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# Israel has an opportunity to declare victory after the operation in Rafah



The Israeli army's action in Rafah has the potential to end the seven-month operation in the Gaza Strip and bring in a period of peace and reconstruction.

Because Israel decided to carry out a military operation in Rafah despite the warnings of its allies, particularly the US, to refrain, it assumed the opportunity, but also the responsibility, for determining the timing of the peace.

Whether the operation in Rafah will be the last point of the conflict in Gaza is primarily up to Israel, and there are many reasons for Israel to do so.

It appears that there is currently sufficient data available for Israel to proclaim victory and end the operation in Gaza.

The action in Rafah followed a dramatic turn of events in the last few days. They included Hamas's sudden acceptance of the peace arrangement that the Arab partners, Egypt and Qatar, made in cooperation with the Western partners.

This twist did not please Israel, which, by sending its diplomats to Cairo, remained in the negotiation process but rejected the plan as different from its earlier proposal and assessed it as Hamas's trick in an attempt to buy time.

## The last goal

The entry of troops into Rafah last Monday was Israel's response to the peace proposal, with which Hamas also agreed, to end the conflict in three phases of 42 days each and begin the normalisation of life in the Gaza Strip.

The key point of Israel's rejection of the offered arrangement is the definition of a period of peace, that is, the Israeli military presence in Gaza.

## If Israel manages to destroy Hamas' combat potential during its "limited" operation in Rafah, it will practically mean fulfilling the third goal of the Israeli operation

Israel's military response in Rafah, which followed, means that the government of Benjamin Netanyahu insists on fully achieving one of the three goals it set out at the start of the operation - to prevent the possibility of Hamas re-creating the military potential to threaten Israel in the future.

If Israel manages to destroy Hamas' combat potential during its "limited" operation in Rafah, it will practically mean fulfilling the third goal of the Israeli operation, which is the preventive removal of Hamas as a threat.

Whether that happens will depend on Israel's assessment of the effects of the Rafah action.

## Hamas has already been defeated

Even before Israel's army entered Rafah, it achieved its proclaimed goal of destroying Hamas's potential to harm Israel militarily again.

Only 20% of Hamas existed at the organisational level before the operation in Rafah; 19 of its total 24 battalions were destroyed, and the remaining 3,000 to 10,000 of its members have been hiding among civilians, **concluded** the Jerusalem Post's military analyst, Yonah Jeremy Bob.

"Hamas has lost many of its pre-war capabilities and likely will not be able to regain them again for years to come, if not longer", wrote Yonah Jeremy Bob.

## Hamas's sudden acceptance of the peace arrangement proposed by the Arab states was another signal that it was aware of the proximity of military defeat

Hamas's sudden acceptance of the peace arrangement proposed by the Arab states was, therefore, another signal that it was aware of the proximity of military defeat.

It was also a last-minute attempt to stop the announced (and contested) Israeli operation in Rafah, but it was too late.

Even before that, at the end of April, Hamas **indicated** that it wanted to save what could be saved when its leaders, again surprisingly, said that they would be ready to disarm if the two-state arrangement within the 1967 borders was implemented.

However, their frequent announcements that they were ready for peace definitely lost credibility last Sunday when Hamas fired 14 missiles at Israeli positions in Gaza, killing four Israeli soldiers.

## The patience of allies

Benjamin Netanyahu's government has long endured warnings from allies, particularly the US, not to take military action in Rafah. Fears of large civilian casualties were justified because the densely populated area is home to around one million, and according to UNRWA, there are as many as 1.4 million Palestinians, primarily refugees from other parts of Gaza.

However, the Israeli war cabinet took the risk of that condemnation, expecting that the action in Rafah could bring a final victory over Hamas, which means the total destruction of Hamas.

An additional motive for launching the Israeli action is that in the coming days, it is expected that the pier built by the US forces will be operational, through which the main delivery

of humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians will take place.



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Washington continues to criticise Israel for ignoring its demands not to intervene in Rafah, but it will not take more drastic steps to thwart it.

President Joe Biden and PM Netanyahu **discussed** Rafah last Monday. The US President emphasised opposition to Israel's "major ground operation". However, Israel declared the operation "limited", taking extensive measures to protect civilians and urging them to evacuate the city.

This points to the tacit American acceptance of the Israeli operation, expecting that it will be the last in a series and that a massive influx of humanitarian aid and care for civilians will soon begin.

Israel has the opportunity to end the operation in Rafah by declaring the fulfilment of its original war objectives (with the release of the hostages captured by Hamas), about which an agreement was reached in the peace process.

The prerequisite is that the operation should be short and without endangering civilians to the extent that was the case in previous actions in the Gaza Strip. Any delay, particularly the suffering of civilians, would end the patience of the Arab mediators, particularly the US, towards Israel.