



The Gaza Terror Offensive

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***THIS ARTICLE WILL BE REGULARLY UPDATED.
THE MOST RECENT UPDATES WILL BE AT THE TOP.***

October 15-18, 2023

WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

Though fighting continues, the intensity as a whole is less than it was in the first two or three days as all sides prepare for the next phase: the likely Israeli ground offensive into Gaza.

President Biden's Visit:

Meanwhile, some political events have occurred - most notably visits by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who came to Israel and a number of Arab states, and President Joe Biden, who came to Israel soon thereafter. The president was supposed to continue on to Jordan to meet with King Abdullah, Egyptian President Sisi, and Palestinian President Abbas, but that meeting was cancelled. The excuse was an explosion that caused heavy casualties at a hospital in Gaza which the Arab parties blamed on Israel. In fact, the hospital was hit by a failed Palestinian rocket launch.

The essence of Biden's visit to Israel was to emphasize the United States' support. However, some of his statements hint at limitations he might impose in the future, including a warning against a return of Israeli occupation and a demand that Israel provide him with a plan for after the war. The Israeli government's response was

that this is going to be a long war and we are not yet making plans for what will happen afterwards. First it must be fought and won. The goal is clear: destroying the Hamas organization (though exactly what that means has yet to be worked out). We do not yet know if Hezbollah and Iran will join in. There are simply too many variables at this stage.

Furthermore, it is beyond Israel's ability to determine for the Palestinians who their leadership will be. The United States and its allies had a plan for what would happen after they evicted the Taliban from Afghanistan and destroyed the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. They are much more powerful and rich than Israel, spent approximately a decade in Iraq and two decades in Afghanistan, and failed in their objectives. We are aiming for a more modest goal, one that is difficult enough to achieve. We have no ability to do more than that.

Gaza:

Having completed the clearing of Israeli territory of Hamas terrorists (though there are hints that a few teams are still hiding inside Israel), the IDF has spent the four days covered in this update bombing Hamas installations (approximately 5,000 targets attacked in Gaza) and personnel and preparing for a ground offensive into the Strip. The population of 26 villages and towns within a zone around Gaza has been evacuated. Hamas and the other terrorist organizations have continued to fire rockets and mortar bombs into Israel but the rate of fire has gone down considerably. The latest count is almost 7,000.

Lebanon:

Meanwhile, on the Lebanese border, Hezbollah has slightly escalated its daily strikes into Israel, firing guided anti-tank missiles, mortars and small-arms fire. The IDF is returning fire but not escalating its response. To prevent civilian casualties, Israel has evacuated 28 villages and towns within approximately five kilometers from Lebanon. The IDF has deployed a strong proportion of its available forces in defensive positions along the Lebanese border.

Syria:

On the Syrian border, the IDF has significantly reinforced its forces, but so far there has been no noticeable escalation. In fact, according to a Syrian opposition organization based in London, Assad has ordered his army to ensure that they do not provoke Israel by firing into it. According to that organization, the order was issued after Assad was warned by the leader of an unnamed Arab state that any

provocation at this time would bring a powerful Israeli retaliation. Israel has been conducting a bombing campaign against the Iranian and Hezbollah presence in Syria for several years. In the cases when the Syrian regime's army intervened, it suffered severe casualties via Israeli retaliations.

Judea and Samaria:

In Judea and Samaria too, Palestinian attacks on Israelis have escalated somewhat. However, despite calls from the Hamas leadership to unleash violence on Israelis, these attacks have not surged. Israeli security forces have responded with police raids to arrest terrorists. So far almost 450 have been arrested and approximately 55 have been killed either attempting to attack Israelis or resisting arrest with firearms.

Inside Israel:

Inside Israel a few dozen private Arab individuals (including a professor of brain research at the Technion Institute, a schoolteacher at a Jewish school, and a medical doctor) have expressed support for Hamas's actions. Some Israeli Arabs have been arrested for incitement on the basis of the content of their social media posts. Others have been fired with complaints lodged with the police. Arab politicians have shied away from endorsing Hamas's actions but have not decried them either, though they have been vociferous in criticizing Israel's response. One of them, a member of Israel's Knesset, compared it to the actions of Nazi Germany against the Jews.

Conversely, some Israeli Arabs have condemned Hamas's actions clearly and loudly. One popular blogger who had always identified himself as a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship publicly reversed his identity as Israeli first and condemned Hamas for its barbarity. The tribes of the murdered Bedouins, most of whom were bus drivers at the nature party but a few of whom were killed by rocket attacks on their villages, have come out clearly against Hamas. Apparently, Hamas had specifically ordered its terrorists to kill Arabs as well as Jews in Israel.

The Bedouin are not required to serve in the IDF. However, among the tribes of northern Israel, it is quite common for Bedouins to volunteer for the IDF and the police. Among the southern tribes this is less common. They tend to be more confrontational with the state through land ownership disputes (the northern tribes are more sedentary, whereas the southern tribes tend to try to appropriate new land) and a thriving smuggling economy based mostly on drugs. They also tend to be more religious, often in radical versions. Of course, "tend" does not

mean everyone. Many might not get along with the state but are not inclined towards open rebellion either. It is more a criminal than a political issue. This event might create a shift in their political views, though that remains to be seen.

The Arab and Muslim World:

Across the Arab and Muslim world responses have been varied – from praise for Hamas and condemnation of Israel’s response, to only condemnation of Israel without mentioning Hamas’s actions positively or negatively, to negative responses to Hamas. Some of those last view Hamas’s actions as barbaric, while others seem more concerned that those actions have brought more suffering upon the Gazan population without condemning them in principle. These individuals especially condemn Hamas’s leaders for living in fancy hotels with their families at the expense of the Palestinian people and failing to send either themselves or their children to participate in the unfolding tragedy in Gaza.

