



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on February 12, 2024

Saudi Arabia: Israel to Face ‘Serious Repercussions’ Over Rafah Strikes

Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Ministry has issued a warning to Israel and its allies, saying they will meet with “very serious repercussions” if West Jerusalem goes through with a planned ground operation against Hamas in Gaza’s last place of refuge for civilians who have been displaced by the ongoing war.

The ministry’s statement, posted on February 10, slammed the scheduled “storming and targeting” of Rafah, Gaza, where an estimated 1.4 million Palestinians have sought refuge after being displaced from their homes by Israeli bombing.



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Rafah is “the last resort for hundreds of thousands of civilians forced by the brutal Israeli aggression to flee,” Riyadh said. “The kingdom affirms its categorical rejection and strong condemnation of their forcible deportation and renews its demand for an immediate ceasefire.”

The statement came one day after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu instructed his military to make plans for evacuating civilians crowded into Rafah as commanders gear up to attack the last Hamas stronghold in the Palestinian enclave. The city’s pre-war population was around 280,000 people. Israel launched airstrikes in Rafah on February 10, killing at least 44 people, as per Hamas.

Netanyahu has ignored international calls for a ceasefire and maintained that only “total victory” over Hamas will make Israel safe from the sort of attacks that ignited the region’s latest war in October.

Over 28,000 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began, based on the Hamas-run health authorities. The UN has reported that 85 percent of the population has been displaced from their homes, and that 570,000 Gazans are starving. The conflict began when Hamas fighters raided Israeli villages, killing more than 1,200 people and taking hundreds of hostages back to Gaza.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry suggested that both Israel and its backers will be held responsible for what happens in Rafah. “This continued violation of international law and international humanitarian law confirms the need for an urgent convening of the UN Security Council to prevent Israel from causing an imminent humanitarian disaster for which everyone who supports the aggression is responsible.”

Saudi Arabia and Israel were reportedly negotiating to set up diplomatic relations when the surprise Hamas attacks were launched, but Riyadh’s Foreign Ministry said earlier this week that it will not establish formal ties with Israel until the “aggression” against Gaza is halted and an independent Palestinian state — framed along 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital — is recognized.

In a statement on February 7, the ministry revealed it had informed the United States “that there will be no diplomatic relations with Israel unless an independent Palestinian state is recognized on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and that the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip stops and all Israeli occupation forces withdraw from the Gaza Strip.”



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"The Kingdom reiterates its call to the permanent members of the UN Security Council ... to expedite the recognition of the Palestinian state," the ministry continued, declaring that this would help ensure "that a comprehensive and just peace is achieved for all."

The statement did not specify whether Israel must also admit a Palestinian state in order for a deal with Saudi Arabia to proceed.

While Washington is supposedly [considering](#) whether to acknowledge Palestinian statehood, Netanyahu has refused to mull the idea. Instead, he has demanded "full Israeli security control over the entire area west of Jordan," a description that includes land considered Palestinian under the 1967 borders.

The term "1967 borders" refers to Israel's frontiers before the Six-Day War. A return to these lines would see Gaza expand, while Israel would give up its claims to the West Bank, Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem, and would withdraw its security forces and settlers from these areas.

The Saudi statement came a day after White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters that talks on a normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel were "ongoing," and that the U.S. had received "positive feedback from both sides."

Saudi Arabia did not join its neighbors, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, in acknowledging Israel under the Abraham Accords, brokered by former U.S. President Donald Trump in 2020.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh on Tuesday. A readout of the meeting from the U.S. State Department made no mention of an independent Palestinian state. Instead, it said the pair had discussed the need for "an enduring end to the crisis in Gaza that provides lasting peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike."

Also, international ratings agency Moody's has lowered Israel's credit rating, in the country's first-ever sovereign downgrade, the company [announced](#) on Friday.

Moody's cut Israel's credit score to A2, the sixth-highest investment grade, and kept its outlook as "negative," meaning further downgrades are possible. The agency cited political and fiscal risks from Israel's continued war with Hamas as the reason for the downgrade.

"The ongoing military conflict with Hamas, its aftermath and wider consequences materially raise political risk for Israel as well as weaken its executive and legislative institutions and its fiscal strength, for the foreseeable future," the agency said in a statement on its website.

"While fighting in Gaza may diminish in intensity or pause, there is currently no agreement to end the hostilities durably and no agreement on a longer-term plan that would fully restore and eventually strengthen security for Israel," Moody's added. It noted that it "expects that Israel's debt burden will be materially higher than projected before the conflict."

Moody's placed Israel's credit rating on review back in October, less than two weeks after the country declared war on Hamas following the surprise attack by the militant group. S&P and Fitch placed Israel on negative ratings watch, but so far have not downgraded its credit score. S&P warned last month that it could also cut Israel's sovereign rating if the war with Hamas expands to other fronts, such as Lebanon or Iran.

Regarding the downgrade, Netanyahu maintained it does not reflect the state of the country's economy, but "is entirely due to the fact that we are at war."

"The rating will go back up as soon as we win the war," he said in a statement, as cited by Bloomberg.



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