

**Israel-Hamas war**

## **Israel demolishes buildings to create buffer zone within Gaza**



Report suggests 1,100 buildings bulldozed amid US warnings not to reduce Palestinian territory

**James Shotter** in Jerusalem YESTERDAY

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Israel's military is working to establish a buffer zone inside Gaza, demolishing buildings near the border despite warnings from the US against any long-term reduction of the enclave's territory.

Israel's border was breached in multiple places by Hamas militants as they stormed into the country from Gaza in the October 7 attack that ignited the war, prompting Israeli officials to say they would [enforce a buffer](#) along the perimeter of the Palestinian territory to prevent a repeat.

A person familiar with the matter said the aim was to "keep this area completely clean of any terrorists or infrastructure, rocket launchers, mortars . . . and to give us the freedom of operation in that space".

The topic is one of several areas of disagreement between Israel and the US, which has repeatedly said it will oppose any moves that result in Gaza's territory being diminished.

John Kirby, the US national security spokesperson, reiterated that position on Tuesday. "We do not want to see the territory of Gaza reduced in any way," he said.

However, secretary of state Antony Blinken struck a softer line on Tuesday, saying that while the US was "clear about not encroaching on [Gazan] territory", there might be scope for "transitional arrangements".

Israel declared [war on Hamas](#) after its October attacks, during which militants killed 1,200 people and took a further 250 hostage, according to Israeli officials.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed more than 25,000 people, according to Palestinian officials, as well as displacing 1.9mn of the enclave's 2.3mn inhabitants, reducing huge swaths of it to rubble.

To enforce the buffer zone, Israeli forces have been destroying buildings along the border with Gaza. On Monday, 21 [soldiers were killed](#) when the mines they had laid in two buildings 600 metres from the border were detonated by rocket-propelled grenades fired by Hamas militants, causing the buildings to collapse.

Israeli officials declined to comment on how wide the buffer would be. But Amos Yadlin, former head of Israeli military intelligence, said this month he expected Israel would enforce a "perimeter" of 500 metres to 1km inside Gaza once the fighting was over.

"This will be a buffer: no one will be there, only mines . . . to make sure October 7 never happens again," he said in a briefing with journalists.

According to a report from Israel's N12 news, Israel has demolished about 1,100 of the 2,800 buildings that before the war stood on the land it intends to use as a buffer zone.

The Israeli military declined to confirm or deny those figures, but Richard Hecht, a military spokesperson, said Israel Defense Forces were “operating in the area in order to prevent Hamas activity threatening the citizens of Israel”.

“As part of this, the IDF is locating and destroying terror infrastructures embedded, among other things, inside buildings. This is part of the imperative actions that are needed in order to implement a defence plan that will provide improved security in southern Israel,” he added.

[Israel](#) maintained a buffer zone inside Gaza after it withdrew from the strip in 2005. But over the years that buffer was eroded, in part as a result of indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas to ease the blockade on Gaza.

In the early weeks of the war, senior Israeli officials said a buffer would be reimposed. Then-foreign minister Eli Cohen said the territory of Gaza would “decrease”, while Avi Dichter, former head of Israel’s internal security service who is now agriculture minister, in October said Israel would enforce a “margin” around Gaza.

He added: “On the Gaza Strip all along, we will have a margin. And they will not be

able to get in. It will be a fire zone. And no matter who you are, you will never be able to come close to the Israeli border.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also insisted Israel will maintain “full . . . security control” over both Gaza and the occupied West Bank once the war is over.

*Additional reporting by Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv*

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