Israeli Casualties:

Meanwhile, search teams are still combing the land through which the terrorist attack swept and finding more bodies, though the number found per day has gone down (today they found the burned bodies of a mother and her child). The current count of Israelis killed is more than 1,400 with more than 4,230 wounded. This includes a number of Israelis killed or wounded in the fighting over the past few days, but virtually all were killed or wounded on the first day. The current count of hostages confirmed kidnapped to Gaza is 199.

Palestinian Casualties:

The Gaza Health Ministry, which is controlled by Hamas in its role as government of Gaza, claims that so far nearly 3,500 Gazans have been killed and approximately 12,000 wounded. They do not differentiate between personnel of Hamas and other terrorist organizations and civilians.

The incident at the hospital has been hashed out in the media. As usual, Israel was immediately blamed for the incident, with many European and American leading media accepting without reservation the Palestinian claim and instantly spreading it all over the world. But after collecting evidence, including radar traces of rocket trajectories, a video from a camera belonging to Al-Jazeera, an audio of Palestinian Islamic Jihad personnel explicitly stating that their rocket launch had failed and had hit the hospital, etc., Israel proved that in fact it was a rocket fired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the second-largest terrorist organization in Gaza, that hit

the hospital. Past experience has shown that hundreds of the rockets fired from Gaza fail to cross the border and land inside Gaza, often killing or wounding locals.

WHAT NEXT?

The event everyone is waiting for is the Israeli ground offensive into Gaza. Given that Israel has called on the civilian population of Gaza to evacuate all the northern area of the Gaza Strip (and that about 500,000 – roughly half the population – have already done so), it is probably safe to assume that the IDF will concentrate its ground offensive in the northern half.

It will not be an easy battle. Hamas and the other groups can muster at least 40,000 fighters in total. They are very well armed, as the videos, photographs and equipment captured from the forces that crossed the border into Israel show.

The fighting will occur in one of the densest urban areas in the world, making it one of the most difficult objectives for an attacking force. In addition, Hamas has prepared a huge warren of underground tunnels, storerooms, command posts, fighting positions, etc. In May 2021, the IDF destroyed a portion of this warren, but its complete extent is not known - only that there is much more than was destroyed.

To destroy these tunnels from the air, their exact traces must be acquired; otherwise, bombs would be dropped randomly and do very little damage. Destroying the tunnels with ground forces, as was done in the summer 2014 war, requires the ground force to locate well-camouflaged entrances and then transport large amounts of explosives into the tunnels along a significant portion of them (if the portion demolished is too short, Hamas can quickly dig a bypass). This means that even if we employ overwhelming power above ground, with virtually no restrictions because the civilians are not there to be hurt (though some probably will be, either because Hamas is trying to convince or compel them to stay or because some people always stay for whatever reason), Hamas terrorists can hide underground and conduct a deadly game of hide-and-seek with our forces for a long time. Given the size of their forces and the density of the urban terrain, forcing them to hide in the tunnels will not be an easy task in the first place.

Another issue is that many of them might exfiltrate from northern Gaza to southern Gaza with the rest of the population. It is very likely that most of the leadership has done so already, or will do so once the ground offensive begins. Given that we do not want to harm that population, even after we take and clear

northern Gaza, what do we do then? Head south into the dense concentration of civilians created by earlier moving the population of the north to the south?

Conversely, withdrawing without killing or capturing most of Hamas will definitely not provide the political and security solution we need.

All the above applies if the war is restricted to Gaza. If Hezbollah decides to intervene, the entire debate changes completely. Hezbollah is a much more powerful force than Hamas. It has almost free access to reinforcements and a supply of armaments from Iran, and the size of the terrain on which it operates is several times bigger and just as complex as Gaza (mountainous with many built-up areas, though it is less dense).

Given the above military complexities and uncertainties, Biden's request that Israel provide a complete end-state scenario is totally unrealistic.

October 12-14, 2023

By the evening of October 10, 2023, after four days of fierce fighting, the IDF had regained control of the entire area captured by Hamas on the first day except for small stay-behind teams that were attempting to hide until the sweeps through the area passed them by so they could try to conduct ambushes or attacks at a later date. While part of the IDF force was completing the reclosure of the border throughout these four days, the rest was fighting remnants of Hamas forces still in Israeli territory. October 11 was spent combing through the area again and again to find the stay-behind teams and to search for Israelis, either dead or still in hiding. From October 12 the fighting inside Israeli territory gradually came to an end, though Hamas and other Palestinian groups still conducted attacks as they attempted to cross the border.

More and more IDF units transitioned from combing the area and defending the border to reorganizing, replenishing, and beginning to train for the next mission: a ground offensive into Gaza. About 1,550 terrorists were killed inside Israel and approximately 250 were captured. So, counting those terrorists who managed to retreat back to Gaza, the entire attack included approximately 3,000 terrorists. Of these, 1,000 participated in the initial attack with the others joining in two waves of reinforcement. The second wave was preplanned and the third was improvised, apparently decided upon only after the success of the first wave. The third wave

included terrorists from Palestinian Islamic Jihad who had not originally planned to participate. It also included members of the general Gazan population who were given money and told to run into Israel and do any damage they could.

