

Israel's Rafah test could show path to toppling Hamas

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 10.11.2025

The debate over the fate of Hamas terrorists trapped in tunnel networks under IDF-controlled territory in Rafah may seem like a minor incident amid the constant flow of events, but its outcome could decisively shape how our enemies and regional states assess whether Israel is truly determined to dismantle its adversaries or can be appeased with superficial fixes.

Hamas' military wing made clear early this week that fighter surrender or weapons abandonment remain off the table. Mohammad Nazzal, a senior Hamas official abroad, rejected exile outside Gaza and urged mediators to intervene.

Turkey wasted no time seizing this as another diplomatic opportunity, with sources saying it is "working to ensure safe passage for approximately 200 'Gazan civilians' trapped in Rafah tunnels" - as if 200 civilians simply got stuck in underground passages.

The deteriorating relationship between Ankara and Jerusalem, sparked by Turkish arrest warrants and Israel's response, combined with Israeli opposition to Turkish participation in Gaza's multinational force, will feature in Jared Kushner's discussions with Netanyahu, though not as the central focus.

Washington's primary objective is stabilizing the ceasefire. Meeting this goal requires advancing to stage two of the Trump plan and generating implementation momentum. With everyone occupied by processes and mechanisms, reality on the ground will shift toward non-combat, enabling Trump to pursue his broader diplomatic ambitions.

From Israel's perspective, however, the ceasefire is not the end goal. Particularly not now, after recovering living hostages and most deceased remains. Eliminating enemy capabilities and removing weapons from the territory remain Israel's core objectives, which cannot be sacrificed to ceasefire demands or satisfied through cosmetic arrangements.

Furthermore, Israel's approach in Gaza will directly

impact Hezbollah arrangements (and the reverse), leaving no room for creative half-measures that sound good but deliver nothing.

Even without this consideration, regional discourse is already showing such formulas emerging. Examples include attempts to limit disarmament definitions to offensive weapons only - excluding tunnels, personal arms, and other capabilities from discussion. Another involves establishing an "administrative committee" for civilian Gaza governance, supposedly without Hamas participation, when the terror group already influences personnel selection and will clearly control such governance as the Strip's dominant force.

Returning to the besieged in Rafah - their number remains unclear. Media reports citing Israeli sources estimate 150 to 200. Foreign press mentioned lower figures, while Hamas websites simply stated the military wing withholds information due to sensitivity, describing them as "Qassam elite" facing high risk "while contending with medical supply shortages, electricity deficits, and the need to secure tunnels after extensive war damage."

Hamas spokesmen have raised no claims about broken commitments on this matter. They frame the connection to recovering IDF soldier Hadar Goldin's remains through humanitarian considerations and stability interests.

Given these circumstances, Israel possesses every advantage to transform this incident into a powerful symbol of its Hamas dismantlement commitment. Time favors us here, and provided our forces can block attacks from the besieged or other directions, no rush exists. Regardless, this event's conclusion must be decisive - mass surrender, detention or terrorist deaths. Images and publicity carry value. This is how regimes fall. Exile, as some mediators suggest, while not inherently rejected, should only be acceptable as a post-surrender, post-arrest step, never as a replacement.

A *Al-Resalah* Hamas website editorial characterized the besieged issue as testing Hamas' capacity for post-war challenges. "It combines military, diplomatic, and humanitarian aspects and conveys an important message to the Palestinian public and the world regarding Hamas's ability to protect its people and manage humanitarian crises, in an extremely complex environment and under international supervision." This equally tests Israeli determination, providing further reason Israel cannot accept any solution Hamas would claim as an

achievement.

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