Israel-Hamas war

Benjamin Netanyahu rules out return of Palestinian Authority in Gaza

Israeli prime minister opposes the US position on who will govern the enclave when fighting ends

Israeli soldiers operate inside the Gaza Strip, © via REUTERS

James Shotter in Jerusalem NOVEMBER 11 2023

Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday that he opposed the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, underscoring the growing divergence between his government and the US over what the enclave's postwar governance should be.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken said this week that when the fighting between Israel and Hamas ended, Gaza should be unified with the occupied West Bank under the administration of the PA. He insisted that Israel should not reoccupy Gaza, which is home to 2.3mn Palestinians.

But in a press conference on Saturday, the Israeli prime minister took a different stance from his country's closest ally, saying that Israel would maintain "security control" in Gaza for "as long as necessary" and that there "needs to be something else there," rather than the PA.

"I insist upon it," he said. "There may be pressure on this issue. I don't intend to cave."

Netanyahu also rejected calls for a ceasefire, despite mounting international pressure for an end to the fighting which has fuelled a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and driven its health system to breaking point.

French president Emmanuel Macron on Friday became the first leader of a big western country to call for a ceasefire, and urged Israel to stop killing babies and women in Gaza.

"De facto — today, civilians are bombed — de facto," he said in an interview with the BBC. "These babies, these ladies, these old people are bombed and killed. So there is no reason for that and no legitimacy. So we do urge Israel to stop."

Macron's comments followed a warning from Blinken that "far too many Palestinians" had been killed in the fighting.

Israel bombarded and then sent ground troops into Gaza last month after Hamas militants carried out the deadliest ever attack on Israel, killing more than 1,200 people, according to Israeli officials.

The Israeli assault has so far killed more than 11,000 people, including more than 4,500 children and more than 3,000 women, according to Palestinian officials.

Israel has also severely restricted supplies of electricity, fuel, water and food to Gaza, fuelling what aid groups have described as a humanitarian catastrophe in the impoverished enclave.

The UN's humanitarian arm OCHA said 20 of the 36 hospitals in Gaza had ceased operating as a result of the conflict. On Saturday, the biggest medical facility in the enclave, the al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, suspended operations because it had run out of fuel for its generators.

Doctors without Borders said that hospitals in Gaza had been "under relentless bombardment" over the past 24 hours, and that Shifa had been hit "multiple times".

Israel denied besieging Shifa, and said on Saturday that it would "co-ordinate [with] anyone who wants to leave the hospital safely". Israel has said it is operating near hospitals because Hamas is using them as bases. Hamas, which has controlled Gaza since 2007, has denied this.
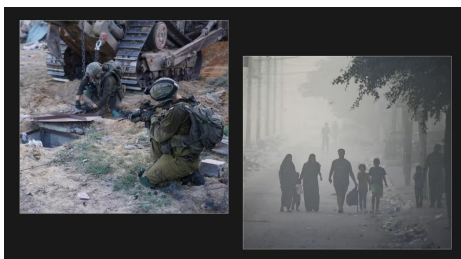
Mai al-Kaila, the Palestinian Authority health minister in Gaza, warned on Saturday that 39 babies at Shifa were at risk of death because of a lack of electricity, oxygen and medicines.

Mohamed Abu Silmeyeh, director of the hospital, told Al Jazeera TV that injured people were still being brought in "but we cannot operate on them because all surgery theatres are completely closed and without power"

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He said between 500-600 patients were trapped in the hospital as well as 800 staff and about 15,000 displaced people. Health officials said two infants had died because of a lack of power at the hospital.

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"Medical teams are using primitive methods to keep [infants] warm, like wrapping them up in cellophane and giving them artificial breathing, but this will not continue for long and I expect more people to die in the incubator and ICU units," Abu Silmeyeh said.

Netanyahu said that world leaders should be condemning Hamas, not Israel, for the harm to civilians. "Israel entered the war due to that terrorist organisation's brutal murder of hundreds of Israelis and holding hostage more than 200 Israelis," he said.