



Qatari official: Rafah invasion would kill deal

Tells Haaretz: 'We're getting the impression that PM isn't interested in a hostage deal'

Jonathan Lis

A senior Qatari official harshly criticized Israel's declared intent to launch a large-scale military operation in Rafah in an effort to spur Hamas to agree to a hostage deal, arguing that invading the Gaza city would actually prevent a deal and endanger the hostages' lives.

"The Rafah operation is preventing a deal," the official said. "It isn't a means of pressuring Hamas. Hamas understands from this move that Israel plans to enter Rafah whether or not there's a deal. In other words, in practice, Israel has no intention of ending the fighting."

He added that in his estimate, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu isn't interested in a hostage deal right now.

"We agreed to serve as mediators on two conditions," he said. "The first was that both sides want us as a mediator, and the second, that both sides are interested in implementing a deal. As of now, we're getting the impression that Netanyahu isn't interested in a deal."

Finally, he protested the accusations made by several senior Israeli officials, including Netanyahu, that Qatar is responsible for the delays in reaching a deal.

"Our prime minister is running the talks personally," he said. "He's spending a significant portion of his time on this. And in exchange, Qatar is absorbing criticism and becoming a scapegoat for some Israeli politicians so they can cope with the pressure from the hostages' families."

The Qatari official's statements came against the background of Netanyahu's pledge earlier in the day that "we'll go into Rafah and de-

Smotrich, pay the price

Editorial, Page 5

stroy the Hamas battalions there, with a deal or without one, in order to achieve total victory." Netanyahu, speaking at a meeting with representatives of the Gvura Forum, an association of families who lost members in the current war, added that "the idea that we'd end the war before all its goals have been achieved is inconceivable."

A senior Israeli official who isn't a politician but is involved in the hostage negotiations said that Israel had offered Hamas a postponement of several months

in the Rafah operation in exchange for implementation of the deal's first stage. But the government doesn't intend to publicly declare the war over, in part due to its assessment that such a declaration would dismantle the governing coalition, he added.

Consequently, he said, Israel is hoping Hamas will bet that Jerusalem won't be able to resume the fighting after a few months' pause.

The Qatari official's statements come in the wake of an interview published this weekend with Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesman and prime ministerial adviser Dr. Majed Al-Ansari, which came against the background of Doha's decision to reconsider its role in mediating between Hamas and Israel.

Al-Ansari told Haaretz last week that "we were hoping to see much more flexibility, much more seriousness, much more commitment on both sides, all through the process." He didn't mention Netanyahu by name, but charged that "Qatar is being used as a political punching bag for those who are looking either to safeguard their political futures or to find more votes in the next elections."

See HOSTAGE, Page 2



Student protesters linking arms in front of Hamilton Hall at Columbia University in Manhattan, Tuesday.

Caitlin Ochs/Reuters

Columbia University administration:

Students occupying building will be expelled

After pro-Palestinian students take over Hamilton Hall, school closes the campus entirely

Judy Maltz

NEW YORK – Columbia University has announced that students occupying Hamilton Hall, a main campus building, will be expelled.

"We made it very clear yesterday that the work of the university cannot be endlessly interrupted by protesters who violate the rules," Ben

Change, the university spokesman, said in a statement.

"Continuing to do so will be met with clear consequences. Protesters have chosen to escalate to an untenable situation – vandalizing property, breaking doors and windows, and blockading entrances – and we are following through with the consequences we outlined yesterday. Students

occupying the building face expulsion."

Expulsion means that they can never come back to Columbia.

He added that students who remain in the "Gaza Solidarity Encampment" are being suspended pending an investigation. "Those students will be restricted from all academic and recreational

spaces and may only access their individual residence. Seniors will be ineligible to graduate," he said.

"This is about responding to the actions of the protesters, not their cause," he added.

Earlier, the university announced it is blocking access to the main Morningside Heights campus to everyone

except students who live in the dormitories located inside and employees who provide essential services.

The drastic measure, which was announced early Tuesday morning, follows the violent takeover of Hamilton Hall, a historic campus building, in the middle of the

See PROTEST, Page 4

Smotrich calls for 'total annihilation' in Gaza Strip

Noa Shpigel

Finance Minister and member of the security cabinet Bezalel Smotrich called on Monday for annihilating Israel's enemies, saying "There are no half measures. [The Gaza cities of] Rafah, Deir al-Balah, Nuseirat – total annihilation. That thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from un-

der heaven' – there's no place under heaven," he said, quoting the Bible in a reference to a demon and enemy of the Jewish people.

Smotrich also mentioned the ongoing negotiations with Hamas for a hostage release deal, saying that Israel is "negotiating with someone who long ago should have ceased to exist at all."

He made the remarks at

a Mimouna party, a traditional North African Jewish celebration held at the end of Passover. It took place at the home of Rabbi Shachar Butzhak, who is affiliated with the Garin Torani movement – a state-funded group of Jewish religious nationalists often planted in secular populations or in mixed Arab-Jewish towns as a demographic and intimidation

strategy.

