

Israel-Hamas war

Israel 'starting to implement' plan to starve north Gaza, say rights groups

'Generals' Plan' calls for closed military zone and evacuation, with those remaining treated as combatants and denied aid



Palestinian families arrive in Gaza City after evacuating their homes in the Jabalia area. Under the Generals' Plan, civilians would be ordered to leave north Gaza © Omar Al-Qattaa/AFP/Getty Images

James Shotter in Jerusalem, Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv and Malaika Kanaaneh Tapper in London 6 HOURS AGO

Israel appears to be starting to implement a controversial plan to force Hamas into submission by laying siege to the north of Gaza and starving those who remain, Israeli human rights groups have warned.

The so-called Generals' Plan, created by former national security adviser Giora Eiland, calls for Israel to order civilians to leave north Gaza for other areas of the enclave, and then declare the north a closed military zone.

Those who did not leave would be considered military targets, and totally cut off from supplies of food, water and medicines.

Eiland said the plan — which he presented to parliament's defence committee last month — is designed to ratchet up pressure on Hamas to release the 101 Israeli hostages that the Palestinian militant group still holds in Gaza. But human rights groups say that it would trap civilians, and that carrying out the plan would breach international law.



Former national security adviser Giora Eiland created the so-called Generals' Plan © Ariel Schall/AP

The Israeli military has denied implementing Eiland's plan. On a call with journalists on Sunday, Nadav Shoshani, a spokesman for the Israel Defense Forces said: "We have not received a plan like that."

According to two people with knowledge of internal Israeli deliberations, senior Israeli security officials are unwilling to officially approve the plan, with some considering parts of it to be violations of international law.

But Israeli media reported last month that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had told MPs he

was considering the scheme. On Monday, four human rights groups — Gisha, B'Tselem, PHR-I and Yesh Din — said there were “alarming signs” that Israel was “quietly” starting to implement it, and called on the international community to stop it. The Israeli prime minister’s office declined to comment.

Eiland said he put forward his plan because a year of fighting had failed to pressure Hamas into releasing the remaining hostages it holds in Gaza, some of whom are believed to have died.

Israel could increase pressure on Hamas by besieging and taking total control of northern Gaza, and threatening to keep control “theoretically speaking forever” if Hamas did not free the hostages, he said.

But human rights groups said that many civilians would be unable to leave the north, and that even if they did, there was nowhere safe to go in Gaza.

Treating those remaining in the north as combatants simply because of their presence there, and issuing open-ended evacuation orders, were both clear breaches of international law, said Tania Hary, executive director of Gisha.

“People who can’t go — and also anyone who chooses to stay — don’t lose their status as non-combatants. They continue to be civilians,” she said. “And Israel still has an obligation to protect them and to follow the rules of international humanitarian law.”

Israel launched a new, massive offensive 10 days ago in northern Gaza, which was the strip’s most densely populated area before the war. Most of the north’s population has been forced to leave and prevented from returning. But the UN estimates that more than 400,000 people are still sheltering there.

Israel’s military began by bombarding and then encircling [Jabalia](#), before expanding the offensive to cover other areas nearby. Israel launched almost as many attacks and air strikes in north Gaza in two days last week — 118 — as the total for all of September, which came to 140, according to the UN.

It has also issued a renewed wave of evacuation orders, telling people to head south to an overcrowded area that Israel describes as a humanitarian zone in al-Mawasi on the coast in southern Gaza. Israel has repeatedly bombed the area, claiming that militants are using it as cover and to launch rocket strikes at Israel.

There has also been a sharp reduction in aid deliveries. According to Israel's own figures, the average amount of aid that arrived in the entire enclave each day so far this month is less than quarter of the amount delivered per day in September.

Philippe Lazzarini, head of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, said the UN had "not been allowed to provide any assistance including food" to northern Gaza since September 30.

On Monday, amid a growing international outcry, including from US vice-president Kamala Harris, Israel said 30 trucks of flour had been allowed to enter north Gaza, and an additional 100 through the Kerem Shalom crossing in the south of the strip.

Analysts dismissed that as far too little to meet the population's needs but, according to one person with knowledge of Gaza's humanitarian situation, it might indicate that Israel was backing down.

"The numbers [for aid] are minuscule, and not only in the north. De facto there was a change in policy and what we were seeing fit all the parameters for implementing Eiland's plan," the person said. "But I think today's resumption of semi-normal aid delivery reflects an understanding that the plan cannot actually be executed in practice, in the real world," they added.

All of Gaza's population is experiencing food insecurity

IPC food insecurity classification	Projection for Jun to Sep 2024 (% of population)	Population affected
<input type="radio"/> Catastrophe: Extreme lack of food; starvation; death	22.00	495,291
<input type="radio"/> Emergency: Large food consumption gaps	33.00	745,437

FINANCIAL TIMES

Source: IPC

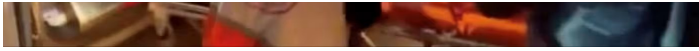
Hussam Abu Safiyeh, director of Kamal Adwan hospital in Beit Lahia in northern Gaza, said that no food or medicine had reached the hospital for 10 days, depleting its already meagre supplies and forcing it to scale down medical services.

"There's a full siege on the north of Gaza. Medicine, treatments, food — everything is prevented from reaching us," he said. "In the coming days, if no solution arises, we will face another catastrophe: famine."

The hospital had received an evacuation order two days ago, he added. But the doctors did not leave and new patients kept arriving, with the intensified bombing leaving the hospital's wards overflowing.

"There are many people still in the north, still needing medical treatment. It's very difficult to evacuate such a hospital that provides humanitarian services," he said. "No one is going to leave. No safe place exists in Gaza for people to go to anyway."





Kamal Adwan hospital in Beit Lahlia. The hospital received an evacuation order but doctors have stayed, with new patients arriving © Palestine Red Crescent Society via Reuters

One of those who did leave was Ahmad, a 33-year-old father from Jabalia. Initially, he was reluctant to leave the place he had remained throughout a year of brutal war and near-starvation. But as the Israeli attacks intensified, his family decided they had no choice.

Under fire from quadcopters — which shot a neighbour who was running behind them in the leg — the family fled to Saftawi, before being forced to flee again when that area was also subject to an evacuation order. They ended up in the Shati refugee camp in the ruins of Gaza City.

It was only as they left Jabalia, and the Israeli military began to close off the roads behind them, that it occurred to him that Israel might be trying to force the remaining population out of Gaza's north permanently.

"If I had been sure that this was the most likely scenario — the 'Generals' Plan' and the emptying out of north Gaza—I would not have left Jabalia," he said. "Even if that had meant death."

Cartography and data visualisation by Aditi Bhandari

