

Israel-Hamas war

US warns Israel against ground offensive into Rafah in draft UN resolution

Text seen by Financial Times also calls for 'temporary ceasefire' in Gaza



Palestinian children gather to receive food at a government school in Rafah © AFP/Getty Images

James Politi and **Felicia Schwartz** in Washington 11 MINUTES AGO

The US is circulating a UN Security Council resolution warning Israel against a “major ground offensive” into Rafah, the city in Gaza near the Egyptian border where about 1.5mn people are sheltering from the conflict elsewhere in the enclave.

The move represents rare criticism of Israel by the US at the UN, reflecting President Joe Biden’s frustration with the conduct of the Israeli government’s war in Gaza and high death toll among Palestinian civilians — and as the planned attack on Rafah becomes a potential [breaking point](#) for Washington.

The US move in the UN also comes as Biden faces growing pressure internationally from key US allies and domestically from influential lawmakers within the Democratic party to persuade Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to wind down [the war](#) in favour of a more limited counter-terrorism strategy against Hamas.

The use of a UN Security Council resolution to call for a shift in Israel’s strategy represents a big diplomatic milestone for the US, which typically defends Israel at the organisation and recently vetoed a resolution calling for a ceasefire.

According to a draft text of the US’s proposed resolution, which was obtained by the Financial Times, the UN body would say that “under current circumstances a major ground offensive into Rafah would result in further harm to civilians and their further

displacement including potentially into neighbouring countries”.

The draft adds that a military operation “would have serious implications for regional peace and security” and demands that it “not proceed under current circumstances”. News of the draft text was first reported by Bloomberg on Monday.

The UN Security Council is responsible for protecting international peace and security and includes 15 countries that can vote on resolutions. While 10 are rotating members, the other five, including the US, are permanent members with veto rights, giving them extra power.

Although the US is circulating the draft to obtain the widest possible support, it is unclear whether or when it will be voted on by the Security Council.

According to the draft resolution, the Security Council would also support “a temporary ceasefire in Gaza as soon as practicable, based on the formula of all hostages being released” and “lifting all barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance at scale”.

Talks between the [US, Egypt and Qatar](#) to secure a six-week pause in fighting have stalled in recent days.

The Biden administration has continued to rebuff calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, including by vetoing a separate UN Security Council resolution proposed by Algeria that was considered on Tuesday. US officials said the resolution would jeopardise its efforts to broker a deal to release hostages in exchange for a temporary humanitarian pause.

It was the third time since the start of the conflict that the US used its veto on the Security Council to avert a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire.

“Demanding an immediate unconditional ceasefire without an agreement requiring Hamas to release the hostages will not bring enduring peace,” US ambassador to the UN Linda-Thomas Greenfield said.

Biden last week said his “expectation” was that Israel would not move ahead with the Rafah offensive, but it is unclear whether the Jewish state will heed his request.

Netanyahu said on Saturday that calls for him to refrain from attacking Rafah were tantamount to people telling Israel to “lose the war” and vowed he would not “capitulate to any pressure”.

Although the US has staunchly supported Israel's right to attack Hamas in response to the deadly terrorist attacks on Israel on October 7, Biden has been disturbed by the civilian death toll in Gaza resulting from the ground offensive and aerial bombardments.

Israel's war on Hamas in the enclave has so far killed more than 28,000 people, according to Palestinian authorities, while more than 1.5mn have been displaced and are in makeshift refugee camps in the territory's south, close to Rafah.

Biden said earlier this month he believed that the Israeli actions had been "over the top". However, the US has not been willing to challenge Israel using other levers, such as withholding military aid.

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