By the evening of October 14, the total number of Israelis confirmed killed since the beginning of the war, which started early in the morning of October 7, was more than 1,300, and approximately 3,500 had been wounded. Among the dead are approximately 40 Israeli Bedouin Arabs. The vast majority of the casualties are the civilians murdered on the first day. So far, the IDF has published the names of 265 soldiers killed (most on the first day). These include 63 officers (nearly a quarter of those killed), including four battalion commanders and three brigade commanders - vivid proof that IDF officers lead from the front. The Israeli police have published 34 names that also include commanding officers.

At least 120 hostages were taken by the terrorists into Gaza. Israeli cross-border raids into Gaza have located a number of bodies of Israelis who had been kidnapped and then killed after being forced across the fence.

By noon of October 12, Hamas and the other groups had fired approximately 5,750 rockets, perhaps more, at cities, towns and villages across the southern half of Israel. In the following two days, hundreds more were fired, but the numbers have not yet been published. On October 13, three rockets or explosive drones were fired at the northern city of Haifa some 150 kilometers from Gaza and another was intercepted over the Arab town of Shfar'am.

The Israeli air force has been given the mission of destroying every single known Hamas or other militia group's site and has conducted the most massive bombing of Gaza ever. After warning the population to move out of the areas to be targeted and allowing time for them to do so, the bombing began, and by the evening of October 14 some 4,000 targets had been struck. Photographs of the damage to the relevant areas have been published. Hamas and the other groups are deliberately ensconced and enmeshed within the civilian population to prevent the IDF from attacking them and to provide graphic photographs of killed civilians if it does. The IDF has consistently "played the game" by providing warnings of its impending attacks to enable civilians to move out, which of course also provides early warning to Hamas to move its personnel out as well or compel civilians to stay. (In some cases in the past they have actually brought in more civilians to be used as human shields to prevent an air strike.)

In the past, the warnings were often focused on particular buildings or groups of buildings. The IDF developed a method to destroy just a target building with minimal damage to adjacent buildings, which might suffer light damage but remain standing and livable. This time, entire areas are being told to evacuate. More than 423,000 Gazans have evacuated the designated areas.

On October 13, the IDF ordered the entire population of northern Gaza to move to southern Gaza. The UN claims that that amounts to 1.1 million people (including the 423,000 mentioned above) and has demanded that Israel rescind the order, as has the World Health Organization, because such a move risks the well-being of these people. Apparently staying in a combat zone is deemed less dangerous? Or do the UN and WHO support Hamas in its use of the Gazan population as human shields to prevent Israel from carrying out its threat to destroy the organization?

The Gaza Ministry of Health claims that by the evening of October 13, approximately 1,800 Gazans had been killed by Israeli air strikes and 7,270 wounded. As usual they claim the majority are civilians, but deep analysis during previous confrontations has shown that this is usually untrue. It will take time to conduct a serious analysis of the present list of killed published by the Gazan organizations.

Israel has shut down its supply of electricity and water to Gaza. It had already shut all traffic into and out of Gaza, so the supply of fuel has stopped. Gaza has its own electricity plant and water sources, but they are not enough for the population's needs. Gaza depends on Israel to augment that insufficient capacity with Israeli-generated electricity and water.

After completing the mobilization of 300,000 reserve personnel in two days, the IDF mobilized another 60,000 (including the author of this summary).

OTHER EVENTS

The border with Lebanon has become active, though much less than Gaza. There have been several cross-border raids and firing has been directed at Israel with weapons of various sizes and types, from small arms to mortars, anti-tank missiles, and rockets. The IDF has responded with artillery and air strikes. So far five Israeli soldiers have been killed and a few wounded. Hezbollah has admitted to the deaths of only three of its personnel. Some of the attacks were by Hamas or

Palestinian Islamic Jihad personnel located in Lebanon. Several of these were also killed, but the number has not been published.

Residents of some of the especially exposed Israeli villages along the Lebanese border have been evacuated further south.

There has been an increase in sporadic Palestinian attacks throughout Judea and Samaria. Israel has responded by stepping up its counter-terrorist operations. Thirty-two terrorists have been killed and approximately 280 have been arrested while attacking Israelis or in IDF raids on their homes or hideouts based on intelligence. Of these, 160 are Hamas and the others are from other groups. Only a few Israelis in this area have been wounded so far.

THE INITIAL HAMAS ATTACK

A few more tactical details have emerged.

According to the amount of supplies they brought with them, the Hamas terrorists were not planning a raid, but a conquest. They intended to stay and hold the ground they had captured. This part of their plan failed. I can only assume that since the Hamas leadership are well aware of the overall ratio of forces, they did not expect their force to hold the ground indefinitely, but apparently they did intend to hold it longer than they succeeded in doing in order to kill more Israeli soldiers as they attempted to retake the ground and, of course, to gain more propaganda points against Israel.

In my last summary I described one of the small battles of the Israeli units deployed along and near the border. The following is a description of one Israeli unit that responded to the Hamas attack as told by some of the officers of the unit, one of whom is a university student of mine. It was a regular army infantry unit that was spending the holiday weekend at home:

On Saturday morning, at about 06:30, the rocket-attack warning siren woke me. I live about 40 kilometers from Gaza and I understood very quickly that something out of the ordinary is happening there, so I immediately switched on my phone. My battalion commander phoned me and said to come to the base. We [the commanders] had cars so it was easier for us – the challenge was to bring the men to base because there is no public transportation on the Sabbath.

The unit called its personnel to go directly from their homes to an assembly point near the battlefield. Israeli combat troops take their personal weapons with them when going on leave, so they did not have to go to their base, though the rest of their gear had to be brought to them at the assembly point.

