



Israeli soldiers prepare to go to the Gaza Strip on December 13, 2023, amid ongoing battles with the Palestinian resistance group Hamas. **JACK GUEZ/AFP**

Is Israel losing the war against Hamas?

By Leila Nezirovic
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PERSPECTIVE

In a complete departure from the Israeli narrative, Dan Halutz, a former Israeli military chief, has suggested that Israel has lost the war against the Palestinian resistance group Hamas in the besieged Gaza Strip. He criticized the current Israeli military and political strategy, expressing concerns over the future of Israel in an interview aired on local broadcaster Channel 7. Israel can only win this war if it succeeds in destroying Hamas. However, so far, it is proving very "difficult" to even dislodge it. Hamas is much more than a movement; it is an idea, and the fundamental problem is that one cannot destroy an idea, according to Paul Rogers, an emeritus professor of peace studies at the University of Bradford. Destroying Hamas would not solve the problem for Israel, as even if they appear to destroy it, then "it will just rise in a different form in maybe two or three years' time, maybe a little bit more, but it doesn't solve the underlying problem of the position of Palestinians. And they are not going to go away," Rogers told Anadolu.

The professor argued that the war between the Israeli military and Hamas is a battle of time, as the Israelis only have a certain amount of time in which they can defeat Hamas because otherwise, the pressure from the international community, and particularly from the United States, will force Israel to bring the war to an end. The sheer loss of life on the Palestinian side is causing "huge problems" internationally for Tel Aviv, said Rogers, pointing out that Israel is slowly but steadily losing support, possibly even in the US, as since the beginning of the war on Gaza, Israeli forces have in their brutal military campaign killed over 22,000 Palestinians and wounded over 56,000. "So, the issue is that you can't defeat a group like Hamas in the first place. But you can't keep on trying, either, as the patience of even the closest ally would run out." "This is why the whole issue is, in a sense of time, urgent, and time is against the Israelis on this," said Rogers, who is also a global security consultant at Oxford Research Group (ORG).

Israel spreading false narrative

Tel Aviv, however, is still spreading a false "narrative of a severely weakened Hamas" by claiming that the war in northern Gaza is mainly completed and that victory in southern Gaza would follow soon.

"The official narrative has been that Hamas is weakened, but in reality, the IDF's doctrine of massive force is falling," said Rogers, referring to the Israeli army. He raised doubts about the idea that Israel is making any significant progress in the war.

At one point, official casualty figures showed more than 460 Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza, Israel, and the occupied West Bank and about 1,900 injured. However, other reputable sources suggested much higher numbers. Even a department within the Israeli Ministry of Defense which deals with rehabilitation reported different figures to the ministry, giving a figure of around 5,000 injuries, whereas the official line was closer to 2,500. According to the rehabilitation department, over 2,000 military personnel had been registered as disabled since October 7 — with 58% of all those it had treated suffering from severe injuries to their hands and feet, which is a lot higher than the official figure.

"So, there are actually differences within the military itself as to the numbers that they're releasing," and one suspects that in fact, "the number of injuries is very much higher than is being said," Rogers noted.

Hamas is fighting on its own territory with thousands of young fighters prepared and ready to die, which is a huge advantage for the military group, many analysts have suggested. This makes it "extremely difficult" for a more conventionally organized country to defeat such groups.

Rogers pointed out that Hamas is "certainly more efficient" in some of its use of weapons in current circumstances than what analysts would have expected.

As far as its tunnel network is concerned, it is even more extensive and more organized than it was assumed by the Israelis, he said, adding that Hamas has succeeded in hiding captives despite a very high level of surveillance and intelligence on the Israeli side.

The Israelis have developed airpower to a very sophisticated level, but whenever Israel sent in ground troops to Lebanon, for instance, they found it much more difficult to handle paramilitary groups such as Hezbollah or Hamas on the ground. It would be even more so difficult if part of the fighting was to happen underground, Rogers asserted, adding there is a suspicion that Hezbollah has developed a similar kind of system of underground tunnels in southern Lebanon, which, according to him, will be very tough to handle.

The reality is that any modern army fighting this kind of guerrilla war, in an urban environment with many

ruins and many obstacles around, "is going to find it very difficult," he said, adding that this is as true for the Israelis as it was for US special forces and others in recent wars including Russia in terms of its fighting in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol.

Israel unable to win war

Yitzhak Brick, a major general (reserve) in the Israeli army and former ombudsman for the occupation forces, raised an alarm months ago that Hamas could launch an attack on Israel and that the country must prepare for a multi-front war, given the situation on the Lebanese border, but his claims were dismissed by the defense establishment and the political leadership.

He referred to Hamas as equipped, trained fighters who will cross the border on foot and attack with an aim to take back Palestinian land and conquer settlements.

Brick warned that the Israeli army has turned into a primarily air-based military, unable to win a war and fight effectively on the ground. He accused the leadership of completely trying to avoid losing on the battlefield, suggesting that this "completely loses the deterrence of the army and the ability to win the war." "We have lost the ability to field an effective army and have become a one-dimensional aerial power that cannot win a war on its own."

