

Condemnation Slows, but Does Not Stall, Israel's Assault on Rafah

Despite fierce criticism, Israel insists it must take control of Rafah and the border with Egypt to prevent future arms smuggling.

By Steven Erlanger, Isabel Kershner and Natan Odenheimer / May 25, 2024

Despite an international court order to stop its assault on Rafah, Israel says it will continue its operation, trying to walk a line between not angering its American allies too much while trying to achieve strategic aims that it considers too important to abandon.

[...]

Tamir Hayman, the executive director of the Institute for National Security Studies and a reserve major general and a former head of military intelligence from 2018 to 2021, said that Israeli negotiators misread their Egyptian counterparts and thought Cairo would not object so strongly to its takeover of the crossing. Cairo has now said it will join South Africa in petitioning the International Court of Justice to find Israel guilty of violating the Genocide Convention.

[...]

But Mr. Michael and Israeli officials agree that the four Hamas battalions still in Rafah are not as well trained as those in the north and are not an urgent problem. Strategically, it is far more important for Israel to seal the border with Egypt, Mr. Hayman said.

Despite Egyptian denials of any tolerance of smuggling into Gaza, Mr. Hayman said, Israeli intelligence believes that most of Hamas's weapons and components came from Egypt, either through smuggling tunnels or through the crossing itself, often carefully hidden over the years in regular commercial truck traffic.

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