Once we saw the video clip from Sderot of the Hamas terrorists and their vehicles on the street, we realized that we were in a completely different situation. The battalion commander told us that hundreds of terrorists had crossed the border and to bring everyone to the field, no matter how. The men just got into anything they could to get to the battle. One took his brother's car, another his father's or the neighbor's. No one thought where we would put the cars once we got there, everybody just drove and did anything we could to get there as fast as possible.

The first group to arrive organized quickly and entered Kibbutz Nahal Oz, the others joining gradually. The situation was not clear. They saw bodies of police, soldiers and civilians in the streets and when they began entering the houses they found more. In some houses the family was being held hostage by terrorist teams. About 100 terrorists had entered the village and begun going from house to house to kill residents and prepare a defense to hold it. More terrorists came later to reinforce them.

The moment we entered the kibbutz we heard a crazy amount of shooting. Suddenly I saw them. They were dressed in black with enormous amounts of weaponry. They were running between the houses of the village.

The battle lasted a few hours and by the end of it the last terrorist had been killed or had fled. Then the Israeli troops began to evacuate the surviving civilians hiding in locked bomb-shelters – some of whom did not believe they [the soldiers] were not terrorists trying to coax them out by pretending to be Israelis, as that had happened too.

Note: many of the terrorists who crossed the border were wearing uniforms deliberately patterned on those of the IDF or similar. There is also evidence of the involvement of ISIS members in the attack; these may have been the terrorists wearing black.

WHAT NEXT?

I am not privy to the decisions by the rival leaders so the answer to this question must be regarded as conjecture.

The Israeli government has stated that IDF ground forces will enter Gaza to clear it and destroy Hamas.

So far, the IDF has focused on an aerial bombing campaign inside Gaza. On October 13, a few small raids were conducted with tanks, armored personnel carriers (APCs), and infantry. The exact methods and timetable of the declared ground offensive have not been divulged and the goal is very ambitious, so it could take weeks or months of fighting to achieve.

It will be hard and bloody for both sides. The terrain is mostly dense urban conglomerations surrounded by farmland. Hamas has fortified the urban terrain considerably. While some of those fortifications are being systematically destroyed by Israeli air strikes, some are not, and the fortifications are being replaced by piles of rubble interspersed between three- to five-story buildings built extremely close together. Many of the tunnel complexes that together created the huge underground warren beneath the cities will still be available to the Gazan fighters even after the bombing, as only a precise hit can destroy them and achieving such a hit requires a very detailed and accurate map of the system. The IDF does have such maps of some areas in Gaza (they have targeted tunnels successfully in the past), but apparently not all of it.

These tunnels will enable the Gazan combatants to survive and to concentrate troops at chosen locations without exposing them until they come out to fight. This gives them the potential to surprise many Israeli units combing the buildings, rubble and streets. The Israelis will have to conduct their operations very slowly and methodically and use a lot of explosive shells – one reason they are determined to move the Palestinian population away from the future battlefield. This suggests the IDF's first objective is to conquer and clear the northern half of the Gaza Strip.

The questions I raised in my first interim summary have not yet been answered and will not be for some time:

- Will Hezbollah and Iran join the fighting?

- How long will the West support Israel, especially since fighting in Gaza will inevitably inflict severe casualties and general suffering on the population at large?

At least in public, Hamas is not backing down. Its rocket units are still firing into Israel, its offensive ground units continue to launch attacks into Israel (though they are small and have failed to recross the border), and its defensive units are preparing for the expected Israeli ground offensive.

October 9-11, 2023

WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

By the evening of October 10, after four days of fierce fighting, the IDF had regained control of the entire area captured by Hamas on the first day except for small stay-behind teams that were attempting to hide till the sweeps through the area passed them by in order to either conduct further ambushes or attacks at a later date. While part of the IDF force was completing the reclosure of the border throughout October 10, the rest was fighting remnants of Hamas forces still in Israeli territory. October 11 was spent combing through the area again and again to find the stay-behind teams and to search for Israelis, dead or still in hiding.

By the evening of October 11 the number of Israelis confirmed killed since the beginning of the war early on the morning of October 7 was approximately 1,200 with 3,000 wounded. The vast majority of the casualties were the civilians murdered on the first day. From the second day on there have been fewer Israeli casualties per day, but the IDF, police and other agencies are still finding bodies of civilians killed on the first day so the number is not yet final. The search operation is difficult because the Hamas terrorists planted bombs and mines in the villages they captured, along the roads leading to them, and in the fields around them. There are also at least 130 hostages who were taken into Gaza.

PHOTO OF HAMAS IEDS –

Different colored arrows denote different types, anti-armour or anti-personnel

By morning of October 11, Hamas and the other groups had fired approximately 5,000 rockets at cities, towns and villages across the southern half of Israel. More salvos were fired throughout the day but I have not yet seen a final number.

The Israeli air force has been given the mission of destroying every single known Hamas or other militia group's site and has conducted the most massive bombing of Gaza ever. After warning the population to move out of the areas to be targeted and allowing time for them to do so, the bombing began, and by the evening of October 11, 2,687 targets had been struck. Photographs of the damage to the relevant areas have been published. Hamas and the other groups are deliberately

ensconced and enmeshed in the civilian population to prevent the IDF from attacking them or to provide graphic photos of killed Gazan civilians if it does. The IDF has “played the game” by providing warnings of its impending attacks to enable the civilians to move out, which of course also provides early warning for Hamas to move its personnel out too or compel the civilians to stay (in some cases in the past they have actually brought more civilians in to serve as human shields to prevent the air strike).

