

# [***Biden administration officials believe Netanyahu's claim a Rafah invasion date has been set is bluster***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BS1-0DX1-JBSS-S07G-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; The Biden administration is dismissing [*Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/01/middleeast/israel-protests-netanyahu-intl/index.html)'s pronouncement that a date has been set for a ground offensive into Rafah as bluster that is in no small part fueled by the Israeli prime minister's tenuous political standing at home, senior administration officials told CNN.

The administration has been publicly questioning Netanyahu's insistence Monday that Israel has decided on a time to mount a widescale offensive into the southern Gaza city, with top Biden national security officials saying publicly Tuesday that no date had been shared with them.

Privately, multiple senior administration officials chalked up Netanyahu's pronouncement - which was followed Tuesday by a declaration that that"no force in the world" will stop Israeli troops from entering Rafah - to bravado.

The prime minister has been struggling to balance his stated goal of eliminating Hamas with the tremendous pressure of reaching a ceasefire that would see Israeli hostages freed. Israeli officials argue that four Hamas battalions remain in Rafah that must be taken out.

Netanyahu may also face a ticking clock - once the war ends Israel is expected to go through a political reckoning and the potential fracturing of Netanyahu's tenuous far-right governing coalition.

In pushing back against Netanyahu's Rafah plans, American officials have reiterated that the US has not seen anything resembling a comprehensive plan from the Israelis on how they would carry out such an operation, including first moving the majority of the estimated 1.4 million civilians out of Rafah.

"We do not have a date for any Rafah operation, at least one that's been communicated to us by the Israelis," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday, adding: "I don't see anything imminent."

"If he has a date he hasn't shared it with us," President Joe Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan also told reporters Tuesday.

And in a call with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on Monday, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant told Austin that Israel is still putting together a plan for a potential invasion of Rafah and making necessary preparations - including for the protection of civilians - and did not indicate that a date has been set for the operation, multiple people familiar with the call told CNN.

Biden remains sensitive to Netanyahu's current political standing, including how much the prime minister is beholden to his ultra-conservative government, the most right-wing in Israeli history, one senior administration official told CNN.

Still, US officials - everyone from Biden on down - have been largely careful to stay away from publicly commenting on Israeli ***politics*** throughout the course of the Israel-Hamas war.

Those private observations have at times spilled out into public view. Speaking to donors in Washington in December, Biden criticized Israel's hardline government as he called on Netanyahu to alter his approach to the war.

"I think he has to change, and with this government, this government in Israel is making it very difficult for him to move," Biden said, calling Netanyahu's government the "most conservative government in Israel's history."

He warned that support for Israel's military operation was waning amid heavy bombardment of Gaza and added that Netanyahu's coalition "doesn't want a two-state solution."

In a virtual meeting last week, top Biden national security officials pressed Israeli officials, including minister of strategic affairs Ron Dermer and national security adviser Tzachi Hanegbi, on how the Israel Defense Forces would move such a large group of civilians out of Rafah. They asked about practical details, including where those people would be housed and how much food and water would be needed for them, according to one senior administration official and two sources briefed on the talks.

Israeli officials did not provide comprehensive answers to the questions in the meeting, the sources said. The two sides have since had follow-up discussions and in person follow-up meeting is expected to take place next week, Blinken said Tuesday.

In last week's call, Israeli officials also argued that not going into Rafah would be a waste of the efforts made to root out Hamas during the first six months of the conflict, according to one of the sources briefed. Hamas would rebuild from the remaining battalions there, the officials told their US counterparts.

CNN's Natasha Bertrand and Oren Liebermann contributed to this report.

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