



Hamas says it agrees to cease-fire proposal

Israel studying Hamas response, but sources suspect a ruse; IDF orders evacuation of Rafah ahead of ground operation

Jack Khoury and Jonathan Lis

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh informed the Qatari and Egyptian mediators Monday night that his organization has agreed to their proposal for a cease-fire with Israel in the framework of a deal to free the hostages.

Hamas sources said the organization has received guarantees from both the United States and the Egyptian and Qatari mediators that Israel would not resume the war in the Gaza Strip after the deal is completed.

The Israeli negotiators have begun studying Hamas' response, which was given to Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed Al Thani and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel. But Israeli sources said they think this is probably a Hamas ruse.

Earlier on Monday, before the Hamas announcement, Israel began the evacuation of the civilian population in the area of Rafah in Gaza's south, in preparation for a ground operation. According to the IDF's Arabic-language spokesperson, the army "will act with extreme force" against terrorists in several neighborhoods near Rafah. The IDF estimates there are about 100,000 residents in the neighborhoods it ordered to evacuate.

Palestinians residing east of the city of Rafah, next to the Philadelphia route on the Egyptian border, received phone calls and voice messages instructing them to evacuate and head for the Al-Mawasi area near Gaza's shore or the Khan Yunis area. Flyers instructing residents to evacuate were also dropped in the area. Accord-



Palestinians leaving Rafah on Monday.

Ali Jaddallah/Anadolu via Reuters

ing to accounts by eyewitnesses in the area, Palestinian families have already begun evacuating Rafah.

In the past day, Israeli strikes in Rafah killed 26 people, according to the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza.

Also earlier Monday, senior Hamas officials sent

messages to the heads of the various Palestinian militias in Gaza saying that the steps Israel was taking in preparation for an operation in the town of Rafah would in no way change Hamas' positions or its demand for an end to the war and a full Israel withdrawal as a precondition for any deal.

Monday evening, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant met with Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi to discuss plans for the operation, which he said "would soon begin in the Rafah area and other places in Gaza."

Hamas officials have insisted on an end to the war as a precondition for the

deal because they are convinced that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is only interested in implementing the first stage of the proposed deal, which includes the release of all hostages who aren't soldiers and possibly also the release of female soldiers. They think he won't fight for the return

of the abducted soldiers, viewing them instead as a reasonable price to pay to defeat Hamas in Gaza.

"It's quite clear that Netanyahu isn't interested in a comprehensive deal," one senior Palestinian official said. "His behavior merely

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Amos Harel

Driving a wedge between Israel, U.S.

Israel was caught by surprise Monday night when Hamas announced that it had accepted the mediators' proposal for a hostage deal. Over the past few days the negotiations had appeared on the point of total collapse.

Earlier Monday, the Israel Defense Forces demanded that some 100,000 Palestinians evacuate their homes in the eastern edges of Rafah, in what appeared to be preparations for the much-heralded invasion of the city. But then came the U-turn of Hamas, which notified the Egyptian and Qatari mediators of its decision. The deal in its first stage is supposed to include the release of 33 of the 132 Israeli hostages still held by Hamas, an unknown member of which are still alive, in exchange for a cease-fire and the release of several hundred Palestinian prisoners. However, Israel's agreement to the proposal will be required first.

The big question pertains to the nature of the cease-fire. For the past few months, the main obstacle to a deal has been Hamas' demand that it include a full withdrawal of IDF forces alongside a complete cessation of the fighting. Hamas recently also demanded American guarantees in view of repeated statements by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he intended to order the

IDF to take Rafah. Israeli political sources said last night that Egypt and the United States may have reached an understanding behind Israel's back to update the Egyptian proposal that Israel accepted two weeks ago.

This seems to be an initial signal from Netanyahu that he will reject the proposal following Hamas' positive response (which we do not yet know the exact nature

Congressional deadline

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of). Just a couple of days ago, the prime minister and his spokespeople claimed that Israeli media were making false accusations against him that he was trying to sabotage the talks while putting the blame on Hamas. It now appears that he will once again give a negative answer. The move will be justified by the claim that Israel needs to ensure that Hamas is defeated and by dubious claims of American trickery (claims against the same American administration that last month approved an additional \$14 billion in aid to Israel). In practice, the main

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IDF strikes Hezbollah's elite Radwan Force after drone hits Metula

Adi Hashmonai, Jack Khoury and Yaniv Kubovich

A drone carrying explosives confirmed to have been launched by Hezbollah hit the northern Israeli town of Metula, the military and local officials reported Monday. In response, the Israel Air Force struck 15 targets in a military base belonging

to Hezbollah's elite Radwan Force in southern Lebanon. Earlier Monday, 30 rockets were fired from Lebanon toward the Golan Heights. No casualties were reported but minor damage was caused to homes in Moshav Kidmat Zvi.

Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the barrage, which the IDF assesses is a response to the overnight

Israeli strike deep inside Lebanon. The military said the IAF hit struck a Hezbollah military compound in the A-Sifri area, south of Baalbek. Lebanese channel Al Mayadeen, affiliated with Hezbollah, reported three people were lightly wounded in the strike.