This time, after the warnings were given, more than 187,000 Gazans evacuated the designated areas. However, the Gaza Ministry of Health claims that by noon on October 11 approximately 1,055 Gazans had been killed and 5,185 wounded. As usual, they claim the majority are civilians, but deep analysis during previous confrontations has shown that this is usually untrue.

This number apparently does not include the Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad personnel that crossed the border into Israel and were killed there. There have not been final numbers published on these, but it is clear that of the approximately 1,500 terrorists who crossed, many hundreds were killed and many others were captured. The captured wounded are in Israeli hospitals, where there have been complaints that placing them next to wounded survivors of the massacre is unacceptable.

Israel has informed Gaza that it will shut down its supply of electricity and water. It has already shut all traffic into and out of Gaza so the supply of fuel has stopped. Gaza has its own electricity plant and water sources but they are not enough for the population’s needs. Gaza depends on Israel to augment that insufficient capability with Israeli-generated electricity and water.

Meanwhile, skirmishes continue along the border. Hamas is still sending attack units into Israel, though these are being defeated.

The IDF mobilization of 300,000 has been completed. As with all such mass undertakings it did not go without a hitch, though relatively speaking some of the complaints aired in social media were exaggerated. On October 10, the government authorized the mobilization of 60,000 more. The mobilization is not only of Israelis living in Israel; a few thousand Israelis abroad are struggling to get back to enlist. Thus, for example, a couple of hundred Israelis in South America are trying to raise money to charter a plane to bring them home after the airlines on which they had tickets stopped flying to Israel.

The mobilization of reserves is not only for Gaza. Some units were deployed on the border with Lebanon in case Hezbollah decides to join the war. Others have been deployed on the border with Syria in case the Iranians and their proxies join the war on that front. The forces in Judea and Samaria have been reinforced considerably too.

Residents in some of the Israeli villages along the Lebanese border have been evacuated further south.

OTHER EVENTS

The border with Lebanon has become active though much less than Gaza. An infiltration by a terrorist team from Lebanon to Israel was intercepted, two members of which were killed with one managing to flee back to Lebanon. Unfortunately an IDF deputy brigade commander was also killed in that skirmish. There have been a number of cross-border fire-attacks of various sizes and types of weapons from small arms to mortars, anti-tank missiles, and rockets. The IDF has responded with artillery and air strikes.

There have been sporadic Palestinian attacks throughout Judea and Samaria with a few casualties on each side. Israel has responded by stepping up its counter-terrorist operations, focusing on Hamas personnel – dozens have been arrested and a few have been killed or wounded while resisting arrest or trying to attack the IDF patrols.

WHY NOW?

The answer to this question is not clear and the available information is conflicting. There is no clear evidence or any smoking gun at this point.

WHY THE HAMAS SUCCESS?

A few more tactical details have emerged.

Hamas attacked the Israeli surveillance system and communications system with explosive drones.

The initial attack was successful but not as one-sided as originally thought. The Hamas forces took heavy casualties fighting the vastly outnumbered Israeli troops along the border, but overwhelmed them. I sat with the father of one of the soldiers from the Golani infantry brigade who was killed fighting and listened to the description of one of these initial battles by a friend from his unit who was wounded and evacuated. They were one of a small group of soldiers in a slightly

rear camp who heard shooting in the distance, grabbed their weapons and rushed to the nearby village, where they ran into a numerically superior force from Hamas entering the village from the other direction. They fought in the streets for a few hours until finally there were no longer any Israeli soldiers able to fight. The young soldier who told us this was 10 months in the army, as was the son of my friend who was killed a couple of hours after the wounded soldier was evacuated.

While the fighting was proceeding near the border, other Hamas units drove quickly in all-terrain pickup trucks between the embattled strongpoints and villages, heading for the next row of villages, camps and the nature party.

Judging from the amount of supplies they brought with them, they were not planning a raid, but a conquest. They intended to stay and hold the ground they had captured.

During the day IDF units from all over Israel were rushed to the area, with speed taking precedence over organization. These units rushed to counterattack the Hamas troops. Gradually more units arrived in a more organized fashion and began fighting to take back the villages and extricate the survivors.

The new information shows a very well-thought out plan, executed by surprise and exploiting that surprise by rushing into Israel at high speed (motorcycles and all-terrain pickup trucks) against a numerically greatly inferior defense force dispersed over a very wide front.

However, given that Hamas intended to hold on to the ground it had won in the first rush, not only massacre the population, this second portion of their plan failed. I can only assume that since the Hamas leadership are well aware of the overall ratio of forces they did not expect their force to hold the ground indefinitely, but apparently they did intend to hold it longer than they succeeded in doing.

WHAT NEXT?

I am not privy to the decisions by the rival leaders so the answer to this question must be regarded as conjecture.

The number of casualties inflicted on Israel in a single day is the worst in its history. This is definitely the most catastrophic event Israel has suffered. This success by Hamas cannot be tolerated. It requires that Israel inflict in return a much more massive defeat on Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. This is what Israel's leaders, including the opposition, are saying. The size of the mobilization

is unprecedented since 1973 (in absolute numbers the greatest mobilization ever, but Israel's population in 1973 was only about one-third what it is today, so in relative terms the 1973 mobilization was bigger). Taking the statements and the mobilization into consideration it is clear that Israel intends to conduct an all-out offensive against Hamas. However, the exact methods and timetable have not been divulged.

The questions I raised in my previous paper have not been answered yet, and will not be for some time:

- Will Hezbollah and Iran join the fighting?
- How long will the West support Israel – especially since fighting in Gaza will inevitably inflict severe casualties and general suffering on the population at large?

