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Munich dispatch: Gaza 'wind blowing against the West'

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warns the world smells hypocrisy as Israel readies death blow in Rafah

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MUNICH, GERMANY – The Munich Security Conference came to an end today but not before EU leaders warned that international “winds” might be blowing against the West on the issue of Israel’s war in Gaza

While the international meeting this weekend entertained manifold topics — from the role of the Global South to the importance of AI and food security — the Ukraine war dominated the conference, with Gaza coming in second at a considerable distance.

But the focus on Israel’s military operations grew more intense as the confab drew to a close, between yesterday afternoon and Sunday morning. In the press center, for example, the current situation in Gaza vied for attention with the death of Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s speech on Saturday.

Indeed, Rafah was an often-repeated word Sunday in the Bavarian capital. The day before in a televised news conference, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [announced](#) that “total victory” against Hamas would require an offensive against Rafah once people living there evacuate to safe areas. It is difficult to see how the concept of a “safe area” can apply to any place in the Gaza Strip today. At least 28,985 people have been killed and 68,883 injured (mostly civilians) in the Gaza Strip since October 7, when 1,200 Israelis were killed and over 250 hostages taken during a Hamas attack against Israel. In a side event Sunday organized by the Consulate General of Israel in Munich, the press was shown a video, about 10 minutes long, documenting Hamas atrocities on October 7.

According to the [United Nations](#), over 75% of the Gazan population has been displaced, many multiple times. There is also a severe lack of food, medicine, and other essential items because of Israel’s decision to let only a trickle of the aid trucks into Gaza needed to maintain basic conditions of life.

Addressing the audience in Munich, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell stated that peace in the Middle East requires “a prospect for the Palestinian people” and that “the security of Israel will not be ensured just by military means.”

In a reference to the war in Gaza, he noted that “Russia is taking good advantage of our mistakes. The blame about double standards is something that we need to address and not only with nice words. It is clear that the wind is blowing against the West.”

Borrell appears to share a worry openly expressed by some of the European leaders — such as Spanish president [Pedro Sánchez](#) and Irish prime minister [Leo Varadkar](#) — who have been even more critical of Israel. The concern is that Europe’s failure to rein in Israel will undermine global support for Ukraine and discredit the European discourse on the importance of international law.

Borrell, in sharp contrast with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, has [represented](#) the most vocal position within the EU on the growing death toll and humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza after October 7. Earlier this week, the EU top diplomat replied to Biden’s recent [description](#) of Israel’s military conduct in Gaza as being “over the top.” Borrell [noted](#) that “if you believe that too many people are being killed, maybe you should provide less arms in order to prevent so many people being killed.”

Borrell has long supported a ceasefire but any EU decision on the matter requires unanimity, and countries like Germany, Austria, and Hungary are not on board.

American ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said yesterday that the U.S. will veto an Algerian proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza to be taken up at the UN Security Council on Tuesday. According to Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. is working hard for “a sustainable resolution of the Gaza conflict,” and the Algerian resolution would endanger this.

In an oft-repeated dynamic over the last months, the U.S. is basically asking the international community to trust that Washington’s diplomatic pressure will force Netanyahu to change course. Such an approach has failed once and again, and there is no clear reason to believe this time will be different.

Yesterday afternoon, Qatar’s Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani [noted](#) that the efforts to reach an agreement between Israel and Hamas have been dominated by a pattern that “is not really very promising.”

Part of the U.S. approach to the current conflict has also been to demand that the Palestinian Authority (PA) reforms itself. Washington hopes the PA can [govern](#) the Gaza Strip after the war ends, but Netanyahu has been [adamant](#) it does not envisage any role for the PA in the Gaza Strip in the future.

The Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh was in Munich on Sunday, remarking in an interview that the PA — which has grown even more unpopular in the West Bank after October 7 — is already working on introducing reforms. Shtayyeh said that the recent insistence on the topic only seeks to divert attention from the Israeli military operation in Gaza, however.

In his view, Netanyahu’s interest today is “to keep the war going” and argued that “Netanyahu’s war is going to continue until the end of the year.” The Palestinian leader was supposed to be present at a press briefing around midday, but the event was canceled on short notice due to “scheduling reasons.”

In a panel with his Spanish and Canadian counterparts, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi was one of the last Arab leaders to speak in Munich. He used the opportunity to note that “Israel cannot have security unless Palestinians have security.”

This afternoon, the Munich city center was returning to its normal state after an intense weekend of both open and closed-door meetings featuring top leaders from Europe and beyond. As security barriers were being removed and the 5,000 police officers deployed for the event, many of them from other parts of Germany, returned home, it wasn't hard to note that beyond all the talk, the world's thorniest problems, including two major conflicts, are left unresolved.

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