



Palestinians react after Hamas accepted a ceasefire proposal from Egypt and Qatar, in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip on May 6, 2024.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Why Israel is rejecting Hamas ceasefire deal



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On Monday, Israel dropped leaflets ordering 250,000 civilians to evacuate Rafah, and moved tanks in the area that is a vital entry point for aid in the Gaza Strip. The reasoning for the Rafah invasion, given by Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, was that there was no alternative as Hamas had rejected every proposal for a temporary ceasefire and release of hostages. But by the evening, Hamas accepted a ceasefire deal mediated by Egypt and Qatar, which presented a sliver of hope to Gazans who have been experiencing bombing, displacement and starvation for the past seven months.

The glimmer of hope diminished shortly as the Israeli invasion of Rafah continued on. On Tuesday, a video circulating on social media by Palestinian journalists showed Israeli tanks ramming into the Palestinian side of the Rafah border. Palestinian journalists also reported that all aid deliveries had been stopped as no one in Gaza is able to travel any more.

The US has been quiet so far about the deal that Hamas has accepted, while White House has stated they oppose the Rafah invasion. On the other hand, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo is currently attempting to advance economic sanctions on Israel in a "joint effort with several other European countries" if Israel advances its military operation in Rafah.

In the aftermath of Hamas's announcement of the ceasefire deal, 1,000 Israeli protesters gathered near the defence headquarters in Tel Aviv, and 100 protesters marched towards Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's residence with banners reading, "The blood is in your hands." According to Haaretz, Einav Zangauker, whose son is being held captive in Gaza, protested outside the home of a close Netanyahu ally, Aryeh Deri, stating, "If my son Matan pays for the Rafah adventure with his life, Matan's blood will be on your hands." Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid told The Times of Israel on Tuesday, "The Israeli government abandoned the hostages and must do everything to bring the hostages home."

Against mounting international and domestic pressure, Israel has rejected the ceasefire deal as "far from meeting Israel's basic requirements," and said that Hamas has added further conditions to portray the Israelis as the naysayers. A blame game appears to be playing out between the Israeli government and Hamas; the Israeli foreign minister said that Israel had agreed to "significant concessions" which Hamas refused.

A copy of the text of the ceasefire proposal, obtained by Al Jazeera, shows that the agreement is written in three phases. The first stage, to be conducted in 42 days, entails that Hamas will release all

Israeli hostages, including civilian women and children, and in return Israel will release at least 30 children and women. Throughout the first phase, an agreed-upon number (not fewer than 50) of Hamas's "wounded military personnel" will be allowed to travel through the Rafah crossing to receive medical treatment. Accepting this specific term, for Netanyahu, would mean that he has not achieved his proclaimed aims of "eliminating Hamas."

The second stage involves a permanent cessation of Israeli military operations prior to the release of all remaining living Israeli men, both civilians and soldiers, who have been held captive, in exchange for an "agreed upon" number of prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons. The third stage includes a reconstruction plan for the Gaza Strip, over a period of three to

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five years, and a complete end to its siege. In short, Hamas wants a permanent ceasefire, while Israel wants a temporary truce to bring back the hostages and continue to destroy Hamas in its military campaign in Gaza, which has largely and disproportionately killed civilians.

Though Israel has not yet elaborated on which terms were not agreed upon to underline their reasoning of rejecting the deal, Netanyahu faces political pressure from within his coalition from hardliners who demand that he follow through with the planned Rafah invasion. The foundation of the ceasefire deal, which requires an end to not only Israel's current military operations in Gaza, but also lays out a plan to end Israel's blockade, is not in Netanyahu's domestic political interest to retain power with his current coalition. Israel has consistently asserted that it would not accept a ceasefire deal that provides for a permanent ceasefire to achieve its goal of "total victory"

by destroying Hamas's military and governance capabilities.