The current situation of the land forces "is tragic; they are not ready for war," he told local broadcaster Channel 12 last May. "The truth is that an imaginary reality has been created by the general staff and spread throughout the army. The soldiers have lost their motivation and fighting spirit in recent years, and many are not ready to go into battle," he said, adding that technology, which Israel heavily relies on, is not enough to win the war.

Things however are not looking that great for the Israeli Air Force either, as former Israeli Air Force chief Major General Amikam Norkin warned last year that the country no longer enjoys unfettered superiority and freedom of action in Lebanon's skies, stressing that this reality was apparent to the Israeli military after Hezbollah began manufacturing its own drones, he told public broadcaster KAN.

Brick essentially suggested that Israel is unable to win the war against Hamas alone. But according to Rogers, it is unlikely that the United States will want to get involved on the ground to help the Israeli army because they have experienced problems with this kind of warfare themselves when fighting in the Middle East. Consequently, the US Army would be "really strongly opposed to this and would resist any attempt to do so," and in this sense, "Israel is in this on its own as far as the ground troops are concerned," said Rogers.

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Israel's militarism foils any peace initiative

China better mediates between Israel, Palestine

By Ebrahim Behnam
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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



Nozar Shafiee

Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, and Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State, have conducted a new round of negotiations in the West Asia region. According to reports, Borrell's talks in Lebanon and Blinken's meetings in Turkey, Jordan, Qatar, and Israel aim to prevent the escalation of the Gaza conflict and to broaden efforts to mitigate the ongoing hostilities. Can these negotiations extinguish or reduce the flames of war in Gaza? To discuss this matter, Iran Daily has interviewed Nozar Shafiee, an expert in international relations.

The US secretary of state and the EU high representative for foreign affairs have embarked on new diplomatic efforts in the region, particularly focusing on the Gaza conflict. According to media reports, the US and Europe are concerned about the potential escalation of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel. In your opinion, can Blinken and Borrell have a significant impact? Is the likelihood of an escalation of the conflict serious?



Israeli soldiers attend the funeral of Captain Liron Snir, 25, who was killed in the northern Gaza Strip amid the ongoing ground operation of the Israeli army against Palestinian resistance group Hamas, on November 22, 2023. **JAMES OATWAY/REUTERS**

Yes, there is concern that Israel may intensify its attacks on Hezbollah, leading to a broader scope of the conflict. However, rather than being concerned about the expansion of the Gaza War, the US must focus on finding a solution to end the war and devise a plan for peace. The main problem is the lack of viable solutions to halt and conclude the conflict, an aspect that the US seems to overlook while primarily aiming to prevent the occurrence of a new war. The battleground, namely the Gaza Strip, despite its limited geographical extent, has repercussions that are felt in the entire Middle East, North Africa, and maybe even beyond. Therefore, the negotiations should prioritize finding a solution to cease the conflict.

The US continues to advocate for establishing two states of Palestine

and Israel, a proposal rejected by Israel or at least its current cabinet. Do you think the US has the capability to persuade the Israeli regime to accept such a plan?

A significant challenge in this regard is that Washington itself is part of the crisis or part of the problem. In the past, we have witnessed peace proposals put forth by the US that were unfair and predominantly in favor of Israelis, resulting in no tangible outcomes. An effective mediator should be impartial, sincere, and trusted by both conflicting parties. However, because the US is not impartial and is itself a part of the Israel-Palestine crisis, it has so far been unsuccessful in establishing peace. In the recent Gaza conflict, too, the US vetoed proposed ceasefires and deployed its naval fleets to the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea, giving Israel the green light to take any action against Palestinians.

Another point revolves around Israel. Israel's aggressive policies obstruct any peace initiative, especially now that a hawkish cabinet led by Benjamin Netanyahu is in power there. Therefore, as long as one party continues its militaristic policy, chances for achieving diplomatic success remain elusive.

Israelis have believed in recent decades that increasing pressure on Palestinians would make them more inclined to accept conditions for peace, albeit a peace in favor of Israel. However, past experiences have invalidated this belief. Therefore, if a plan is to be proposed to end this crisis, it should also pressure Israel to abandon its military policies. The Gaza war experience tells us that proposed solutions regarding Palestine must be rational and mutually acceptable, rather than serving the interests of only one party.

Some experts believe that Israel is attempting to provoke Iran or Hezbollah and intensify the conflict to drag the US into the war. Do you think the US is currently prepared to enter a new war?

When countries perceive that their vital interests are at stake, they mobi-

lize public resources to prevent such threats. They may even resort to war in such a context. However, the US is currently grappling with more significant challenges, such as the conflict in Ukraine, upcoming presidential elections, and most importantly, its traditional competition with China. Americans are well aware that engaging in a new war in West Asia would undoubtedly result in greater losses in other regions. Therefore, it is in their best interest to choose a path that leads to peace. Some have suggested that China, in particular, should get involved and mediate between Israel and Palestine to end the Gaza conflict. China maintains good relations with Israel and is trusted more by Palestinians compared to the US. China, contrary to the US, maintains impartiality, and perhaps, could help untangle this decades-long conflict.