Israel using AI to deliberately target more civilians in Gaza

Israel is using artificial intelligence to deliberately target more civilians in the Gaza Strip in order to "harm Palestinian civil society and create a shock" that would force civilians to put pressure on Hamas resistance movement, a new investigation has revealed.

● AFP

PERSPECTIVE

The investigation has been conducted by +972 Magazine and Local Call outlet, and is based on talks with several current and former members of Israel's intelligence community, official statements by the Israeli Army and other Israeli institutions, in addition to Palestinian testimonies, data, and documentation from the Gaza Strip.

Since October 7, the Israeli military has killed more than 16,000 people – mostly women and children – in Gaza after it launched a brutal onslaught on the Gaza Strip in response to Hamas's operation in the occupied territories.

The number of civilian casualties in Israel's renewed aggression on the Gaza Strip is much higher than the numbers registered in previous Israeli assaults on Gaza.

Although the Israeli regime has never cared about civilian lives in conflicts, the large number of such casualties in the ongoing aggression has raised questions about Israel's new military tactics in its confrontations with the Palestinian fighters.

During the current aggression on Gaza, the Israeli Army has signifi-

cantly expanded its bombing of targets that are not distinctly military in nature. The targets include private residences as well as public buildings, infrastructure, and high-rise blocks, which sources say the army defines as "power targets".

The bombing of power targets, according to intelligence sources who had first-hand experience with its application in Gaza in the past, is mainly intended to harm Palestinian civil society to "create a shock" that, among other things, will reverberate powerfully and "lead civilians to put pressure on Hamas," as one source said.

According to sources who talked to +972 Magazine and Local Call, the main goal of the Israeli aggression was to kill as many Hamas fighters as possible.

Habsora

For this goal, the Israeli Army has used a system called "Habsora," which is largely built on artificial intelligence.

The system can "generate" targets almost automatically at a rate that far exceeds what was previously possible. This AI system, as described by a former intelligence officer, essentially facilitates

a "mass assassination factory." According to the sources, the increasing use of AI-based systems like Habsora allows the army to carry out strikes on residential homes where a single Hamas member lives. According to the investigation, such attacks can knowingly kill entire families in the process.

The sources added that in the majority of cases military activity is not conducted from these targeted homes.

In one case, the Israeli military command knowingly approved the killing of hundreds of Palestinian civilians in an attempt to assassinate a single top Hamas commander.

Yet testimonies of Palestinians in Gaza suggest that since October 7, the army has also attacked many private residences where there was no known or apparent member of Hamas or any other resistance group.

'Nothing happens by accident'

"Nothing happens by accident," said a source. "When a three-year-old girl is killed in a home in Gaza, it's because someone in the army decided it wasn't a big deal for her

to be killed – that it was a price worth paying in order to hit [another] target. We are not Hamas. These are not random rockets. Everything is intentional. We know exactly how much collateral damage there is in every home."

The investigation says the Israeli Army has files of potential targets in Gaza – including homes – which stipulate the number of civilians who are likely to be killed in an attack on a particular target. This number is calculated and known in advance to the army's intelligence units, who also know shortly before carrying out an attack roughly how many civilians are certain to be killed.

According to sources, the Israeli Army has significantly relaxed rules over harming Palestinian civilians.

Saving time

Therefore, there are "cases in which we shell based on a wide cellular pinpointing of where the target is, killing civilians. This is often done to save time, instead of doing a little more work to get a more accurate pinpointing," a source said.

Various sources who served in the Israeli Army's intelligence units

said that army protocols allowed for attacking power targets only when the buildings were empty of residents at the time of the strike. However, testimonies and videos from Gaza suggest that since October 7, some of these targets have been attacked without prior notice being given to their occupants, killing entire families as a result.

According to the Israeli Army, during the first five days of the conflict it dropped 6,000 bombs on the Palestinian territory, with a total weight of about 4,000 tons. Media outlets reported that the army had wiped out entire neighborhoods; according to the Gaza-based Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, these attacks led to "the complete destruction of residential neighborhoods, the destruction of infrastructure, and the mass killing of residents."

According to the reports, Israel bombed the Islamic University of Gaza, the Palestinian Bar Association, a UN building for an educational program for outstanding students, a building belonging to the Palestine Telecommunications Company, the Ministry of National Economy, the Ministry of Culture, roads, and dozens of high-rise

buildings and homes – especially in Gaza's northern neighborhoods. Indeed, according to sources who were involved in the compiling of power targets in previous wars, although the target file usually contains some kind of alleged association with Hamas or other resistance groups, attacking the target functions primarily as a "means that allows damage to civil society." The sources understood that damage to civilians is the real purpose of these attacks.

