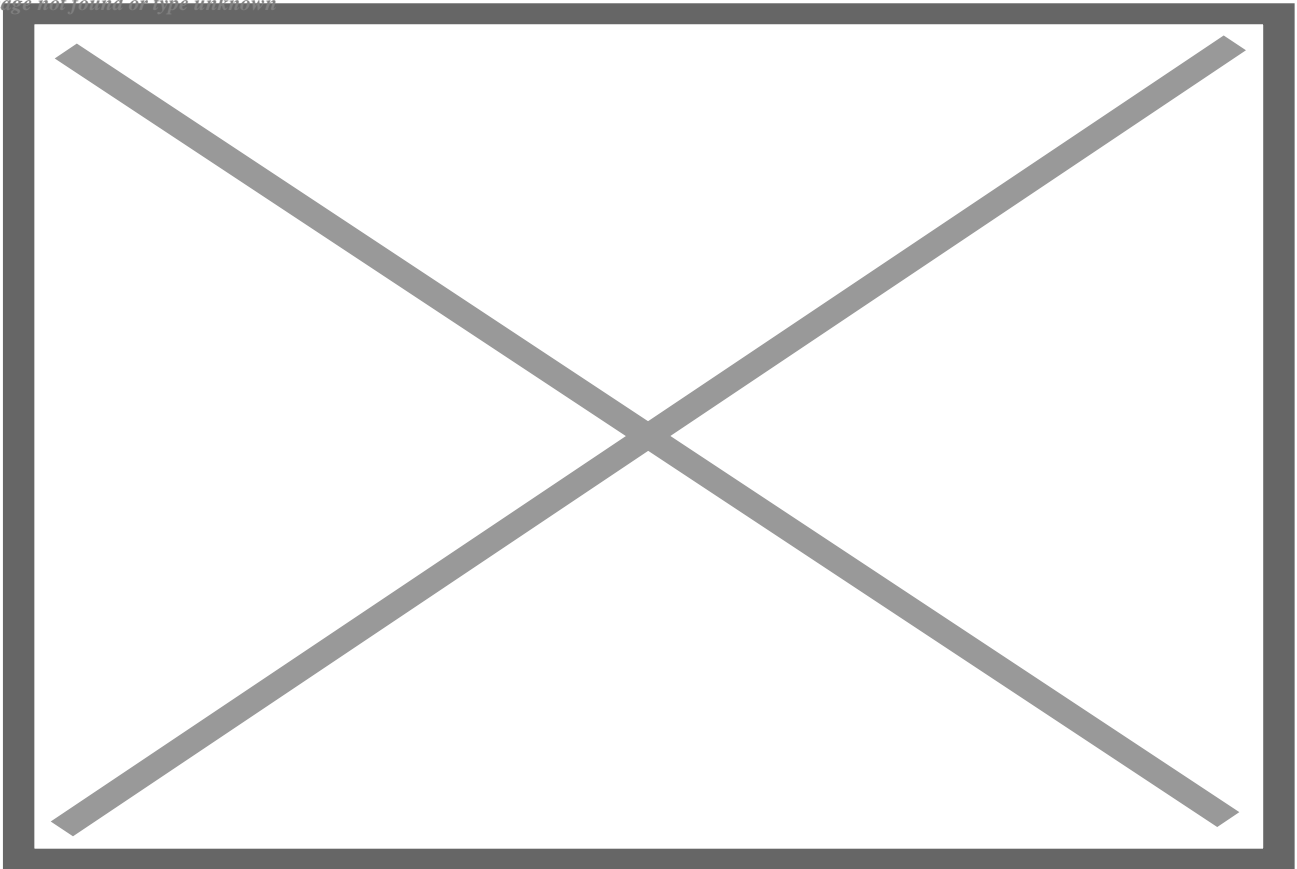


Israel reportedly pulls out troops from southern Gaza as attacks enter seventh month

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Tel Aviv, April 7 (RHC)-- The Israeli military says it has withdrawn its ground troops from the southern Gaza Strip, including Khan Younis, amid conflicting reports about the scale and duration of the disengagement.

“Today, Sunday April 7th, the IDF’s 98th commando division has concluded its mission in Khan Younis. The division left the Gaza Strip in order to recuperate and prepare for future operations,” the army said in a statement issued in Tel Aviv.

The military confirmed the reported withdrawal to Reuters news agency, but added that one brigade has remained, without giving further details. An Israeli brigade is typically made of a few thousand soldiers. It was unclear whether the reported withdrawal would delay a long-threatened incursion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, which Israeli leaders have said is needed to eliminate Hamas.

Meanwhile, Al Jazeera's Imran Khan said the Israeli claim of withdrawal could be a "new strategy." "We're told that they don't need that number of troops to put this new strategy into place," said Khan, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem.

"But if you listen to the Israeli military analysts, you get a slightly different take on things. What we are hearing is that this could be a redeployment of forces in order to get ready for a ground offensive into Rafah," Khan said, noting that the United States is "dead set" against the plan.

The White House, commenting on the partial withdrawal, said it was likely to be an opportunity for troops to "rest and refit." "They've been on the ground for four months, the word we're getting is they're tired, they need to be refit," said the White House's National Security Spokesman John Kirby.

The Israeli announcement came as its war on Gaza hits the six-month mark, leaving a deadly trail that the International Court of Justice described as a "plausible case of genocide."

Egypt, meanwhile, is preparing to host a new round of talks aimed at reaching a ceasefire in Gaza and release of captives taken by Hamas. The withdrawal is one of the demands that Hamas made before agreeing to a ceasefire with Israel.

Israel's offensive in Gaza, launched after the attack by Hamas on Israel six months ago on October 7, has focused in the past months on the south of the Palestinian enclave.

Rafah has become the last refuge for more than a million Palestinians sheltering in the territory near the border with Egypt. More than 250 people were seized and some 1,200 people during the October 7 attack, according to Israeli tallies.

In the Israeli operation that followed, more than 33,100 Palestinians, including 13,800 children, have been killed, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza.

According to the United Nations estimates, about 1.7 million people have been forced to flee their homes and into shelters, a situation, which the the world body warned could lead to widespread famine

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