

Rafah

Israel expects Gaza war against Hamas to last for seven more months

National security adviser Tzachi Hanegbi restates timeframe for 'destroying' militant group in besieged enclave



'What's needed is patience and to know how to stand strong,' said national security adviser Tzachi Hanegbi, pictured left with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu © Abir Sultan/Pool/AFP/Getty Images

Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv YESTERDAY

Israel expects to continue the war in Gaza until the end of the year in order to achieve its goal of “destroying” Hamas’s rule in the besieged Palestinian territory, a top security official has said.

Tzachi Hanegbi, the country’s national security adviser and a confidant of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said Israel’s original war plan [against Hamas](#) defined “the year 2024 as a year of combat. We’re now in the fifth month of 2024, which means that this year we are expecting another seven months of fighting.”

The defiant comments in a radio interview come despite the country’s increasing international isolation and mounting pressure to end the war as Israeli forces step up their offensive in the [southern Gaza city of Rafah](#).

The Financial Times reported in December that Israeli officials were planning for the war against Hamas to last for [most of this year](#), at varying levels of intensity, in order to “destroy” the militant group as the leading military and political power in Gaza.

These war aims had not changed, Hanegbi said in the interview with Reshet Bet radio, with the coming months intended “to deepen our achievements and to achieve our goal”.

“What’s needed is patience and to know how to stand strong,” Hanegbi said. “This is what has allowed this nation to survive for 75 years, and before that for 3,000 years. Not to stand there with a stopwatch for ourselves or set . . . ultimatums.”



Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip. Despite the scale and length of Israel’s offensive, most of Hamas’s top leaders in Gaza remain at large © Israeli Army/AFP/Getty Images

Some 1,200 people were killed during Hamas’s October 7 attack on the Jewish state that triggered the conflict, with about 250 more people taken hostage, according to Israeli authorities.

In response, the Israeli military launched a ferocious offensive in Gaza that, after nearly eight months, has reduced vast swaths of the strip to rubble, displaced much of the territory’s population of more than 2mn, and led to a humanitarian catastrophe, according to international aid groups. More than 36,000 people have been killed, according to health authorities in the Hamas-controlled territory.

Earlier this month Israel embarked on a major operation in Rafah, which Israeli officials consider to be Hamas’s only remaining stronghold in the enclave, in an attempt to dismantle the group’s last four standing battalions.

Despite the scale and length of Israel’s offensive, most of Hamas’s top leaders in Gaza remain at large.

The Israel Defense Forces on Wednesday said it had attained “tactical” control over the Philadelphi corridor along Gaza’s border with Egypt, giving the military the ability

to “cut off the oxygen line” that Hamas has used to resupply and rearm its fighters.

The IDF said it had discovered 20 tunnels into Egypt, some of which it claims were known to Cairo, as well as 82 access points which the military will aim to dismantle. Israeli forces have also located rockets along the route.

The results of the operation proved “it was necessary to operate [in Rafah]”, it added.

In recent weeks Hamas militants have also [re-emerged in areas of northern Gaza](#) previously cleared by the IDF, necessitating renewed operations and fierce street-to-street fighting. On Wednesday, three Israeli soldiers were killed and several injured by a booby-trapped house in Rafah, the Israeli military announced.

Israel has faced growing international condemnation because of the high death toll and humanitarian conditions inside Gaza, including [censure for alleged war crimes](#) by both the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court this month. Israeli officials have rejected the allegations.

International criticism increased over the weekend after an air strike targeting two senior Hamas commanders in north-western Rafah killed some 45 civilians sheltering in a [nearby camp for displaced persons](#). The IDF said it was still investigating the cause of the huge fire that tore through the makeshift encampment.

Yet Hanegbi, speaking at a security conference in Tel Aviv on Monday, said the Rafah offensive would be completed “in a few weeks”, and that Israel would then “transition from a high-intensity [military] campaign” in Gaza to a low-intensity phase of the war.

Netanyahu, for his part, has insisted repeatedly he would not stop until “total victory” over Hamas was achieved despite the pressures at home and abroad.

“I am not ready to surrender and retreat. I am not ready to end the war before all its objectives are completed,” the long-serving Israeli leader said in parliament on Monday.