The strike in Lebanon comes after 40 rockets were launched into Israel's Upper

Galilee region Sunday.

The IDF also said that it struck Hezbollah targets in Ramyah, Aya ash Shab, Marwahin, and Jabal Blat. According to the army announcement, two launches were spotted from Syrian territory toward Moshav Ramat Magshimim. The rockets landed in open areas, and a tank returned fire to the launch sources.

In the past few days, senior Biden administration officials have been saying that an agreement is possible to end the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, on the condition of a cease-fire in Gaza.

The American sources said that - in talks with senior officials from Israel, Lebanon, France and other countries involved in the

discussions on a cease-fire on the northern front - the moment agreements are reached to end the fighting in Gaza, it will be possible to act quickly to also reach agreements on issues important to Israel, Hezbollah and the Lebanese government.

In another development, Sgt. Michael Ruzal, 18, of the Nahal Brigade is the fourth Israeli soldier killed

in Sunday's rocket barrage which landed near the Kerem Shalom crossing near the Gaza border.

The army said that ten launches were detected in the barrage, which was aimed at two positions where the soldiers were stationed. According to the announcement, the forces were stationed there to guard vehicles and military equipment intended to

be used in case the army decided to enter Rafah.

The army says the barrage was carried out in an area 300 meters from an area used as shelter for displaced Gazans.

There were portable shelters nearby, and the army is checking whether the soldiers were alerted about the

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Comparing America to Nazi Germany is classic Netanyahu



Protest signs at George Washington University in Washington.

Getty Images via AFP

Alon Pinkas

That Iran is the reincarnation of Nazi Germany is a recurring theme in Benjamin Netanyahu's limited repertoire of speeches. But now there's a new entrant: U.S. college campuses, which, according to the Israeli prime minister's breathtaking demagoguery, are "reminiscent of what happened in German universities in the 1930s," no less.

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Egyptian firm 'makes millions' getting refugees out of Gaza

Naghm Zbeedat

One of the recurring stories of Israel's war in Gaza has been the exorbitant fees being charged by Egyptian fixers to get Palestinians through the Rafah border crossing into Egypt's Sinai.

A report last month claimed that one Egyptian travel company generated nearly \$90 million in a few weeks by charging the desperate over \$5,000 to leave the Strip.

Gazans on social media have grown increasingly critical of the practice, which shows no sign of abating for those able to raise the hefty fees required to leave the war behind.

One of the first outlets to report on the practice was the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, which in January highlighted the plight of those looking to flee Gaza and the Israeli bombardment.

The OCCRP, a global net-

work of investigative journalists, said its reporters were given quotes on the spot to secure exits from Gaza. One Egyptian agency quoted \$7,000 for Palestinians, \$1,200 for Egyptians and \$3,000 for other foreign passport holders.

The organization also spoke with an Egyptian citizen, Rasha, 31, who was trapped in Gaza with her Palestinian husband and

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New UN accusation
Food program says Israel still impeding access to Gaza



Johanna Geron/Reuters

Anti-Israeli Belgian effort
Seeks to get EU states to impose economic sanctions

haaretz.com

A survivor of both the Holocaust and Oct. 7 looks back and ahead

Rachel Talshir

At the end of our first meeting, 99-year-old Chaim Shilo (Solow) from Nirim, a kibbutz near the Gaza border, expressed a wish: "I want to be able to live out my remaining years in my home, in my kibbutz that I founded and loved so much."

This meeting took place in the middle of January, in his temporary apartment, in assisted living, in Ganei Sharonim in Even Yehuda, a town east of Netanya. He told me about the stages of the evacuation after October 7, about the longing for the house that he left behind, the small garden around it, the place that was so familiar and taken for granted, and the routine that has been obliterated. Before Passover, I went to speak with him again. He told me that he'd already been visited by people who were in Nirim and reported to him that the garden around his house was being cared for and is still beautiful. When we parted, near the parking lot, he said: "I don't think I'll get to return to Nirim. This return is not going to happen in my lifetime. If ever."

In the second meeting, we talked about topics that we did not get to in our



Chaim Shilo

Avishag Shaar-Yashuv

previous meeting. As usual, Solow related to every question in the same concise and purposeful manner. In both meetings, he returned to and described in detail the one story that, in his opinion, changed the course of his life dramatically - the story of his leaving his former home in Germany. The core of the story is his mother's decision in 1936 to take her family to Palestine despite his fa-

ther's strong objections. Here is the story in brief. "My father was a famous doctor. We lived in Leipzig. A respectable and wealthy family. With the rise of the Nazis to power, Mother began pressuring Father to immigrate to Palestine. He did not want to hear about it. He, like most Jews, was sure that this too would pass. He derived a lot of satisfaction from his work, his status and life in general. But

in 1936, my mother made a decision in her heart and she sailed to Palestine alone and returned from there, two months later, even more convinced. My father was left with the choice between his beloved wife and Germany. I was 11 years old when the container arrived. It transported to her the furniture that we were attached to, as well as precious mementos

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