

TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2024 ■ 29 NISAN, 5784



Bring them home

Ilan Weiss, age 56, kidnapped from Kibbutz Be'eri

Rimon's song

YouTube video honors freed hostages and those still in captivity

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RIMON'S SONG



Eurovision remembrance

Eden Golan forgoes gala event to commemorate the Shoah

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Hamas says accepts ceasefire, Israel mulls terms

Official: Deal has elements Jerusalem can't accept • War cabinet sends team for talks

Israel is winning war even if set goals not being met

ANALYSIS

By YONAH JEREMY BOB

Israel is indeed winning the war – just not the way you might think.

In October, the government set unrealistic goals. It would have been wiser to be more modest with those military objectives.

But the fact remains that if the government had set more reasonable goals, and if one were to ask if these goals were desirable and achievable, Jerusalem would have quite a few triumphs to date.

80% of Hamas's organized military eliminated

With or without Rafah, the IDF has taken apart 19 out of the 24 existing Hamas battalions, killed around 14,000 terrorists, wounded potentially close to a similar number, and arrested thousands more.

In purely quantitative terms, there are still maybe 30% or more Hamas foot soldiers who faded into the civilian population. But, as a unified and organized combat terrorist group, the IDF demolished the vast majority of Hamas's military force. In all of the previous rounds with Hamas, the highest number of terrorists ever killed by Israel was just over 1,000. The blow that Hamas has suffered is not worse than in the past but is of a whole different order of magnitude.

Stopping most rockets

Hamas succeeded in firing 14 rockets at soldiers in Gaza on Sunday; there hasn't been a time since October when there was zero rocket fire for a full month. However, no rockets have been fired beyond the South since January, and even those have been few and far between.

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SMOKE BILLOWS after an Israeli bombardment in Rafah yesterday. (AFP via Getty Images)

IDF begins limited Rafah operation despite possible ceasefire deal

By YONAH JEREMY BOB and TZVI JOFFRE

The IDF on Monday began the evacuation of around 100,000 Palestinian civilians in Rafah – out of over one million – as it moved toward a limited, initial invasion of the last remaining Hamas stronghold in the enclave.

Late on Monday, the IDF said that it had begun targeted strikes against Hamas positions in Rafah.

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant clarified that the invasion was being rolled out incrementally and in multiple stages so that if Hamas at some point agreed to a reasonable hostage exchange deal that was accepted by Israel, it could be halted.

The military said that civilians in parts of eastern Rafah were told to evacuate to new, expanded humanitarian zones, which included al-Mawasi on the coast and parts of Khan Yunis slight-



SGT. MICHAEL RUZAL (IDF)

ly to the north, areas that are still in southern Gaza but that stretch as far northward as central Gaza. No one will be allowed to evacuate to northern Gaza.

Hamas is said to have between 4,000 and 8,000 fighters left, including at least four battalions in Rafah, out of the around 35,000 terrorists that it had prior to the war starting on October 7.

Although the army's land invasion of Rafah has not yet begun, the IDF's chief spokesperson, Lt.-Col. Daniel Hagari, said on Monday that the air force struck around 50 targets there to pave the way for a ground attack.

Hagari did not commit to slowing the Rafah operation, despite Hamas saying it had accepted a joint Egyptian-Qatari ceasefire proposal.

Israel's initial response was that this was not the agreed-upon deal and that it needed to review the proposal.

The new humanitarian zone includes field hospitals, tents, and increased provisions of food, water, medicine, and other supplies.

In April, Israel acquired 40,000 tents for a larger humanitarian intake zone ahead of the expected Rafah operation.

Additionally, the IDF is working in cooperation with international organizations

and several countries to allow an increase in humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Following cabinet approval, the IDF called on the population to evacuate through leaflets, text messages, phone calls, and statements in Arabic.

Shortly after the announcement, Palestinian media reported that the IDF began dropping leaflets over Rafah informing civilians of the evacuation. The leaflets warned that Gaza City is still off-limits, considered to be a "dangerous combat zone," and that it is "forbidden to approach the eastern and southern security fences."

The leaflets, published by the IDF as well, noted that the military would act with "extreme force" against terrorist organizations in the areas under the evacuation order. "Anyone who is near terrorist organizations puts

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By TOVAH LAZAROFF

Hamas's acceptance of a Gaza ceasefire proposal from Egypt and Qatar did not stop Israel from continuing its military operation in Rafah, even as Jerusalem sent a delegation to Cairo late Monday night to study the deal.

"The war cabinet unanimously decided that Israel will continue the operation in Rafah to exert military pressure on Hamas to advance the release of our hostages and the other goals of the war," the Prime Minister's Office said.

At the same time, "although the Hamas proposal is far from meeting Israel's requirements, Israel will send a delegation" to the negotiations so that it can be sure it explored every "possibility of reaching an agreement under conditions acceptable to Israel," the Prime Minister's Office added.

