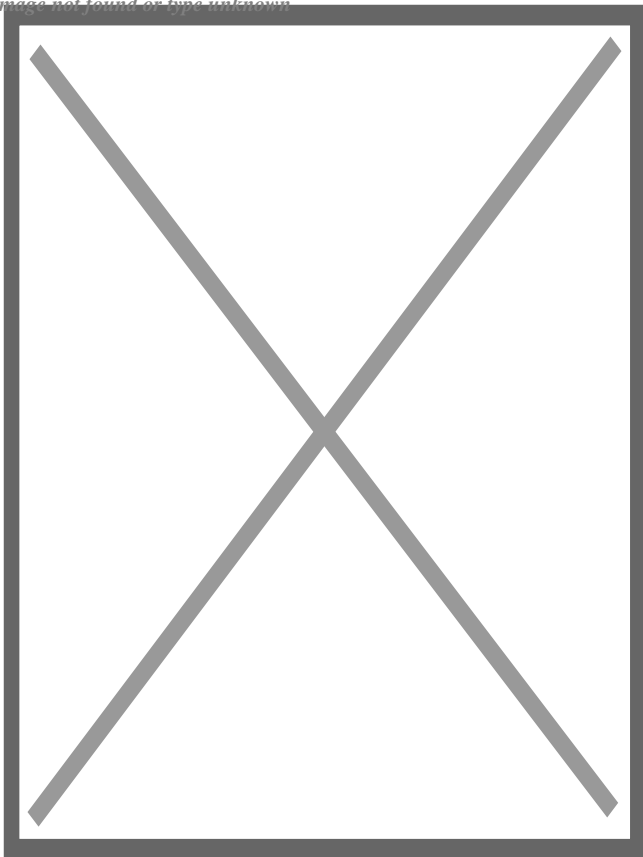


*Despite international
condemnation of its genocidal
aggression, Israel says war on
Gaza will last another seven
months*

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Tel Aviv, May 30 (RHC)-- Israel's national security adviser says the continuing war on Gaza is likely to last through the end of the year. In an interview with Israel's Kan public broadcaster on Wednesday, Tzachi

Hanegbi said “we are expecting another seven months of fighting” to destroy the military and governing capabilities of Hamas and the smaller Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) group.

His remarks came as Israel finds itself increasingly isolated on the world stage nearly eight months into the assault, with even the United States and other close allies expressing outrage over the civilian death toll.

Hanegbi defended Israel’s ongoing operations in Rafah, on Gaza’s border with Egypt, saying the frontier had become a “smuggling kingdom” since 2007, when Hamas began governing Gaza. “Every rocket, every explosive device, every shot fired at Israel is because that border was breached,” he said.

Later on Wednesday, an Israeli military spokesman said the army had gained “operational control” over the narrow Philadelphi Corridor, a buffer zone between Egypt and Gaza that was created as part of the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt.

“In recent days, our forces have taken operational control of the Philadelphi Corridor,” army spokesman Daniel Hagari said in a televised address.

Hanegbi’s remarks raise questions about the future of Gaza and what kind of role Israel will play in it. Already, top ally the U.S. has demanded that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu produce a postwar vision for the Palestinian territory, and his defence minister and a top governing partner have warned that he must take steps to ensure that Israel does not remain in Gaza indefinitely.

Israel’s assault has already devastated Gaza’s urban landscape, displaced most of the territory’s population and sparked a humanitarian catastrophe and widespread hunger. Israel claims it must dismantle Hamas’s last remaining battalions in Rafah and also said it will seek indefinite security control over the Gaza Strip.

Hamas has rejected any postwar plan that excludes the group, reiterating that it will remain in Gaza.

Over the past several days, the Rafah offensive has so far killed dozens of Palestinians as NGOs and professional unions declared Gaza a “famine-stricken” zone. Recent attacks have struck so-called safe humanitarian zones near Rafah, killing dozens of people, according to Palestinian officials. Israeli tanks moved into the heart of Rafah city on Tuesday despite an order from the International Court of Justice for Israel to end its attacks on the area.

Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Deir el-Balah, said that in the central part of Rafah city, there is “a confirmed report of families trapped inside their residential homes, caught in the line of artillery fire.” Israeli quadcopters had pursued people there, he said, preventing them from evacuating to safer areas.

“From the northeast to the northwest of Rafah, where tent camps have been attacked in recent days, the situation is getting worse by the hour because of the expansive military operations,” Mahmoud said. “At the same time, nearly all health and public facilities are pushed out of service right now.”

The World Court said Israel had not explained how it would keep evacuees from Rafah safe and provide food, water and medicine. Its ruling also called on Hamas to release hostages taken from Israel on October 7 immediately and unconditionally.

Rafah residents said Israeli tanks had pushed into Tal as-Sultan in the west and Yibna and near Shaboura in the center before retreating towards a buffer zone on the border with Egypt, rather than staying put as they have in other offensives.

Palestinian health officials said on Wednesday that 19 civilians had been killed in Israeli air strikes and shelling across Gaza.

Health Minister Majed Abu Ramadan urged Washington to pressure Israel to open the Rafah crossing to Egypt for aid supplies, saying that there was no indication that Israeli authorities would do so soon and that patients in besieged Gaza were dying for lack of treatment.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, reiterated its opposition to a major ground offensive in Rafah on Tuesday while saying it did not believe such an operation was under way.

The armed wing of Hamas and that of its ally PIJ said they confronted invading forces in Rafah with antitank rockets and mortar bombs and blew up explosive devices they had planted, resulting in numerous successful hits.

The Israeli military said three Israeli soldiers were killed and three badly wounded.

In the nearby city of Khan Younis, an Israeli air strike killed three people overnight, including Salama Baraka, a former senior Hamas police officer, medics and Hamas media said. Another killed four people, including two children, medics said.

In northern Gaza, Israeli forces shelled Gaza City neighbourhoods and moved deeper into Jabalia, where residents said large residential districts were destroyed.

More than 36,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's Gaza offensive, according to health officials.

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