

# Intel Report From Cipher Brief

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## Netanyahu changes course, will send aides to White House to discuss battle for Rafah.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday reinstated a plan to send an Israeli delegation to Washington to discuss how to clear Hamas fighters out of Rafah without an all-out military assault and a high civilian death toll. President Joe Biden asked for the meeting last week, hoping to persuade the Israeli military to spare civilians forced into Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city, by relentless Israeli bombardment further north. On Monday, Netanyahu scrapped his aides' travel plans after the US abstained and did not veto a United Nations Security Council resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and immediate return of hostages. Without a U.S. veto, the resolution passed and, in Netanyahu's view, put pressure on Israel. "The bad thing about the US decision... was, it encouraged Hamas to take a hard line and to believe that international pressure will prevent Israel from freeing the hostages and destroying Hamas," Netanyahu said Wednesday, according to the *Times of Israel*. He insisted his move was "a message to Hamas: 'Don't bet on this pressure, it's not going to work.' I hope they got the message." (Point of fact: Hamas took its hard line in writing before the U.N. Security Council vote.) His aides have since reached out to the White House, asking to reschedule the canceled trip. The *Times of Israel* reported that Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer and National Security Council chairman Tzachi Hanegbi will likely travel to Washington soon.

EXPERT

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*"It is discouraging to see the apparent stall in a potential cease fire agreement in Gaza. A few days ago, I thought we were close, but Hamas continues to make unreasonable demands. Israel continues significant combat operations. Chances of a hostage deal are now 50-50 at best."*

**Admiral James Stavridis (Ret.)**  
Former Supreme Allied Commander, NATO

@stavridisj on X

## ANALYSIS – Inside the Biden administration's effort to shape Israel's war plans.

Whenever Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu deals with political rivals, President Joe Biden, or most other world leaders, sparks fly. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's visit to Washington this week, by contrast, was quiet, intense and businesslike. The *Wall Street Journal* reported Wednesday that the tone of back-to-back meetings among the Israeli defense chief and senior White House and Pentagon officials was pragmatic and cooperative. "I think there is an understanding we have to dismantle Hamas," Gallant said after leaving the White House. (The word "dismantle" crops up frequently in Israelis' discussions of their goals. As the *Washington Post* reported Wednesday, "The IDF says it

has 'dismantled' 20 of the original 24 Hamas battalions. Dismantled does not mean destroyed.") In contrast to President Biden's roller-coaster relationship with Netanyahu, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Gallant have maintained a strong, open channel, meeting several times and talking by phone about 40 times.

The *Journal* reports that in this week's meetings, Pentagon officials pushed for a phased operation to dismantle Hamas's four remaining battalions in Rafah without annihilating the cramped civilian population. At a meeting at the Pentagon Tuesday, Austin pressed his Israeli counterpart to ensure that civilians are protected before the Israeli military operation is mounted. "Our goal is to help Israel find an alternative to a full-scale and perhaps premature military operation," a U.S. defense official told the *Journal*. Since Austin and his team have not seen Israel's plans in granular detail, they cannot be sure that those plans will actually protect civilians.