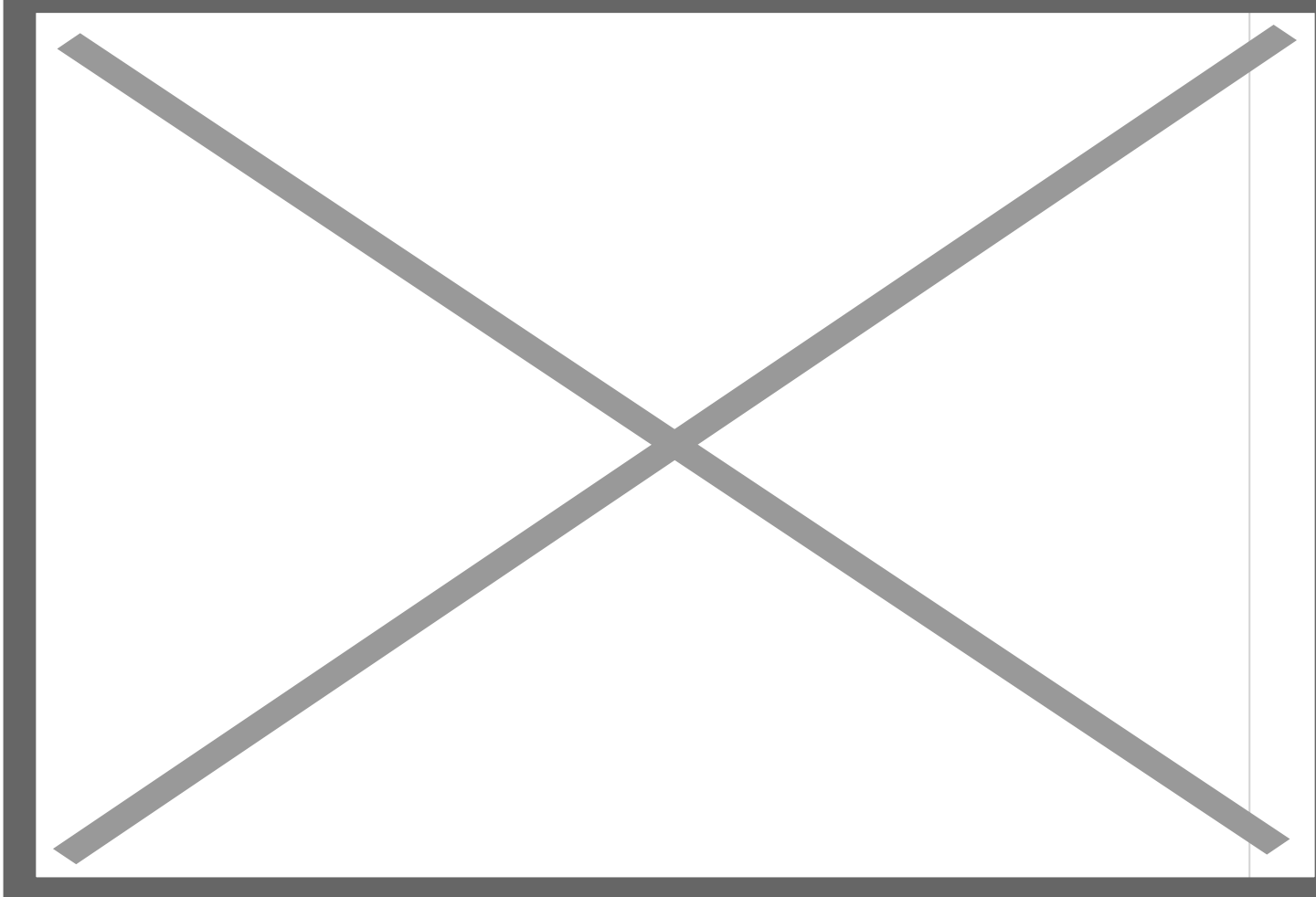


South Africa recalls diplomatic personnel from Israel over Gaza war

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South Africa's Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor meets with her counterpart from Iran in Tehran
[File: Atta Kenare/AFP]

Tehran, November 6 (RHC)-- The South African government has said it will recall all diplomats from Israel to signal its concern over the situation in Gaza.

Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, a minister in the president's office, said on Monday that all diplomatic staff in Tel Aviv would be called to return to Pretoria for consultations, without providing further details.

"We are ... extremely concerned at the continued killing of children and innocent civilians in the Palestinian territories and we believe the nature of response by Israel has become one of collective punishment," Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor told a later press conference.

"We felt it important that we do signal the concern of South Africa while continuing to call for a comprehensive cessation [of hostilities]."

Pretoria has long been a vocal supporter of the Palestinian cause, with the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party often linking it to its own earlier struggle against apartheid.

Pandor said the recall of the diplomats was "normal practice," adding the envoys would give a "full briefing" on the situation to the government, which will then decide whether it can be of assistance or if a "continued relationship is actually able to be sustained."

Several countries have recalled diplomats from Israel as global criticism of its continued bombardment of Gaza grows.

NATO member Turkey did so on Saturday, joining fellow Muslim states such as Jordan and Bahrain. Several South American countries have also broken ties following Bolivia, which at the start of November became the first nation to sever diplomatic links with Israel due to its "disproportionate" attacks in Gaza.

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