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Stunning State Department Memo Warns Diplomats: No Gaza 'De-Escalation' Talk

As Israel escalates its offensive, U.S. diplomats are being discouraged from publicly using three phrases that would urge calm.



By Akbar Shahid Ahmed

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A child injured as a result of Israeli attacks is brought to a hospital in Rafah, Gaza, on Oct. 13. ABED RAHIM KHATIB/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

As Israel escalates its attacks on Gaza, the State Department is discouraging diplomats working on Middle East issues from making public statements suggesting the U.S. wants to see less violence, according to internal emails viewed by HuffPost.

In messages circulated on Friday, State Department staff wrote that high-level officials do not want press materials to include three specific phrases: “de-escalation/ceasefire,” “end to violence/bloodshed” and “restoring calm.”

The revelation provides a stunning signal about the Biden administration’s reluctance to push for Israeli restraint as the close U.S. partner expands the offensive it launched after Hamas — which rules Gaza — attacked Israeli communities on Oct. 7.

The emails were sent hours after Israel [told more than 1.1 million residents](#) of northern Gaza that they should leave their homes and shelters ahead of an expected ground invasion of the region. On Thursday, the United Nations [said Israel had given Gazans](#) a 24-hour deadline to move to the south of the strip, and warned that it would be “impossible for such a movement to take place without devastating humanitarian consequences.”

Asked about Israel’s evacuation order on Friday, U.S. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby [declined to reject or endorse it](#), calling it “a tall order.”

“We’re going to be careful not to get into armchair quarterbacking the tactics on the ground by the [Israel Defense Forces],” Kirby said. “What I can tell you is we understand what they’re trying to do. They’re trying to move civilians out of harm’s way and giving them fair warning.”

When reached for comment on the directive, a State Department official said they would not comment on internal communications.

U.S. officials have said they expect Israel to abide by the laws of war in its operation against Hamas. But they have avoided discussion of a ceasefire, even as [aid groups](#) and some analysts have suggested that may be essential to allow civilians to flee Gaza and allow vital supplies to enter the area after Israel cut off electricity and water that the strip usually relies on. Earlier this week, Secretary of State Antony Blinken [deleted and replaced](#) a post on X, the former Twitter, in which he mentioned Turkey's calls for a ceasefire.

Israel's operation in Gaza has killed nearly 1,800 people so far, the Gazan Health Ministry [said Friday](#), including 583 children and 351 women. U.S. officials [believe](#) there are 500 to 600 American citizens in the area. Israel has repeatedly bombed the exit point from Gaza that does not lead into its territory.

Last weekend's Hamas-led attack, and Palestinian militants' rocket fire since then, have killed a combined 1,300 Israelis, Israel [said](#) on Thursday.

U.S. President [Joe Biden](#) has repeatedly pledged to support Israel as it seeks to avenge the unprecedented Hamas assault. Yet as Israel's biggest source of diplomatic and military support, the U.S. has significant leverage in the matter of how the country chooses to seek retribution — and whether Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tries to limit the civilian toll of his response.