

Hamas gearing up for major move



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OPINION EXCLUSIVE

For several days, the Israeli armed forces have maintained a presence on the Gaza border and have signaled their preparedness for a ground invasion on the Palestinian territory. However, a combination of factors have led to uncertainty and hesitation on their part to roll into the besieged Gaza Strip.

Since launching an all-out offensive after suffering a stunning defeat at the hands of Hamas on October 7, the Israelis have been attempting to force Palestinian residents to evacuate the northern and central areas of Gaza, with the intention of relocating them to the south near the Egyptian border. Their attempts have not succeeded, as a dramatic rise in casualties in the coastal enclave suggests that people have not abandoned their homes. On the other hand, Israeli residents near the fence with Gaza and in the northern areas of the occupied territories have fled.

On Sunday, Israeli forces carried out a limited operation to test land incursion into Gaza from Khan Yunis. But they encountered fierce resistance from Hamas. An Israeli soldier was killed, and several others were wounded, forcing the infiltrator to abandon their tanks. The countermeasure indicated Hamas's readiness for an Israeli land invasion.

Furthermore, tensions have grown between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the military top brass, with reports of commanders not effectively executing Netanyahu's orders. Israel's National Security Council held a meeting on Sunday to address this issue.

Hamas's combat readiness, internal disputes, and doubts among Israeli officials, coupled with pressure from the families of soldiers captured by Hamas, have all contributed to the hesitation in launching a ground attack on Gaza.

Another major factor causing Israeli concerns is the potential response of Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran to a ground invasion of Gaza. The reduced media presence of Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, has left the Israelis jittery about the resistance group's possible response. The United States and Europe, as supporters of Israel, also fear possible reactions from Hezbollah and Iran, leading them to make various threats.

If the current situation persists, and Israeli bombardment continues to claim more lives in Gaza, it may end up very costly for Israel. The ongoing loss of life could result in the situation spiraling out of control. The relatively restrained response of Palestinian resistance groups and their resilience in the face of brutal Israeli attacks indicate that Hamas and other Palestinian groups are gearing up for a major operation. It is even suggested that Nasrallah may be overseeing these developments.



AFP

Hamas fighters counter Israeli soldiers inside Gaza

Palestinian death toll tops 5,000, nearly half of them children

International Desk

Israel on Monday bombarded Gaza with more airstrikes including refugees as its soldiers fought Hamas fighters on the ground in raids within the besieged Palestinian enclave.

Gaza's Health Ministry said on Monday that 436 people had been killed by Israeli aerial attacks in the past 24 hours, most of them in the south of the narrow, densely populated Gaza Strip, Reuters reported.

According to AP, Israeli warplanes struck targets across Gaza, including in areas where Palestinian civilians have been told to seek refuge, after another small aid shipment was allowed into the besieged Hamas-governed strip.

The Israeli regime is widely expected to launch a ground offensive in Gaza following Hamas's October 7 attack against Israel that killed 1,400 people and captured more than 200 Israelis. Tanks and troops have been massed at the Gaza border.

Israel says it has stepped up airstrikes in order to reduce the risk to troops in the next stages. This is while, at least 5,087 Palestinians, including 2,055 children and 1,119 women, have been killed in two weeks of Israeli strikes, the enclave's Health Ministry said in an update, AFP reported.

This is while 15,273 people have been injured in the relentless bombardments, the ministry added.



The picture shows a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip toward Israel on October 23, 2023.
● JACK GUEZ/AFP

Limited land raids

Both Israel and Hamas reported overnight clashes in Gaza. Israel said ground forces mounted limited raids to fight Palestinian fighters and that airstrikes focused on sites where Hamas was assembling to ambush any wider Israeli invasion.

Hamas's armed wing, the Izz el-Deen al-Qassam Brigades, said its fighters engaged with an Israeli force that infiltrated Gaza and they destroyed some Israeli military equipment. The group said the infiltration by what it described as an armored force took place east of Khan Yunis

in southern Gaza.

Gaza's Interior Ministry said that at least 18 Palestinians were killed and dozens injured in an Israeli airstrike that hit homes in the Al-Saudi and Janina neighborhoods of Rafah, close to Gaza's southern border with Egypt, after the third small aid shipment was allowed into the besieged Hamas-governed territory. The third aid convoy entered the Gaza Strip on Monday via the Rafah border crossing, AFP said. The UN says at least 100 trucks a day are needed to provide the basic needs of Gaza's 2.4 million inhabitants.

Desperate need for fuel

The development came as UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) warned on Sunday that it was set to run out of fuel within three days, putting the humanitarian response in Gaza at risk.

UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini said that without fuel, "there will be no water, no functioning hospitals and bakeries" and that "no fuel

will further strangle the children, women and people of Gaza".

Israel has still not allowed any fuel to enter Gaza, where there has been a power blackout for nearly two weeks. Hospitals say they are scrounging for generator fuel in order to keep operating life-saving medical equipment and incubators for premature babies.

WHO calls for safe passage

World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus issued a new appeal on Monday for "sustained safe passage" for medical essentials and fuel to keep health facilities open.

The UNRWA said Sunday that 29 of its

staff had been killed in Gaza since the outbreak of the war. "We are in shock and mourning. It is now confirmed that 29 of our colleagues in Gaza have been killed since October 7," it wrote on X, raising the death toll released Saturday of 17 staffers.

Western 'license' to kill

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh on Monday accused Western nations of giving Israel a "license to kill" in its war against Hamas, AFP reported.

"What we hear from the mouth of the occupation (Israeli) leaders on preparations for a land invasion means more crimes, atrocities and forced displacement,"

he said.

US President Joe Biden, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and other leaders have visited Israel in recent days reaffirming its "right to defend" itself, while calling on the Israeli government to stay within international humanitarian law.

'Massacre' in Gaza condemned

However, millions of people across the world, especially Europe and the US, have demonstrated support for Palestinians during the past two weeks.

Thousands of people rallied in Paris on Sunday demanding an end to the Israeli military operation in Gaza which organizers said was a "massacre".

"Israel assassin, Macron complicit" and "No peace without decolonization" were among the slogans at the demonstration in the Place de la Republique Square in eastern Paris, called by a left-wing collective. Police said they made ten arrests

at what was the first pro-Palestinian rally in the capital that had not been banned by the police because of security fears.

Police estimated that 15,000 people attended the rally Sunday, while organizers counted 30,000. Roughly a thousand people also marched in the southern city of Marseille.

Several thousand people also demonstrated support for Palestinians in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo with the city's mayor harking back to the bloody siege the city endured during Bosnia's inter-ethnic war in the 1990s.

Iran support for Palestine

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has reaffirmed the Islamic Republic's support for the oppressed Palestinian people, saying Israel must immediately stop its massacre of civilians, Press TV reported.

Amir-Abdollahian made the remark in separate phone calls with Hamas Political Bureau

Chief Ismail Haniyeh and Islamic Jihad Secretary-General Ziad al-Nakhleh on Monday.

He noted that Israel must open the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza to let desperately needed aid flow to Palestinians running short of basic needs and also stop the forced replacement of people in the besieged strip.



Injured Palestinians await treatment at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City following Israeli strikes on October 23, 2023.
● DAWOOD NEMER/AFP