

Israel-Hamas war

Hamas shows starved Israeli hostages alongside emaciated Palestinian babies

Propaganda video released after US envoys declare flawed food distribution system as 'incredible'



Families of hostages demand their release from Hamas in Tel Aviv's 'Hostage Square' © AP

Mehul Srivastava in Tel Aviv

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Hamas has released a propaganda video of a visibly starved Israeli hostage alongside images of emaciated Palestinian babies that have prompted international condemnation of Israel's blockade of Gaza.

The undated video was released late on Friday soon after [Steve Witkoff](#), the US special envoy to the Middle East, and Mike Huckabee, US ambassador to Israel, visited an American and Israel backed-food distribution site in Gaza, which has been gripped by famine.

The video shows Evyatar David, a young musician taken hostage alongside 250 others on October 7, 2023, when Hamas triggered a 21-month war with a cross-border raid into southern Israel.

He is shown shirtless in a tunnel, his ribs protruding, ticking off the days on a hand-drawn calendar.

The propaganda video, which his family has asked media not to broadcast, is interspersed with images of starving babies and children, with a message declaring “They Eat What We Eat”.

Another video, released on Thursday by a separate militant group that is also holding Israeli hostages, showed Rom Braslavski, an off-duty reservist, looking gaunt and pale.

Propaganda videos have been released before when talks stalled, prompting a national outcry and renewed pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

On Saturday morning Witkoff went to Tel Aviv’s “Hostage Square”, where the families of those taken captive have begged Netanyahu to agree to Hamas’s demands for a ceasefire.

Witkoff has been the primary American mediator, working with Qatar and Egypt to broker a deal that would lead to the remaining 50 hostages — of whom 20 are still estimated to be alive — being handed over by Hamas.

Those talks have repeatedly collapsed, most recently two weeks ago, largely over Hamas’s overarching demand that any temporary ceasefire eventually becomes a lasting truce. Netanyahu has rejected that condition.

US President Donald Trump said on Friday that he was waiting to be briefed by Witkoff on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, where widespread starvation has taken hold over a besieged population of at least 2mn civilians.

Israel has throttled the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza for the entirety of the war, including an 80-day siege this year when it ended a ceasefire in March.

Since then Israel has allowed in a trickle of aid from the UN and other humanitarian agencies. It has backed instead the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which runs four distribution sites in south and central Gaza staffed by US mercenaries working under the protection of the Israeli military.

Despite tens of thousands of starving Palestinians within an hours' walk of the site, Huckabee described the project as “incredible”, throwing his weight behind an Israeli attempt to replace a UN-led model of food distribution that it claims bolsters Hamas' resilience in Gaza.

The two US envoys donned flak vests on Friday, with Witkoff sporting a Make America Great Again baseball cap, to visit one of those sites, driving through the rubble of the southern Gaza Strip, where Israel has nearly completed the demolition of the city of Rafah.

International aid groups have criticised the foundation for violating humanitarian principles and serving as a “fig leaf” to force the displacement of Palestinians out of north and central Gaza into the south.

Local officials said more than 1,000 people have been killed trying to receive aid in recent months, many in attacks by Israeli troops while attempting to reach GHF sites. The Israel Defense Forces dispute the casualty figures, while GHF said most casualties took place away from their hubs.

A UN-backed panel warned this week that the packages of food the GHF were distributing were inadequate and would “lead to mass starvation, even if it was able to function without the appalling levels of violence that have been reported”.

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