

Israel calling up tens of thousands of reservists to expand war on Gaza



Tel Aviv, May 5 (RHC)-- The Israeli military will call up tens of thousands of reservists to expand the country's assault on the besieged Gaza Strip, army chief Eyal Zamir says.

He made the announcement on Sunday after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised to continue the war despite growing calls from inside Israel for a deal that would bring home Israeli captives held in Gaza and end the war, which has killed more than 52,000 Palestinians.

"This week, we are sending tens of thousands of draft orders to our reserve personnel to intensify and expand our action in Gaza. We are increasing the pressure to return our people [held captive in Gaza] and defeat Hamas," Zamir said, adding that the Israeli military would "operate in additional areas and destroy all of [Hamas's] infrastructure above and below ground".

The military chief made the announcement during a visit to the Atlit naval base on Israel's northern Mediterranean coast.

The announcement came before a Netanyahu-chaired security cabinet meeting to discuss an expansion of the war in Gaza, which began in October 2023 and has decimated the Palestinian enclave.

A growing movement within Israel has called for an end to the war, and an increasing number of reservists are ignoring call-ups.

Two government officials told the Reuters news agency that the cabinet would also discuss the possible resumption of aid to Gaza as humanitarian groups warn of increased starvation in the territory since Israel imposed a total blockade on March 2.

Israel continues to face widespread global outrage over the conduct of its war in Gaza, which has shattered the territory's infrastructure as well as its healthcare system and displaced the vast majority of its 2.3 million residents at least once since the war began.

Far-right Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, in an interview with Israeli Army Radio, said he wanted to see a "powerful" expansion of the war but did not disclose details as to what new plans might entail.

"We need to increase the intensity and continue until we achieve total victory. We must win a total victory," he said. He demanded that Israel bomb "the food and electricity supplies" in Gaza.

Leading humanitarian groups, including the Red Cross, have warned that the humanitarian response in Gaza is on the verge of "total collapse" and Palestinians face a "daily struggle to survive" amid bombardment and the crippling blockade.

United Nations agencies have said truck convoys carrying aid are building up at the border and have not been allowed into the enclave, where a famine is looming.

Israeli officials claim an expanded military offensive would pressure Hamas into releasing the 59 remaining captives, but critics argue it further endangers their lives. Israel ending the fragile ceasefire, which saw Palestinian prisoners exchanged for Israeli captives, on March 18 has not led to any more releases.

The reserve call-ups are going out as Netanyahu promised to respond to Yemen's Houthis after the rebels fired a missile that struck a road at Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport, wounding six people and prompting several major airlines to suspend flights.

Netanyahu said the response will take place "at a time and place of our choosing".

The Houthis have said their fighters carried out the assault “in support of the oppressed Palestinian people” and to counter Israel’s “crime of genocide” in Gaza.

[SOURCE: REUTERS and NEWS AGENCIES]

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