

GNITN - Special Edition

Israel At War – Day 198

Rafah Offensive Coming Soon

Painful Blows Coming

We see in a [report](#) from *The Jerusalem Post* that Israel is going forward with the Rafah campaign:

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hinted that the IDF would soon launch a military operation in Rafah as he vowed to free the remaining 133 hostages held in Gaza, in a special address to the nation in advance of the Passover holiday, which begins on Monday night.

Netanyahu noted one of the reasons for the offensive:

“In the coming days we will increase the military and political pressure on Hamas because this is the only way to free our hostages and achieve our victory,” Netanyahu said on Sunday.

“Until now, all proposals for the release of our hostages have been rejected by Hamas outright,” Netanyahu explained as he blamed the terror group for the failed talks for a hostage deal.

With recent news that Hamas will only offer the release of only 20 hostages as part of a deal, the Prime Minister doubts that the terrorist group is serious about getting an acceptable offer on the table:

“Instead of withdrawing from its extreme positions, Hamas is counting on a rift among us. It draws encouragement from the [international] pressure being directed at the Government of Israel,” Netanyahu stated.

“As a result of this, it has only hardened its conditions for the release of our hostages,” Netanyahu said.

Israel has only one card to play now:

In light of the international pressure on Israel for a unilateral Gaza ceasefire that is divorced from a hostage release, Israel has very few pressure levers to free the hostages short of a Rafah operation.

Netanyahu used a familiar analogy to make his point:

In language reminiscent of the Passover story in which Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to allow the Jewish slaves to leave Egypt, Netanyahu said that Hamas was “hardening its heart and refusing to let our people go.”

“Therefore, we will strike it with additional painful blows – and this will happen soon,” Netanyahu vowed.

With more and more Gazans relocating north, these blows could be coming quickly after Passover concludes.

Only 40 Hostages Still Alive

According to a [news report](#) in *i24news.tv* of the 130 or so hostages thought to be alive, the number could be much lower:

Concerns are mounting over the fate of the hostages held by Hamas, with fears emerging that only 40 out of the 133 individuals remain alive, according to intelligence gathered by Israel's domestic security agency, Shin Bet.

The assessment could be accurate:

A source familiar with the intelligence efforts, as reported by The Daily Mail, remarked on the changed landscape since the attack, stating, "[Intelligence] is much easier to access than before October 7 when we had limited access to Gaza and we didn't have a lot of possibilities of sources. The situation is completely different because we are there."

As noted before, time is of the essence:

However, negotiations with Hamas present significant challenges, as emphasized by a security source who deemed it a "lost cause."

Yehonatan Sabban, representing the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, emphasized the urgency of the situation, stating, "The hostages in Gaza are running out of time."

However, one Israeli security agency denies the report as we read in an [article](#) on this from *The Jerusalem Post*:

The approximation was allegedly based on intelligence gathered by the Shin Bet, but the security agency merely denied these claims.

"The publication in question is not true and is not in the opinion of the Shin Bet," the agency said. "The numbers mentioned in the publication are in the writer's opinion only and are not based on information passed on by the Shin Bet. The publication in question is not true."

Still other publications support the fear that many hostages are no longer alive:

This report came shortly after, less than two weeks prior, US officials told the Wall Street Journal that they estimate most of the hostages taken from Israel and held by terror groups in the Gaza Strip are no longer alive.

CNN, at the same time, reported that Hamas told the mediators in the framework of hostage negotiations that it was unable to identify and locate 40 live hostages to carry out the first phase of the deal, according to an Israeli source, as well as another source privy to the details.

Holding out hope that these reports aren't accurate is always a good thing. But we must be ready to accept that Hamas isn't telling us the truth, yet again.

US Sanctions IDF Troops

We read in an [article](#) by *The Jerusalem Post* that the United States plans on issuing sanctions on an IDF unit, a move that isn't sitting well with the Prime Minister and others:

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lashed out at the United States for its plans to issue its first-ever sanctions against IDF units over alleged human rights violations, starting with the Netzah Yehuda Battalion, which in the past has been accused of mistreating Palestinians.

One instance is cited more than others as being used for the sanctions:

Among the more high-profile incidents was the death of Palestinian American Omar As'ad, 80, of a heart attack in January 2022 after he had been detained, blindfolded, gagged, and handcuffed by that battalion in the West Bank.

Netanyahu and others will fight against this:

"I will fight this with all my powers," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the Israeli public on Sunday in a video address.

Minister Benny Gantz, who is a former defense minister and IDF chief of staff, spoke with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday and asked him to rescind the decision, which, he warned, "will harm Israel's international legitimacy during the time of war."

He also explained that “the Israeli judicial system is strong and independent. All IDF units are subject to the IDF’s code of conduct and orders in accordance with international law.”

Both Netanyahu and Gantz took to social media as well:

The decision, Gantz wrote in a post on X, “sets a dangerous precedent and conveys the wrong message to our shared enemies during wartime.”

Netanyahu wrote on X on Saturday night that the decision was “the height of absurdity and a moral low.”

“In recent weeks, I have been working against the leveling of sanctions on Israeli citizens, including in my conversations with senior American government officials,” he stated.

“The government I head will act by all means against these moves,” Netanyahu stressed, adding that “sanctions must not be imposed on the Israel Defense Forces!”

Not everyone in the Israeli government is against the action:

Labor Party leader MK Merav Michaeli said that pending sanctions should not come as a surprise since “the US established a team to investigate the battalion” already two years ago.

“The political and military echelons cannot pretend they did not know about it,” Michaeli stated.

“Instead of wising up and dealing with the situation, we get yet another dose of denial and foot-dragging, lies and covering up the bitter reality,” Michaeli said.

The Netzah Yehuda Battalion should have been disbanded many years ago, she said, as she charged that the battalion “legitimizes” settler violence, “kills Palestinians for no real reason,” and “abuses Palestinian detainees.”

We must recall that it was the violence and instability in the West Bank that was considered a larger threat than Hamas leading up to October 7th. When the IDF is done with Hamas, the West Bank issues will move higher on the list once again.