



IDF launches large-scale ground offensive into Gaza; 140 said killed

Bar Peleg
and Nir Hasson

IDF Spokesperson Brig. Gen. Effi Defrin announced on Sunday that the military has launched a new large-scale ground offensive named Operation Gideon's Chariots, with five battalions operating within the Gaza Strip.

Earlier in the day, the IDF said it had launched a new ground operation in multiple areas across northern and southern Gaza over the previous 24 hours.

According to the IDF, the move follows a week of intensified airstrikes, during which more than 670 Hamas targets were hit in an effort to "disrupt enemy deployments and support ground maneuvers." The army said dozens of Hamas operatives have been killed so far, and that Israeli forces are now "taking control of key terrain across the Strip."

Al-Jazeera reported 140 people killed by Israeli airstrikes on Gaza since midnight Sunday, citing medical sources. 69 of the casualties were in Gaza City and in the north of the area.

Two rockets were fired from Gaza at an Israeli border community. The IDF said one was intercepted. The other hit an open area.

IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir spoke with commanders and soldiers in the field and approved plans for continuation of the operation. He said the army would "allow the political leadership flexibility to advance any hostage deal. "We will continue until we break the enemy's combat capabilities and defeat it wherever we operate," he added, saying that the operation has two main goals: returning the hostages and



Palestinians inspecting the debris at the site of Israeli strikes on a tent camp for displaced people, west of Khan Yunis, on Sunday.

AFP

defeating Hamas.

About 10 protesters, including Alon-Lee Green, national director of the Standing Together movement, were detained by police in a march from Sderot toward the Gaza border on Sunday. "The arrests are a panicked attempt to silence the growing protest against the killing, abandonment, starvation

and destruction," the movement said in a statement.

"We will not stop until the war ends and a deal is reached that returns all the hostages and guarantees a safe future for everyone."

Around 500 people joined the march, which was organized under the slogan "Drop everything and come to the Gaza border."

In the event announcement, organizers wrote: "Within hours or days, [Finance Minister Bezalel] Smotrich, [National Security Minister Itamar] Ben-Gvir and [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu plan to send tens of thousands of soldiers to occupy Gaza, starve more children, kill more Palestinian civilians, displace more

families and sacrifice the lives of the hostages and all of our security for the sake of settling the Strip."

A coalition of international organizations monitoring population movement in Gaza reported that approximately 500,000 Palestinians have been displaced across the Strip, including 63,534 people who were uprooted

from their homes between Thursday and Saturday.

The statement noted that thousands were displaced from the northern areas of Jabalya and Tell Zaatar – both locations where the Israeli military reportedly dropped leaflets on Friday urging residents to evacuate.

With reporting from Rawan Suleiman.

Is PM preparing to bow to U.S. pressure for a Gaza cease-fire?

The United States has been intensely pressuring Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in recent days to accept the framework proposed by U.S. Middle East Envoy Steve Witkoff. This deal would see the release of about half of the living Israeli hostages held by Hamas and a temporary cease-fire in Gaza.

U.S. President Donald Trump's team hopes this interim agreement could pave the way for a broader deal: the release of all hostages and an end to the war.

Hamas, which supports such an outcome, is demanding American guarantees that a final deal would follow, in exchange for accepting the partial deal it has previously resisted. Washington is still pursuing a full agreement in parallel.

Netanyahu, who has yet to announce a decision, is now trying to market an image of "victory" to the Israeli public. This could help justify a partial deal while keeping his far-right coalition partners – Otzma Yehudit and Religious Zionism – from bolting.

In the background, the IDF launched a limited ground maneuver in parts of the Gaza Strip over the weekend and intensified airstrikes, killing hundreds of Palestinians, most of them civilians.

The Witkoff outline, scheduled to unfold over about two months, could allow Netanyahu to safely navigate the Knesset's summer session, which ends in late July. If so, the coalition could hold until the next session begins in late October, potentially pushing elections off until spring 2026.

This is Netanyahu's top political goal right now, with all other concerns appearing

secondary. The cost of a partial deal would be delaying the release of the remaining hostages, who would continue to face danger.

As always, one must listen to the talking points being pushed by Netanyahu's media surrogates to understand where the prime minister is headed. Sunday morning's message: A "critical decision" is expected in the negotiations within 48 hours; Israeli military pressure is what's forcing Hamas to shift its stance and approach a partial deal; and Israel

Hostage talks continue

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should consider a compromise in light of the Trump administration's expectations and the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

On Sunday, two Saudi TV channels – Al-Hadath and Al-Arabiya – reported that the body of Hamas' Gaza military chief, Mohammed Sinwar, had been located in a tunnel bombed last week by the Israeli Air Force in Khan Yunis. They also reported the deaths of 10 Hamas operatives, including Mohammed Shaban, the group's Rafah-area brigade commander.