At least publicly, Hamas is not backing-down. Its rocket units are still firing into Israel, its offensive ground units continue to launch attacks into Israel, and its defensive units are preparing for the expected Israeli ground offensive. On the first day of the war, Ismail Haniya, one Hamas's leaders and a previous president of the Hamas Gaza government, was interviewed in Al-Jazeera in Arabic on "Operation Al-Aqsa Deluge":

*...he called the operation a "great triumph" and said that that the enemy had suffered a political, military, intelligence, security, and moral defeat. He stated that **the operation had begun in Gaza and would spread to the West Bank, Jerusalem, Israel within the pre-1967 borders, and to the resistance and Palestinian people abroad.** This, he said, was not only a Palestinian battle but that of the entire nation, and went on to call on the sons of the nation to join the battle. Stressing that "We are on the verge of victory," he concluded: "Get out of our Jerusalem and our Al-Aqsa Mosque... This land is ours, Jerusalem is ours, everything is ours. ... I say to the sons of our Palestinian people and Arab and Islamic nation: Today, you are on the verge of a great triumph and a manifest victory.*

October 7-9, 2023

"We cannot always prevent the murder of workers in an orchard or sleeping families, but we can set a high price for our blood. A price too high for the Arab settlement, the Arab army and the Arab government to pay. ... [Retaliation operations] are not for vengeance. It is an act of punishment and warning, that if that state does not control its population and does not prevent them attacking us – the Israeli forces will cause havoc in its land."

IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan,
Lecture to IDF officers: "Retaliation Operations as a Means of Ensuring Peace",
July 1955
(Published in IDF monthly journal *Skira Hodsheet*, August 1955).

WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

The Hamas offensive began shortly before 06:29 on October 7, 2023. By 10:00 IDF radars had detected approximately 2,200 rocket launches at dozens of Israeli cities, towns and villages between Gaza and the Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem-Beersheva line. During the day, Hamas and the other Palestinian militias fired many hundreds more; the exact number has not yet been reported.

The firing was conducted in salvos with multiple launchers in an attempt to penetrate the Iron Dome defense system. Many rockets landed in open areas, but even assuming a 95% success rate (the highest Iron Dome has ever achieved), that still means dozens of rockets that managed to hit inside Israeli cities, towns and villages. The number of fatalities and wounded is not very high relative to the size of the bombardment solely because of Iron Dome and the early-warning system that enabled most Israeli civilians to reach bomb shelters in time.

Simultaneously with the beginning of the rocket bombardment, Hamas troops began crossing the border into Israel at variety of locations. The majority had approached the border in tunnels, climbed out just before the underground wall built by Israel, and then, using explosives, broke through the above-ground obstacle of a steel-rod fence and advanced into Israel. Observation cameras monitoring the fence were shot up with small arms and RPG rockets. One group attacked and captured the civilian crossing into Israel at Erez where 20,000 Palestinian civilians cross daily into Israel to work and where hundreds of trucks

transit with goods. A small group crossed the border using paragliders (parachutes with small propeller engines) and a final group attacked from the sea, landing on an Israeli beach. (Of this group only a few got through; most were intercepted by Israeli navy patrol boats and strike-drones).

All together, within the first couple of hours, more than 1,000 Hamas troops crossed the border into Israel in approximately 15 to 30 locations (different sources have provided different numbers) and then fanned out in groups to attack Israeli civilians and military positions. They entered two Israeli towns and 12 villages (at least), driving through the streets shooting at passersby and breaking into houses to kill the residents. In three locations they captured buildings and held the occupants as hostages. The biggest such case included 50 people of all ages at Kibbutz Be'eri who were herded into the communal dining room.

One group reached a large nature-party (like a rave party but held outdoors in nature) where approximately 3,000 young Israelis, mostly in their twenties, had gathered to dance. They attacked them with grenades and assault rifles, then chased the fleeing group, hunting down people who had sought to hide in the low brush. This is probably the location where the largest number of casualties was inflicted. The IDF and police units reaching this area have spent the past two days fighting off remaining teams of terrorists and collecting survivors and bodies.

One large and a few small IDF bases along the border were also attacked in the first rush, pinning down the outnumbered troops at those locations to fight for survival rather than assist the civilians who were simultaneously under attack.

The first responders in the civilian residential areas were local response teams of IDF reservists living in the villages (usually 10 to 20 people per village). They grabbed their weapons and ran out to face the attackers together with a few on-duty policemen in the towns. Here and there, Israelis with private weapons (pistols) also attempted to face the Hamas teams, who were armed with assault rifles.

The IDF units in the area were initially busy trying to fend off the surprise assault, so the first organized IDF response took a few hours as units located in other areas of Israel were rushed to the Gaza border. On arrival, they began trying to understand what was happening and determining how to allocate themselves to deal with the situation, including formulating a means of protecting villages not yet attacked in the initial strike. They began gradually counterattacking inside the

villages captured by Hamas forces, combing the areas to find and kill the terrorists. Once a Hamas force was deemed destroyed, the IDF units evacuated Israeli residents who had locked themselves inside their homes during the onslaught. They also surrounded Hamas teams holding hostages.

The IDF units have been going through residential areas house by house, room by room, searching for terrorists to kill or capture and collecting Israeli survivors and bodies. The evacuated residents are being sent north to central Israel where they are being hosted by kibbutzim (communal villages), public facilities (converted schools), and private citizens who are donating rooms in their homes. Other units combed the areas between the villages to search for scattered civilians – especially from the nature-party – and other Hamas teams that might be hiding there waiting for an opportunity to strike when things seemed to calm down.