For example, Israel attacked the Al-Jalaa Tower in May 2021, which housed prominent international media outlets such as Al Jazeera, AP, and AFP. The Israeli Army claimed that the building was a Hamas military target but sources said that it was in fact a power target.

"The perception is that it really hurts Hamas when high-rise buildings are taken down, because it creates a public reaction in the Gaza Strip and scares the population," said one of the sources. "They wanted to give the citizens of Gaza the feeling that Hamas is not in control of the situation. Sometimes they toppled buildings and sometimes postal service and government buildings."

War with Iran would be disastrous for US

International Desk

Iranian officials have repeatedly warned about any miscalculation about Iran's military strength in response to US officials' rhetoric about a possible military action against Iran. Many US officials are aware of the consequences of the war but some hawkish American officials have been trying to push the US administration towards a new conflict in the Middle East.

The eruption of a new conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza has increased the risk of a broader war in the region. Resistance groups in the region have begun a campaign against Israel and its main supporter, the United States.

Since the beginning of the conflict on October 7, US bases in the region have been the main target of the resistance movements. Meanwhile, the groups have launched many attacks against Israel, in solidarity with the Palestinians and in response to the regime's brutal onslaught on the Gaza Strip.

Unfounded allegations

American officials have time and again accused Iran of being behind the attacks. But Tehran, which supports resistance groups in the region, has rejected the allegations.

In an article, the American newspaper, The Hill, has warned that a war with Iran would be disas-

trous for the United States.

On November 26, Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) said the Biden administration needs to take "massive retaliation" against Iran to end attacks on US assets. Ultimately, the Biden administration, congressmen, and former defense officials are all sharing sentiments that Washington could escalate its move toward armed conflict in the face of Iranian aggression.

But despite the confidence of hawks, a war with Iran would be disastrous for the United States and the broader Middle East.

Regardless of the goals of the mission – from destroying Iran's nuclear capabilities to regime change – there are only two real

paths for Washington to directly attack Iran: an air and naval campaign designed to impose significant costs on the country; or a ground invasion dependent on establishing air and naval superiority.

Both options, however, are less tenable than policymakers suggest and reflect a fundamental miscalculation of Iran's military strength – an issue that has been repeatedly noted by Iranian military officials.

Iran has warned that it would react militarily to any attack on its interests or citizens.

In October, Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani warned that the country would give a decisive, strong response to any miscalculation or mistake by enemies.

Military action

A campaign that relies on air and naval power to rapidly beat Iran into submission will meet significant challenges. Iran's military is designed to prevent such an invasion and impose significant costs on any potential attacker, by air or the sea. Iran has 600-mile range cruise missiles, advanced long-range air defense systems, short-range air defense systems, anti-aircraft missiles, 3,000 ballistic missiles, 6,000 naval mines, and the most capable unmanned aerial vehicles in the region.

In essence, any combined operation involving air and naval war

not only faces the traditional limits that make these campaigns rarely successful, but landing individual attacks on Iranian territory will likely come with high costs to expensive US aircraft and ballistic missile defense systems.

Previous analysts have weighed the chances of success for a campaign reliant on US air and naval power. A 2002 war game that required US planners to change the rules mid-conflict showed that Iran could easily sink US ships, and in 2012, Pentagon officials estimated that such a strategy would require a minimum of 100,000 troops.

Following escalations with Iran in 2019, Pentagon officials estimated that a version of this strategy that sought to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities would require a minimum of 120,000 troops deployed throughout the Middle East.

At present (despite no more recent estimates), even more troops would likely be required, given Iran's increased military spending. As a result, the US will be unable to engage in a strategy relying on air and naval power to overcome Iranian military capacity.

Iran well-prepared militarily

If the intention is to use air and naval power to allow for ground operations, Iran is equally prepared. Such an assault would re-

quire absorbing massive costs to gain access into the country. Analysts estimate that any ground invasion would require 1.6 million US troops, almost ten times what the US committed to Iraq at any given time. Upon arrival in Iran, the US would face the 13th largest fit-for-service population in the world, the 13th most armored vehicles and self-propelled artillery in the world, the 9th most towed artillery in the world, and the 8th most mobile rocket projectors in the world. The human and material costs would be immense.

Iran's strategy to combat the US would center around making any naval and air assault costly, slow, and predicated on an assumption that eventually Americans will lose their willingness to continue fighting.

Iran is surrounded by water and will use her anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles to cover the 2,400-kilometer southern coastline as well as exploiting the lack of US minesweepers to slow down the pace of a naval assault. By slowing the pace of war, Iran will attack the political will of US policymakers and the American public, while also giving itself time to make decisions and potentially even blockade the Straits of Hormuz to the Gulf of Oman.

Expecting an easy win against Iran is not any more of a strategy than waiting for humans to learn to fly.