Earlier on Sunday, in a video message, the Israeli prime minister said he would not accept a ceasefire deal that demands an end to the war. "Hamas remains entrenched in its extreme positions, first among them the demand to remove all our forces from the Gaza Strip, end the war, and leave Hamas in power. Israel cannot accept that," he said in the video message on X.

There has been increasing tensions within the Israeli government to advance on Rafah. Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir continues to insist that Netanyahu goes into Rafah with full force. On Sunday, according to The Times of Israel, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called for an immediate military incursion into Rafah, declaring that he would not allow Netanyahu and his fellow cabinet members to "extinguish the spirit of heroism." Accepting the ceasefire deal would effectively explode the unity in Netanyahu's far-right coalition.

Israel has sent a delegation to Egypt to further negotiate the terms, but the chances of Netanyahu accepting the deal are slim—unless the US exerts significant pressure, which would require a complete reversal in its approach and support for Israel. To stop Israel and push it to agree on a permanent ceasefire would require the US to also view a permanent ceasefire, rather than a temporary truce, to be the solution to the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The US has voiced concerns regarding Israel's military operations, but US backing for Netanyahu's government has not been shaken—especially with the military aid of \$14 billion, which was passed with bipartisan support last month. There has been increasing domestic pressure on the Biden administration as historic Pro-Palestine students' protests is sweeping across the US. They have been met with nationwide arrests of around 2,000 people and militarisation of college campuses. Though the White House National Security Spokesperson John Kirby told reporters on Monday that "nothing changed" in the US stance towards an Israeli assault on Rafah, he reiterated that US support for Israel's security remains "ironclad," while also stating that the US does not support the International Criminal Court's (ICC) judicial investigation into probable war crimes committed by Israeli officials and military.

Last week, prior to Hamas' announcement of the ceasefire deal, Prime Minister Netanyahu pushed back against talks of arrest warrants by the ICC, as it conducts its probe in the genocide case brought on by South Africa. The US has also participated in threatening and intimidating the ICC. In a letter signed by Republican senators, obtained by Zeteo, threats were given to ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan to not issue arrest warrants against Netanyahu and other officials. Signed by 12 GOP senators, the letter intimidated sanctions against Khan and his family, and ICC employees and associates, stating, "Target Israel, and we will target you."

PRO-PALESTINE PROTESTS IN THE US

Student demands for divestment are not new



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The student-led movement against the genocide in Gaza that is sweeping college campuses across the United States has made "divestment" from Israel central to its demands. It's what the "D" in BDS stands for—Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, a Palestinian-led international and non-violent means of holding Israel accountable for decades of colonisation, occupation, and war. There is a long history of students organising for divestment from states and institutions complicit in criminal acts, apartheid, and genocide. Today's campus protests against Israel are building on that movement.

Now, just as apartheid South Africa lost global prestige after US university students successfully forced many universities to financially divest from the then-pariah state, there appears to be some momentum towards a parallel impact on Israel. The administration of the prestigious Brown University is the latest to have agreed to explore divestment from Israel in response to student demands.

Divestment can mean different things depending on the nature of an institution's financial ties. But the idea behind it is simple: it means removing all financial ties, such as withdrawing investments, and therefore ending direct complicity in criminal and unjust actions. US institutions of higher learning are economic powerhouses with massive endowments, and ultimately can be described as "big businesses." Many of them use their funds to directly or indirectly invest in Israel. Harvard University, for example,

South Africa. Nearly three decades later, a campaign called Columbia Prison Divest also forced the university to pull investments from for-profit prison companies.

And, four years ago, Columbia's undergraduate school, called Columbia College, passed a historic student vote calling for divestment from Israel. The list of campus divestment-related victories specific to Israel is surprisingly long. Nearly a decade ago, in 2015, the Associated Press called student-led divestment demands against Israel "increasingly commonplace on many American college campuses."

