

Israel-Hamas war

US says Israel has 'no intent to reoccupy Gaza'

Secretary of state Antony Blinken plays down prospects of Israeli forces remaining in enclave after war with Hamas



Smoke rises after an Israeli air strike in Gaza City © Mohammed Saber/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

Guy Chazan in Jerusalem and **Kana Inagaki** in Okinawa 2 HOURS AGO

US secretary of state Antony Blinken has played down prospects of Israel reoccupying Gaza after Israel's prime minister said the country would maintain an indefinite grip over the Palestinian territory following its war with Hamas.

After a meeting of the Group of Seven foreign ministers in Tokyo, Blinken said on Wednesday: "It is imperative that the Palestinian people be central to the governance in Gaza and in the West Bank as well.

"What I've heard from Israeli leaders is that they have no intent to reoccupy Gaza and retake control of Gaza," he added.

His comments echoed a warning from John Kirby, White House National Security Council spokesperson, on Tuesday that President Joe Biden "maintains his position that reoccupation by Israeli forces is not the right thing to do".

The interventions by Blinken and Kirby came after Israeli prime minister Benjamin [Netanyahu told ABC News](#) that "for an indefinite period, [Israel] will have the overall security responsibility" for Gaza. Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant has stressed that after the war ends, neither Israel nor Hamas will rule Gaza, from which Israel formally withdrew in 2005.

Several disagreements have emerged between Israel and the US over the former's conduct in [the war](#), which it unleashed after Hamas rampaged through southern Israel a month ago, killing 1,400 people, according to Israeli officials.

Israel responded with an aerial and artillery bombardment of the enclave that has killed more than 10,560 Palestinians, two-thirds of them women and children, with 2,550 people reported missing, Gaza's Hamas-controlled health ministry said on Wednesday. It has also begun a ground offensive, and said on Tuesday its troops had entered Gaza City, a Hamas stronghold.

The US has called for greater efforts to protect Palestinian civilians and urged Israel to take ["humanitarian pauses"](#) to allow aid into Gaza and to let foreign nationals — and potentially hostages — out.

G7 foreign ministers also urged a pause in fighting, highlighting the need for "urgent action" as they sought to project unity in their response to the conflict.

"We confirmed the need to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, especially on the importance of humanitarian pauses and corridors to facilitate assistance," said Japan's foreign minister Yōko Kamikawa after hosting the meeting.

Following the G7 talks, UK foreign secretary James Cleverly said: "In the short term it is inevitable that Israel, because it has the troops in Gaza, will need to have a security responsibility. But our view is that as soon as practicable, a move towards a peace-loving Palestinian leadership is the most desired outcome."

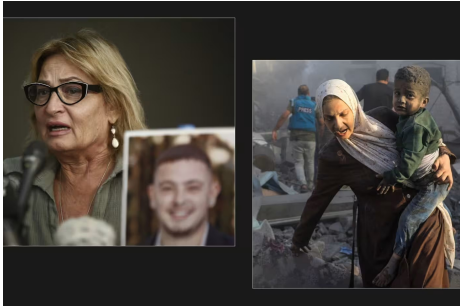
Blinken also stressed that there was "real unity" on whether a ceasefire was needed despite G7 members differing on how much pressure to apply on Israel. But Israel has been unmoved and repeatedly rejected calls for a ceasefire.

Israel said on Wednesday that its air strikes on Gaza had killed a senior Hamas weapons maker, whom it named as Mahsein Abu Zina. A day earlier, it said its troops had entered Gaza's main city, which it sees as Hamas's "centre of gravity".

"[Israel Defense Forces] are in the heart of Gaza City," Gallant said. "They came from the north and the south. They stormed it in full co-ordination between land, air and sea forces."

Israel has urged Palestinian civilians to evacuate to the south, but many Palestinians remain in the north and the UN has described the situation for hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza City and other areas as "increasingly dire".

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Gallant said Israeli forces were still pushing deeper into northern Gaza. “They have one target — Hamas terrorists in Gaza, their infrastructure, their commanders, bunkers, communication rooms,” he added. “They are tightening the noose around Gaza City.”

In a televised address to soldiers on Tuesday, Netanyahu claimed the month-long campaign had been an “extraordinary success”, though he referred to “problems” including drones, improvised explosive devices and anti-tank fire that had inflicted “very painful losses”.

“The success is phenomenal because we went in there and hit the enemy,” he said. “We do not intend to stop. We intend to continue to the end.”

Additional reporting by Lucy Fisher

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