

Israel-Hamas war

Israel pounds southern Gaza after US warning on civilian deaths

Evacuation orders appear to signal preparations for ground offensive in territory's second city Khan Younis



Smoke rises after an explosion in the city of Khan Younis on Saturday © Ahmad Hasaballah/Getty Images

Mehul Srivastava and **Neri Zilber** in Tel Aviv and **Chloe Cornish** in Jerusalem 3 HOURS AGO

Israel has ordered an evacuation of a large area of land in southern Gaza, as it stepped up an aerial bombardment of the enclave that has killed hundreds of people in the three days since a truce with Hamas broke down.

The evacuation order appeared to signal preparations for an Israeli offensive against Hamas in and around Khan Younis, [Gaza](#)'s second-largest city and now the largest population centre in the south. Leaflets have been dropped and text messages sent that have warned of heavy military activity to come.

Israel's military spokesperson, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, said on Monday that the IDF had "entered a new phase" in the war and was "pursuing Hamas wherever Hamas is hiding — in the north and in the south".

"Every rocket launcher, weapons depot, command and control centre, senior commander, underground infrastructure and any hide-out where our hostages may be held," he added.

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Israeli army to pursue Hamas in north and south of Gaza, says Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari © Reuters

Reports in the Israeli media and from inside Gaza indicated that IDF forces stationed in northern Gaza had begun a tentative shift southward, just as the IDF said it was continuing in its offensive against remaining Hamas strongholds in the north. The IDF said air strikes killed two Hamas battalion commanders in northern Gaza on Sunday.

Israel's military operation in southern Gaza would replicate an earlier one against Hamas in the north of the enclave, Herzi Halevi, chief of general staff of the Israel Defense Forces, suggested on Sunday.

"Just as we [fought against Hamas] strongly and thoroughly in the northern Gaza Strip, we are also doing it now in the southern Gaza Strip," Halevi told IDF troops massed outside the besieged Palestinian territory.

The escalated fighting came even after US officials, from secretary of defence Lloyd Austin to vice-president Kamala Harris, warned Israel to take more steps to protect civilians in Gaza. The US pays for as much as a fifth of Israel's defence budget — currently about \$3.8bn a year — under an Obama administration agreement.

"In this kind of a fight, the centre of gravity is the civilian population. And if you drive them into the arms of the enemy, you replace a tactical victory with a strategic defeat," Austin told the Reagan National Defense Forum in California at the weekend.

Asked on Sunday about the US concerns, Eylon Levy, Israeli government spokesperson, said: "We completely agree that far too many people have been killed in this war. It's a sad fact that everyone who has been killed since October 7 . . . would still be alive if Hamas had not decided to launch this war."

Responding to Harris's comments that the civilian death toll in Gaza was too high,

Levy insisted that “the Israeli army has made every effort [in] upholding our obligations under international law to get civilians out of harm’s way”.

Gazans have been ordered by IDF to evacuate from certain blocks around Khan Younis

- Blocks ordered to evacuate
- Refugee camp

- Reported missile strikes
- Refugee camp area



Last updated: Dec 4 9am GMT. Sources: FT research, Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project, Gisha, OpenStreetMap, IDF

Israel and Hamas returned to fighting when a week-long truce brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the US collapsed on Friday.

The pause in hostilities allowed for the release of about 100 Israeli women and children and foreigners held hostage by Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups. Israel in return freed about 240 Palestinian women and children from Israeli jails, and there was a fresh influx of humanitarian aid into Gaza, which has been controlled by Hamas since 2007.

More than 15,520 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began, according to Palestinian officials. Israel estimates that 1,200 people were killed by Hamas during its attack on October 7, when the group also took about 240 hostages.

Palestinian officials said on Sunday that 316 people had been killed since hostilities resumed on Friday. But they also said this counted only those who had been brought to hospitals, and not those still under the rubble.

The UN said dozens of people had been killed in a Saturday air strike on a six-storey building in a refugee camp in northern Gaza, after residents were given an hour and a half's notice to evacuate it.

A block in Gaza City was hit later on Saturday, destroying 50 residential buildings, the UN added. The number of casualties caused by this incident is not yet known.

After concerns about the civilian toll were also conveyed by US secretary of state Antony Blinken to Israel's war cabinet, the IDF made public plans for neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood evacuation orders to be issued to Palestinians ahead of military operations.

But the UN, human rights groups and Palestinians said the orders were impractical, especially when almost the entire 2.3mn population of the besieged enclave was already crowded into the southern part of Gaza.

Israel has suggested, but has yet to enforce, a 14 sq km so-called safe zone in southern Gaza, an area slightly larger than London's Heathrow airport. UN officials have said that safe zones cannot be unilaterally declared in a war zone.

Along Israel's northern border with Lebanon, the IDF said an anti-tank missile targeted an Israeli military vehicle, injuring soldiers with shrapnel. The IDF struck back with artillery.

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