What's different today is that the pace of Israel's atrocities against Palestinians has significantly ramped up and is a bona fide genocide in progress, so much so that Israeli officials fear the International Criminal Court could issue arrest warrants against them. The official figure of Israel's victims in Gaza since last October numbers nearly 35,000, with more than 40 percent of them being children. Israel has decimated so much of Gaza that authorities are unable to keep track of the dead, meaning the death toll is likely even higher.

Young people, including Jewish students, are deeply moved by Israel's genocidal actions and the resulting Palestinian suffering. They are closely monitoring the indiscriminate bombing of Gaza on social media, forming digital ties with Palestinians, and grieving over the deaths of Gaza's children. It's only natural that they are pouring their rage towards the institutions they have



PHOTO: AFP

Students protest in support of Palestine during the University of Michigan's Spring Commencement ceremony on May 4, 2024 at Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

was found in 2020 to have invested nearly \$200 million of its \$40 billion endowment in companies with ties to Israel's occupation of Palestine.

While the latest wave of student-led encampments is new in its scope, motivated especially by the horrors of Israel's latest wave of mass ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza, the student demands for divestment are not new. They are built on a decades-long foundation for protest constructed by an international solidarity movement in support of Palestinian liberation.

The BDS movement, launched by Palestinian unions and other civil society institutions in 2005, explains on its website, "Israel is only able to maintain its oppressive regime over the Palestinian people and avoid accountability for its genocide against 2.3 million Palestinians in the besieged and occupied Gaza Strip because of international state, corporate and institutional complicity."

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), with a long history of organised and coordinated boycott and divestment campaigns, has crafted helpful guidelines on how to divest, and has offered context for such efforts, "[W]e recognise that the Israeli occupation is not the only illegal occupation in the world, although it is the longest and deadliest one." Moreover, according to the AFSC, "It is also the only place in the world from which a call was issued by the occupied people to the international community to use economic activism tools such as boycott and divestment to help end the occupation."

Columbia University in New York, an epicentre of the current student-led campus actions, has a history of using divestment as a tool of protest that far predates the encampment launched by students on April 17. Although many media outlets cite Columbia's 1968 sit-ins against the Vietnam War as a parallel, Omar Barghouti, Tanaquil Jones and Barbara Ransby wrote in The Guardian that the university's 1985 anti-apartheid student sit-ins are even more relevant to today's protests. The Coalition for a Free South Africa successfully pushed Columbia University to divest from apartheid

the most proximity to and power over: the administrations of the schools where they pay exorbitant fees to attend, and that have invested in or partnered with Israel.

Until the tide fully turns against Israel for being an oppressive apartheid state, educational institutions will embrace it as a matter of pride. Cornell University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Central Florida, and University of Michigan are examples of schools that tout their collaborations with Israeli institutions. And there are Israeli efforts specifically aimed at legitimising the colonial state at US universities through donations of "Israel bonds."

Whether or not calls for divestment by the current student-led movement and the long-standing BDS movement succeed or have a concrete result, the symbolic impact of labelling Israel's actions as immoral can have a ripple effect, potentially discouraging schools from taking on such a controversial affiliation. The fact that students at Brown University, Northwestern University, and the University of Minnesota have successfully forced their schools' administrations to vote on divesting from Israel is a major step towards delegitimising Israel. Smaller colleges such as the Seattle-based Evergreen State College are also following suit.

Detractors of divestment say the efforts will have little effect on Israel. Others say they are anti-Semitic, even though the initiatives are aimed at the Israeli state and institutions complicit in apartheid and genocide, not against Jewish individuals in general. Indeed, the current student movements in solidarity with Palestinians have the support and participation of many justice-seeking Jewish groups and individuals.

Minnesota's congressional representative Ilhan Omar put it best in 2019 when the House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning the BDS movement. She said, "We should condemn in the strongest terms violence that perpetuates the occupation, whether it is perpetuated by Israel, Hamas or individuals... But if we are going to condemn violent means of resisting the occupation, we cannot also condemn non-violent means."