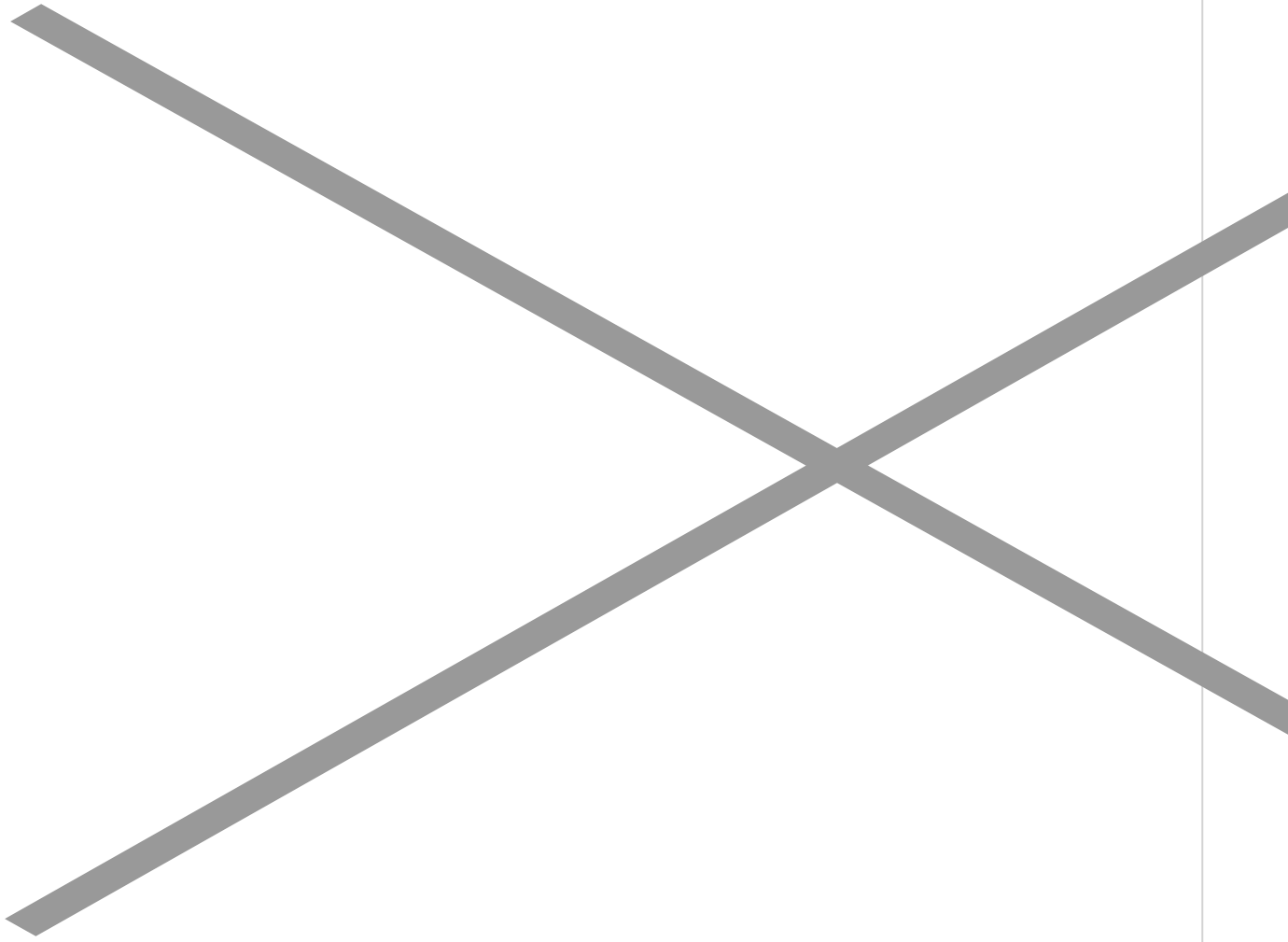


Hamas affirms Israel uses negotiations as cover for Rafah invasion

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Gaza City, May 9 (RHC)-- A senior Hamas official says the Israeli regime is prolonging underway negotiations on a potential truce in Tel Aviv's months-long war on the Gaza Strip so it can carry out a full-scale invasion of the southern Gaza city of Rafah

Izzat al-Rishq, who is a member of the Palestinian resistance movement's Political Bureau, made the remarks on Wednesday. "Israel is not serious about reaching an agreement," he said. It "uses the negotiations as a cover to invade Rafah and occupy the crossing," the Palestinian official added.

The Israeli military sent tanks into Rafah on Tuesday and seized the nearby crossing into Egypt, which is the main corridor for aid into the besieged Palestinian territory. The regime has vowed for weeks to launch a ground incursion against the city.

The city is hosting around 1.5 million Palestinians, who are taking refuge there after fleeing from the ravages of the devastating war.

At least 34,844 people, most of them women and children, have been killed so far as a result of the war that the regime began on October 7 following a retaliatory operation by Gaza's resistance groups.

Rishq said, "[Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu tries to fabricate excuses to evade negotiations, and he blames Hamas and the mediators."

Hamas has already agreed to a proposed truce deal put forward by Qatari and Egyptian mediators. The proposal includes a three-stage truce, each lasting 42 days. The potential deal would allow a captive swap, withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, return of displaced Palestinians, a permanent ceasefire, and reconstruction of Gaza.

Israel has, however, rejected the proposal.

Rishq said, "Hamas is adhering to its position that it conveyed to the mediators by approving their proposal."

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