

*Israel ramps up deadly attacks on
Gaza's Rafah despite UN
warnings*

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Rafah, February 10 (RHC)-- Israel is ramping up its attacks on Rafah as it prepares to mount a ground offensive despite warnings of catastrophic consequences for displaced Palestinians and the United States saying it won't back an assault on the southern Gaza Strip because it would be a "disaster."

The Israeli military launched several rounds of air strikes and tank shelling on Rafah on Thursday and Friday. At least three children were among eight people killed on Friday morning in Israeli attacks on homes in Rafah, the Palestinian state news agency, Wafa, reported. Five of those killed were members of one family.

“We have our backs to the [border] fence and faces towards the Mediterranean. Where should we go?” asked Emad, 55, a father of six, who fled to Rafah with his family.

Four people were also killed and a number injured in the bombing of a kindergarten housing displaced people in az-Zawayda, and one person was killed in a bombing in Deir el-Balah, both in central Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other top officials have said they are planning to expand their military offensive in Gaza to include Rafah, where more than half of the enclave’s population of 2.3 million has been forcibly displaced, some multiple times, as a result of unyielding Israeli attacks.

The United States, the main military and financial backer of Israel and its war on Gaza, has cautioned against a large-scale offensive into Rafah, warning of “disaster” because of the large number of civilians sheltering in the city, which Israel had declared a “safe zone” and where it told them to flee.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Thursday that the White House “would not support” such an operation, and a Department of State spokesperson said there appears to be “no planning and little thought” for such a move by Tel Aviv, noting that Rafah was also a crucial entry point for humanitarian aid.

The Biden administration said it issued a memorandum laying out the standards that countries receiving U.S. military aid must adhere to. The memorandum does not outline new guidelines but calls for the State Department to receive written assurances from countries that they will abide by current U.S. standards. For the first time, it also requires the US government to submit an annual report to Congress on whether countries are meeting those requirements.

The memorandum was issued after Israel has killed about 28,000 Palestinians, most of them women and children, and left much of the Gaza Strip in ruins.

In a report on Friday, The New York Times cited unnamed senior U.S. army intelligence officers as saying Israel has killed only one-third of Hamas fighters, meaning it is far from its stated goal of “total victory” over the Palestinian group.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a post on X that an Israeli incursion into Rafah would “exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold regional consequences”.

Rafah sits along the Palestinian territory’s closed border with Egypt, which is also the main entry point for the limited humanitarian aid finding its way into the Gaza Strip after clearing stringent Israeli checks. Cairo has warned that any ground operation there or mass displacement of Palestinians into its Sinai Peninsula would jeopardise its four-decade-old peace treaty with Israel.

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