

‘Without Conquering Rafah, Israel Cannot Win the War’: Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security President to TML

Keren Setton / March 22, 2024

Israel contemplates a pivotal operation in Rafah, Gaza, amid international pressure and humanitarian concerns, as Netanyahu seeks a path to victory and Blinken discusses peace

For weeks, Israel has been threatening to operate in the southern Gaza city of Rafah. According to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other senior officials, preparations have been underway, and the operation is imminent. The international community, spearheaded by the US, is on standby, raising increasing alarm regarding military action in the area that has become home to over one million Gaza residents who have been displaced from their homes as a result of Israel’s war on Hamas.

[...]

“The issue of Rafah has become highly sensitive,” said Col. (res.) **Eldad Shavit, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies** and a former senior intelligence officer. “This is partly because of Netanyahu’s repeated statements on the matter, but also because it is a very problematic issue that involves continued Hamas presence and a porous border with Egypt that enabled a lot of weapons smuggling into Gaza through Rafah.”

[...]

“Israel’s threats about Rafah may be a way to pressure Hamas on the hostage issue,” Shavit told The Media Line. “The Americans view the deal as highly important because it will come with a truce. It is their hope that during this truce, a more permanent cease-fire and a better solution to the humanitarian crisis may be reached.”

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“Israel will not be able to proclaim it has Gaza under control without curtailing Hamas’ operations in Rafah and preventing the smuggling from there,” said Shavit. “If the cease-fire talks fail, there will be increased public pressure to operate in Rafah because that is the only thing that hasn’t been done yet.”

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