Smotrich, who also is a minister in the Defense Ministry, added that when Hamas is destroyed, Israel must "clear out, with God's help, with one blow, wicked Hezbollah in the north, and really send a message that what will happen to those who harm the Jewish people is the same as those who have tried to harm us in the past – they

will be destroyed, destroyed, destroyed. And it will echo for decades to come."

Smotrich's remarks come amid renewed talks between Israel and Hamas on a deal to release the hostages in exchange for a cease-fire in Gaza. On Tuesday, he came out again against the current proposal being discussed, saying, "Whoever gives his hand to this will forever be

remembered in the history of the Jewish state, and he does not deserve to be considered its leader."

In a statement he delivered at the Knesset, Smotrich said, "the Egyptian proposal is a terrible 'blue and white' defeat and loss, that will give Hamas a resounding victory on a silver platter and send all

See TOTAL, Page 2



Bezalel Smotrich

Olivier Fitoussi

PM in bind over Egypt's proposal, but it's up to Gantz and Eisenkot



Monday's Tel Aviv protest calling for the release of the hostages.

Hadas Parush

Analysis Ravit Hecht

The videos of three hostages released recently by Hamas, together with positive responses from both

Israel and Hamas to Egypt's cease-fire proposal, give the impression that a dramatic deal is just around the corner.

The immediate translation of this into Israel's political arena is a seemingly dramatic trap for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who appears to be nearing the decision of his career. He must choose

between the coalition partners who destroyed Israel, led it to the current situation and now have the chutzpah to exhort the betrayal of Israelis they have already abandoned. Or he must take the decision that is both morally and strategically correct: to return the hostages and retreat from the various military arenas, on the road to normalization and a new regional order under the aegis of the United States.

Reciprocal threats from Bezalel Smotrich on the one hand and Benny Gantz on the other created a sensation of an impending explosion for many Israelis. Smotrich babbled in messianic and other kinds of incitement (his reference to Moses and Nachshon, who at the Red Sea "overcame the weaknesses demonstrated by parts of the nation"), and Gantz replied in his own way (on the supreme importance of returning the hostages).

See GANTZ, Page 2

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In Jezreel Valley

3,000-year-old cemetery possibly tied to ancient Israelites is found

Ariel David

Archaeologists have uncovered rare evidence of burial practices at a rural cemetery in the Jezreel Valley, where more than 3,000 years ago the dead were honored with rituals that involved the use of fire and beeswax. The cultural allegiance of those buried there remains fuzzy, but the cemetery dates right to the period when the Israelite identity was forming in that region, researchers say.

The cemetery and the adjacent village at Horvat Tevet, in modern-day northern Israel, date back to Early Iron Age, specifically to the 11th and early 10th centuries B.C.E. Not only are burial grounds from this era infrequent find, but the discovery also offers precious information on a time that marks the end of the great Canaanite city states and the rise of a new territorial polity in the region, the Kingdom of Israel, the archaeologists note.

As with many contemporary archaeological discoveries in Israel, this story too begins with fairly mundane infrastructure works. In this case, the laying of a gas pipeline and road expansion works

triggered an excavation in 2018-2019 by the Israeli Institute of Archaeology and the Institute of Archaeology in Tel Aviv University, followed by a joint research project by Tel Aviv University and the Israel Antiquities Authority.

The team of archaeologists had previously reported that around the end of the 10th century B.C.E., Horvat Tevet became an important royal estate for the Israelite kingdom, centered around a monumental pillared building. Now they report on the site's earlier phase in a paper published in April in the American Journal of Archaeology by Jordan Weitzel and colleagues.

Burying up that hill

During the Early Iron Age, Horvat Tevet was a small, largely impoverished rural community that buried its dead in shallow graves hewn out of the soft local basaltic rock, surrounding the deceased with ceramics and few other paltry funerary offerings, Weitzel and colleagues write.

The village was a relatively new feature in the area, because during the preceding era, the Late Bronze Age, this

part of the Jezreel Valley was directly ruled by the Egyptians. They declared these lands a royal estate and used its fruits to feed their nearby colony in Bet She'an, in the Jordan Valley, explains Dr. Omer Sergi of Tel Aviv University.

Since the 15th century B.C.E., the pharaohs had controlled the land of Canaan, either directly or through the vassal Canaanite city states. But in the mid 12th century B.C.E. the Egyptian empire came to an end with the so-called Bronze Age Collapse, a period of turmoil that led to the disappearance of multiple ancient civilizations, including the Hittites and the Mycenaeans. Ancient Egypt survived but withdrew from Canaan, leaving a power vacuum that ultimately led, in the subsequent Iron Age, to the birth of the Levantine kingdoms we know from the Bible: Israel, Judah, Moab, Edom and so on.

Unlike many other urban centers, which went up in flames at the end of the Bronze Age, the Canaanite city states in the Jezreel Valley – Tel Megiddo, Tel Rehov and others – survived largely

See TIED, Page 3



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