All the hostages held in Israeli territory have been rescued, but approximately 130 Israelis (the figure claimed by a Hamas spokesperson), including civilians both male and female, the elderly, young children, and soldiers were kidnapped and taken into Gaza. Hamas claims it has placed them in underground installations.

By the early afternoon of October 8, the number of confirmed Israeli casualties had reached at least 700 killed (some expect it to rise to over 1,000) and 2,240 wounded (some with grave injuries, so they might yet die) who have reached hospitals. There are at least another 700 Israeli citizens whose names are known but who are unaccounted for (some might be dead and not yet discovered; others might be among the kidnapped; others might still be in hiding somewhere and out of touch). There are probably more missing whose names are not yet known.

Hamas casualties are currently estimated to be at least 400 killed and almost 2,000 wounded. These figures include those hit inside Israel and those hit in Israeli counterstrikes in Gaza. Dozens more have been captured. Since these numbers were declared, there have been numerous skirmishes as IDF troops continue to comb the residential and open areas to a distance of several kilometers from the border with Gaza.

In an amphibious raid into Gaza, Israeli naval commandos captured a senior commander of the Hamas naval commando force.

The Israeli government has declared war and ordered the IDF to conduct a mass mobilization of reserves. It also ordered the beginning of an aerial offensive

response on Hamas targets in Gaza. The initial strikes were delayed to allow Palestinian civilians living in the buildings and vicinity to evacuate as urged by the IDF using various means of communication – radio, telephone calls, etc.

By the evening of October 8, it was reported that about 75,000 Gaza residents had relocated to designated safe areas, clearing the declared areas for free action by the IDF. In the late evening of that night, the Israeli air force struck approximately 800 targets in Gaza and the navy struck some more. They included residential buildings used by Hamas for hiding command posts, combat positions and storage sites, two banks, numerous weapons storage sites, and some launchers of Hamas and other armed groups. In addition, Hamas troops moving to and from the border, between combat positions and launch sites, etc., were detected by surveillance drones and attacked.

The mobilization of reserves is not only for Gaza. Some IDF units are heading to the border with Lebanon in case Hezbollah decides to join the war; others are reinforcing the forces in Judea and Samaria or replacing regular units being sent to Gaza. Residents in some of the Israeli villages along the Lebanese border are being evacuated.

OTHER EVENTS

Shortly after 07:00 on October 8, Hezbollah fired a number of mortar bombs at an Israeli strongpoint on the border with Lebanon. The IDF returned fire with artillery. At time of writing, it is not clear whether this exchange was a harbinger for an escalation or an isolated incident.

In Egypt, an Egyptian policeman opened fire on a bus of Israeli tourists, killing two and wounding a few more. He also killed an Egyptian.

In east Jerusalem Arab residents began rioting. There have also been sporadic attacks throughout Judea and Samaria.

WHY NOW?

The answer to this question is not clear.

Several excuses were quickly published – such as the fact that Jews were allowed to pray on the Temple Mount, which Hamas sees as an infringement of an exclusive Muslim privilege. But only two days passed from that event till the

attack. The extent and level of organization of this offensive prove that it had been planned and prepared for a far longer period of time.

Some believe Hamas felt it had to pressure Israel to improve the dire economic situation in Gaza. However, Israel has been acting to improve Gaza's economic situation (including allowing 20,000 Gazans to cross the border every day to work in Israel). This attack will worsen Gazans' economic situation, not help it. So this too is not a feasible argument.

Another theory is that this action was fomented by Iran. Hamas and Hezbollah officials have stated that Iran backed it, assisted in the planning, and approved the offensive. They have no particular reason to lie about this, though crediting Iran could be a ploy of psychological warfare – enhancing Iran's image as a Middle Eastern power to be feared by its enemies.

Iran's envoy to the UN has denied Iranian involvement. However, Iran's backing, physical support in funds and weapons, and urging have been documented behind the surge in terror attacks in and emanating from Judea and Samaria over the past two years. In 2019 there were 1,346 terror attacks against Israelis in or emanating from Judea and Samaria; in 2020 there were 1,320. In 2021, the number leaped to 2,135 and in 2022 increased again, to 2,613. From January to August 2023 there were 1,502 attacks against Israelis. Though there were several intense cycles of fighting on the Gaza border during the same period, most of the time that border was almost quiet.

There is some logic to possible Iranian involvement in the current attack. Iran is deeply displeased with the progress in discussions on an agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia – an agreement initiated very much as a treaty of cooperation against the common Iranian threat. Just last week, Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, stated that Saudi Arabia is "betting on a losing horse". The theory goes that the current attack was to prove Israel's weakness and give the Saudis second thoughts.

However, there is a weakness to this theory. A combined attack with Hezbollah would seem to have been a better way of proving Israel's limitations. A Hezbollah offensive could yet be in the offing, but Israel is now more awake to the possibility and is preparing for it. Logic seems to dictate that a simultaneous offensive (like the simultaneous Egyptian-Syrian offensive in 1973) would have been a better

course of action. There could, of course, be reasons why Iran might prefer a disjointed offensive – to pull the IDF into Gaza and then attack from Lebanon while it is being taxed in the south, for example. Or there might have been problems of coordination.

To sum it up – we do not yet know.

WHY THE HAMAS SUCCESS?

This is an issue that will require a very intensive inquiry after the war.

