

War At 6-Month Mark: Israel Pulls IDF Division from Gaza after US Pressure; Netanyahu Still Plans Rafah Invasion

JERUSALEM, Israel – Israel announced Sunday it has pulled a key division out of the southern Gaza Strip. It's a major shift in the war, as Israelis commemorate six months after the Oct. 7 massacre and kidnappings.

Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant says the pullout is a sign of the beating Hamas has taken at this stage of the war.

"Hamas has ceased to function as a military organization throughout the Gaza Strip," Gallant said.

Yet, within an hour, Hamas terrorists were firing rockets at seven Israeli communities from the area Israel's military had just left.

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Still, as the fighting reaches the half-year mark, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sees the elimination of Hamas just ahead.

"We are marking today six months of war. The achievements of the war are great. We eliminated 19 out of 24 Hamas battalions, including senior commanders. We killed, wounded, or captured a significant number of Hamas terrorists," Netanyahu said.

He added, "We cleared Shifa, as well as many other terrorist headquarters, we destroyed rocket manufacturing plants, war rooms, weapons and ammunition caches and we continue to

systematically destroy the underground (tunnels). We are a step away from victory.”

Former IDF International Spokesman Jonathan Conricus told CBN News there are several possible reasons for the timing of Israel’s pullout.

“On the tactical level, what you can read into it is that the IDF is pulling out troops in order to get them some rest and time to reorganize in order to be prepared for the next stage of missions. That’s one way of looking at it,” Conricus explained.

The next stage of missions would be an invasion of Rafah. Yet, Conricus also says the move can be seen as the result of American pressure.

“There was, a few days ago, an important and reportedly heated conversation between the (U.S.) president and the prime minister. And the demands were made. And you could think about what Israel is doing now is an implementation of those demands,” he suggested.

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A third reason for the pullout now could be the preparation for a greater conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria.

“Time will have to tell and we will have to wait (to see) which one of the options it was. But it could be either one or a combination of all,” Conricus noted.

Netanyahu and Gallant insist on an invasion of Rafah, where Hamas’ last intact battalions are holing up. As it has for weeks, the White House disagrees.

Speaking on *CBS Face the Nation*, National Security Council Spokesman John Kirby declared, “All I can do is say what I

said before: we don't support a major ground operation in Rafah. That has not changed. And we're looking forward to having conversations with the Israelis about alternatives to those kinds of operations."

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