US National Security Communication Advisor John Kirby confirmed for reporters in Washington that Hamas had accepted a proposal, which the Biden administration was studying.

CIA Director William Burns "is looking at that response. He's talking to the Israelis about it, and we'll see where this goes," Kirby said.

"Hopefully, whatever is in this thing... can lead to those hostages getting out real soon with their families, where they need to be" given that "each new day passes, their lives get further at risk. So time is really of the essence here."

An official briefed on the ceasefire talks said that Hamas agreed to the latest proposal made by Israel on April 27, and there were no major changes since then.

The Qatari mediators had spoken to Hamas about this on Sunday and Monday, the source stated.

"What happens next depends on Israel," the source said, adding that, "The ball is in Israel's court."

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the proposal that Hamas had accepted was a watered-down version of an Egyptian offer and included elements that Israel could not accept.

"This would appear to be a ruse intended to make Israel

ISRAEL AT WAR



As explosions sound, Palestinians flee Rafah to seek shelter, Page 2

Pro-Palestinian students' war on complexity, Page 4

Gov't data shows average real wages for March rise by 3.5% compared to a year earlier, Page 6

look like the side refusing a deal," said the Israeli official.

Hamas's statement comes after intense negotiations in Cairo on Sunday involving Egyptian and Qatari delegations along with CIA director William Burns. He then traveled to Doha to consult with Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed Al Thani and is expected to visit Israel this week.

An American source told *The Jerusalem Post* on Monday: "Essentially, the talks fell through, they were on life support, which is what prompted Bill Burns to get on a plane and go to Qatar."

"Both the Americans and the Qataris, in a display of shared responsibility, engaged in heavy pressure and diplomacy, striving to breathe life back into the framework of an agreement." The American source further emphasized that we are at a very delicate and sensitive point in time, underscoring the mutual understanding of the situation.

"The Americans and the Qataris are keeping pressure on both sides to build the framework that has been agreed upon."

Taher Al-Nono, a Hamas official and adviser to Haniyeh, told Reuters that the proposal met the group's

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SHUTTING DOWN AL JAZEERA:

More symbolic than anything

ANALYSIS

By HERB KEINON

"In past generations, the Jews were accused of poisoning wells, of using the blood of children to bake matzah, of spreading diseases," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday night at the Holocaust Remembrance Day main ceremony at Yad Vashem. "Today, new plots of genocide and starvation in Gaza are being attributed to us."

One of the central vehicles for spreading those lies is Al Jazeera, the Qatari-owned news channel with tens of millions of viewers worldwide. On Sunday, the cabinet, acting on a Knes-

set law passed last month, announced it would shut down the network in Israel.

Perhaps because the announcement and initial steps to implement the closure took place on a Sunday, the reactions have been surprisingly muted.

Granted, the Foreign Press Association blasted the move as a "dark day for democracy," and *Haaretz* editorialized that today it is Al Jazeera, and tomorrow it will be an Israeli media outlet critical of the government. There was not the outrage that one might have expected from various capitals around the world, however, although US government spokespeople are sure to blast the move when asked about it this week at the daily State Department or White House briefings.

European and Arab capitals, however, may be reluctant to noisily blast Israel over the

move since many of them have taken similar steps in the past.

For instance, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt have all banned Al Jazeera at various points in time. And wouldn't it be rich if Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – who holds a world record in arresting journalists and closing down critical media outlets – sounds off on the issue?

There will be those who, justifiably, argue that Israel does not want to be compared in its treatment of the press to those countries. Then how about Europe?

In March 2022, shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine, the EU banned Russian government-owned RT (Russian Television) and the Sputnik news agency and radio broadcast service for, as EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell

said at the time, "systematic information manipulation and disinformation... as an operational tool in its assault of Ukraine."

In other words, these Kremlin-funded media outlets that unabashedly put Russian President Vladimir Putin's spin on the war were deemed propaganda tools spreading lies about the war in Ukraine. Replace RT and Sputnik with Al Jazeera, and the same could definitely be said about Al Jazeera and the war in Gaza. It is a propaganda tool in the service of Hamas, spreading lies and disinformation about the war in Gaza. If the EU could bar RT, then – using the same measuring stick – Israel can bar Al Jazeera.

Still, should it? Do the benefits outweigh the costs?

First, what are the costs? There is the possible cost to

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MARCHING ON

Holocaust survivor Sol Nayman takes part in the March of the Living yesterday at the entrance to Auschwitz. In September 1939, Nayman, then four years old, escaped with his family from east-central Poland to the Soviet Union. They were later sent to a labor camp, and when the war ended, they arrived at a displaced persons camp in Germany. Nayman emigrated to Canada in 1948, where he helped found a major clothing label. He and his wife, Queenie, have two sons and five grandchildren. See story, Page 2.

(Photo and text: Chen Schimmel)