The supreme source of the failure is totally that of the intelligence services, which had concluded that Hamas was more interested in the economic well-being of its population than in furthering its ideological agenda by initiating a war that would damage that population's well-being. In line with this supposition, the government made various decisions to help the Gazan economy. But more importantly, the IDF assumed that the current scenario was simply not on the table and convinced the government that that was the case. How Hamas managed to plan, organize, and assemble its forces without Israeli intelligence services discovering it will need a very deep analysis once the war is over.

While the details differ and will only come to light in an inquiry, in principle, this is the 1973 fiasco all over again.

The second failure is a long-term one, and not just a failure of this government but of Israeli society in general and IDF senior commanders over the past 20 years. It stems from the insufficient manpower available on a routine basis to man the IDF's missions. This has always been a problem and has objective roots in the size of our population, the percentage of budget Israel can allocate to defense, and the extent of damage to the economy that is created by mobilizing reserves.

But this problem has been exacerbated by a 25-year shift in strategy concocted at the IDF's most senior levels, based on new Western concepts of what wars are and how they are conducted. The result was a deliberate reduction in size of IDF reserves in general and the number of days per year that they serve. This created a built-in shortage of available troops per mission the IDF is required to conduct.

This shortage was dealt with by constantly shifting troops and taking risks in areas considered less imminently threatening. The recent need to reinforce IDF units in

Judea and Samaria due to the escalation of attacks there caused the IDF to reduce its forces along the Gaza border – and why not, since IDF intelligence assessed that Hamas was not going to conduct a major offensive in the foreseeable future (see intelligence analysis above).

Text from the interrogation of a Hamas terrorist captured by the IDF has been published, and it illustrates the extent of the complete failure of Israel's intelligence services. According to him:

- ◆ Hamas had been preparing this attack for more than a year.
- ◆ Hamas was encouraged by the political demonstrations in Israel, seeing them as a sign of Israeli weakness.
- ◆ The past weeks' riots conducted by Hamas were a deception to enable them to prepare their attack and hide the preparations.
- ◆ The attack force included 1,000 men who broke through the border fence at 15 locations (as noted above, other sources claim more locations).
- ◆ This terrorist and his unit were surprised that the IDF was not waiting for them. They operated inside Israel for about five hours before they met armed resistance.

WHAT NEXT?

At time of writing (early afternoon on October 8), a few active terrorists remain inside Israel. The IDF is still busy clearing its territory of remnants of these Hamas teams. The question is, what comes afterwards?

I am not privy to the decisions of the rival leaders, so my answer to this question must be regarded as conjecture.

Hamas is understandably overjoyed at its success, which is the worst defeat inflicted on Israel since October 6, 1973.

The quote from Moshe Dayan at the beginning of this article, stated nearly 70 years ago, encapsulates Israel's situation and the necessary strategy it must implement, albeit adapted to today's conditions. It is not a foolproof strategy or an easy one to implement successfully, but it is probably the only one that has the potential, if successful, of ensuring a better situation in future. What it cannot achieve, just as

it did not achieve it when implemented by Dayan himself and his successors, is eternal peace. Better vigilance and better preparation for future threats will have to be implemented too.

The Israeli government has declared its intention to conduct a major counter-offensive on Hamas in Gaza, the objective of which is to inflict mass casualties and destruction to the Hamas organization, personnel and equipment. But it has not indicated the methods or timeline (other than to say it will be a long war).

Experience has shown that a purely aerial offensive, as conducted in the past, even if significantly intensified, cannot achieve this objective. So it appears that a ground offensive will be conducted sooner or later, even if at first there is a prolonged aerial offensive to prepare the way. This will require preparation and will bring IDF units into dense urban terrain that favors the Hamas defenders who have considerably fortified it and trained in it. It therefore risks suffering heavy IDF casualties. It also risks inflicting major casualties to Palestinian civilians and prompting severe criticism by Israel's only major international supporter, the US.

It will also take a long time to complete, and international support is unlikely to last very long. During Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, after a month in which 135 Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks, the US government initially accepted Israel's need to conduct the operation and then demanded that it halt it midway. Another example occurred during the 2014 war with Gaza, when the US government and Europe tried to force Israeli concessions to Hamas. They were blocked by Egypt, which controls one of the borders of Gaza and views Hamas as a hostile ally of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Obama went so far as to deny Israel replenishment of a key armament item it had requested. After the public calls of commiseration have subsided, it is an open question how the US and Europe will actually act. As of right now, the US government is stating full support for Israel.

Furthermore, the longer the IDF is busy fighting in Gaza, the less it will be prepared for fighting on the Lebanese and Syrian fronts, having lost personnel both killed and wounded and used up stocks of supplies and funds for purchasing more. Thus the risk of another front opening up grows over time.

The final question that must be answered is this. Even if the Israeli counter-offensive is completely and rapidly successful, what then? Hamas rules Gaza because the majority of the population believes in its agenda. In the last democratic election to the

Palestinian Authority parliament in January 2006, Hamas won the majority of seats. That is why Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, has consistently refused to conduct elections ever since. He is fully aware, and this is backed by the polls, that Hamas would gain an even higher proportion of seats. So if Hamas is thrown out of power in Gaza, who will replace it? Will the IDF have to stay there and conduct a non-stop counter-guerrilla campaign while attempting to provide administrative services to the population? That is the last thing Israel wants. The alternative is to withdraw and let the various factions fight each other for control. But given what is known about the opinions of the Palestinian populace, either Hamas will recover its organization and position or its only strong rival, the even more extreme Palestinian Islamic Jihad, might.

These are the questions Israel's government and military must answer to achieve a better situation at the end of this catastrophic debacle.

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