuring reports from journalists on the ground in Palestine even as journalists in Gaza are at risk of being shelled and killed by Israeli forces.

The Al Jazeera Media Network is funded by the Qatari government but maintains editorial independence.

Blinken's request to suppress Al Jazeera comes after Israel approved emergency regulations last week that could pave the way for shuttering the outlet, which Israeli officials have deemed "enemy propaganda."

Israel has long sought to shut down Al Jazeera, one of the few international media companies with a physical presence in both Israel and Gaza. In 2017, Israel announced plans to close Al Jazeera's Jerusalem office and stop the outlet's broadcasts, due to what officials called "incitement."

In 2022, Israeli forces shot and killed Palestinian Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh; after months of denying that Israeli forces killed her, the Israeli military ultimately admitted that it was "highly possible" that it was responsible for her death.

Free press advocates have said that banning Al Jazeera is a dangerous move, and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) urged Israel to reconsider.

"We are deeply concerned by Israeli officials' threats to censor media coverage of the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict, using vague accusations of harming national morale," Sherif Mansour, Middle East and North Africa program coordinator for CPJ, said in a statement. "CPJ urges Israel not to ban Al-Jazeera and to allow journalists to do their jobs. A plurality of media voices is essential in order to hold power to account, especially in times of war."

Like everyone else in Gaza, journalists on the ground are in danger of being killed by Israeli forces. Due to the Israeli siege on the region, Gazan journalists have had to resort to desperate measures to broadcast their reports; with no internet or electricity, and with some journalists' offices bombed, press experts and journalists have raised concerns that there could be a media blackout in Palestine, which could serve to sow doubt regarding the extent of Gazans' suffering and Israel's genocide.

"If those cameras stop rolling, the world will not know what's happening here," Wajeeh Abu Zarifeh, a Gazan journalist whose office was bombed and destroyed during the first week of Israel's current attacks, told Wired. "If we lose the electricity, if we lose the internet, we will stop. This is what Israel wants, to do everything in the dark."

On the same day that news broke about Blinken's comments, an Al Jazeera journalist learned that an Israeli air raid had killed his entire family. Wael Dahdouh, bureau chief for Al Jazeera Arabic in Gaza, was on-air when he learned the news. He then went to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in central Gaza — the only hospital still functioning in the area — to find that his wife, son and daughter were dead. His grandson was declared dead two hours later.

Blinken's support for censorship of Al Jazeera's Gaza coverage comes as he and other Biden administration officials have been stoking the war and seeking to increase U.S. aid to Israel, including weapons, as it carries out ethnic cleansing in Gaza. So far, at least 24 journalists have been killed since October 7, according to CPJ, including one Lebanese reporter, three Israelis, and 20 Palestinians, all of whom were killed by Israeli air and missile strikes.

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