Israel's defense establishment has not confirmed the report and is waiting for official word from Hamas – though assessments are growing that Sinwar and his men were killed in the strike. If confirmed, it would leave only one senior Hamas military leader from before the war still alive in

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Bill expanding state control over media passes first hurdle

Jasmin Gueta
and Nati Tucker

A bill promoting a governmental takeover of Israeli media has passed its first hurdle on Sunday, when a committee of ministers cleared it for a vote in the Knesset, despite objections from the attorney general.

Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara said the proposal allows for "political intervention in the work of broadcasters, endangering Israel's free press."

Deputy Attorney General Meir Levin said that the bill suffers from procedural flaws in a letter sent to Justice Minister Yariv Levin,

who chairs the Ministerial Committee for Legislation. He added that key components of the proposal, which raise substantial constitutional issues, do not meet the required standards.

According to the Attorney General's Office, "there is a real concern that the bill could cause serious harm to the proper functioning of a free press in Israel and to the ability of broadcast outlets to fulfill their role in a democratic society, as well as a real concern of serious harm to freedom of expression and the press."

In practice, the proposal will benefit Israel's wealthy by eliminating cross-ownership restrictions and

weakening news outlets' independence.

When Karhi introduced the original draft of the law in June 2023, he touted slogans such as free market and diversity. Still, it was clear that the draft aimed to control public opinion, information, and data, and tighten government oversight over broadcasting entities.

The current version of the law was formulated after rounds of revisions and endless discussions led by working groups from the Ministries of Communications, Justice, Finance, and the Competition Authority, under the direction of the director general of the Ministry of Communications.

Large portions of the bill's wording have indeed been softened to appease critics, and it does include some necessary reforms. However, a close examination reveals that Karhi's goals remain unchanged: to give the government a foothold in the media market and to support the pro-government Channel 14. So far, Karhi has not made significant progress in the communications sector. In some areas, there has actually been a decline. This reform, too, is based on recommendations from committees, some of which were established over a decade ago and are no longer relevant.

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'Qatar is vital to mediation process': How the pro-Doha campaign continued after Oct. 7

Bar Peleg
and Omer Benjakob

On October 30, 2023, less than a month after the Hamas massacre in Israel, a report was posted on a purported news site called Worldwide & Business News (WBN). The report, which had no byline, promised to reveal "Qatar's Important Role As An Impartial Mediator In The Middle East." It included quotes from Qatar's ambassador to the U.S. calling for the release of Israeli hostages, the sending of humanitarian aid to Gaza and the ending of the war, while vehemently denying Qatar ever supported, endorsed or funded Hamas.

The website that published the report is not a real news outlet. As exposed by



An AI-generated illustration featured in the campaign.

Haaretz, it is one of a number of "digital assets" deployed as part of an online influence campaign crafted by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's aides. A string of exposes published in re-

cent months, based on documents obtained by Haaretz, revealed Project Lighthouse – a campaign conceptualized by Perception, a firm linked to Netanyahu's advisers Israel Einhorn and

Yonatan Urlich and operated by a firm called Koios.

The campaign's goal: to improve Qatar's standing, initially ahead of the 2022 World Cup, which it hosted. A blog alongside the website was created, and links from the two were pushed out on social media by a web of seemingly fake accounts. The reports and content published by this digital influence network continued to appear long after the World Cup's final whistle. Haaretz found that dozens of pro-Qatar articles and tweets were published over the past year and a half, even after the war in Gaza had started. This campaign and the ties behind it are now the central focus of the police investigation into

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Even Piers Morgan is condemning Netanyahu's war



Aya Kubota

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haaretz.com



Yuval Raphael parading during the flag ceremony prior to the Eurovision final. Fabrice Coffrini/AFP

Eurovision 2025 final:

Yuval Raphael takes 2nd place as hundreds in Basel protest war

Ido David Cohen

Israel's Yuval Raphael's performance of "New Day Will Rise," a song written by Keren Peles, finished in second place at the Eurovision Song Contest final on Saturday night in Basel, Switzerland.

Austria was crowned the unexpected winner, after Wasted Love by JJ received a total of 436 points. Israel received 357 points. The public votes awarded Israel 297 points – more than any other country. It received first-place votes from Azerbaijan, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the group representing the rest of the world. Raphael, 24, was at the

Nova music festival during the October 7 attack by Hamas militants on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and saw 251 taken hostage.

During the attack, she hid in a shelter near Kibbutz Be'eri and sustained

'It wasn't just posters'

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shrapnel injuries. She was one of only 11 survivors from that shelter, having hidden under the bodies of victims for eight hours.

She later shared her harrowing experience in a speech before the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Eyewitnesses said that on Saturday, two protesters – a

man and a woman from Holland – splashed red paint and began shouting during Raphael's performance. Security guards quickly led the protesters out of the venue.

Since Thursday's second semifinal, Israel had dropped to seventh place in the betting rankings, with Finland and Estonia overtaking it. Raphael was scheduled to perform fourth out of 26 entries – a relatively early slot that, according to past trends, tends to reduce a country's chances of winning.

During Friday's jury rehearsal – and similarly in Thursday's semifinal dress rehearsal – a few audible boos and other disturbances could be heard during Yuval Raphael's performance. However, no disruptions

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