

The Gaza War is Lost: But Will Netanyahu Concede?

By Ramzy Baroud – October, 2023

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had often boasted about the readiness of his army to deal with, and to eliminate all threats to Israel's 'security'.

The Israeli military, too, has contributed to the Israeli hasbara that Tel Aviv would be able to face several threats at all fronts, from Gaza, to the West Bank, to Lebanon, and Syria.

But the Hamas attack at numerous Israeli targets on Saturday, October 5, at precisely 6:00 am Palestine time, proved him utterly and humiliatingly wrong. Neither Netanyahu, nor his army were in fact able to face a single Palestinian group, operating alone, and under siege.

It will take time for all of this to sink in among Israeli leaders, military brass, media, and society. For now, however, Netanyahu is desperate to show that Israel remains a powerful country and a regional power that deserves its oft-touted status of having an 'invincible' army.

But all his options are nearly impossible.

It was obvious that Hamas, and later the Islamic Jihad, were keen on capturing as many Israelis – both soldiers, and settlers – as possible.

Doing so means creating a new line of defense, that would limit the Israeli military response, and would, eventually force Israel to negotiate.

But what the Palestinian Resistance wants from Netanyahu is too high a price for the embattled prime minister to pay.

Statement after statement, starting with that of Al-Qassam Brigades' top commander, Mohammed Deif – followed by Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas's political bureau, and later Ziad al-Nakhla of the Islamic Jihad .. – showed that the Palestinian demands are both clear and precise:

Freeing all prisoners; respecting the sanctity of Palestinian holy sites in Jerusalem, ending the siege on Gaza and more.

Or else.

Those demands, although should be considered reasonable, are nearly impossible for Netanyahu and his far-right government to meet. If he concedes, his government will quickly collapse, sending Israeli politics once more into another tailspin.

Either way, that collapse seems imminent.

The extremist Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir almost completely disappeared from the political scene. That is an important development.

Indeed, one of the achievements of the Resistance in Gaza is marginalizing such notorious characters, who acted with impunity against unarmed Palestinian civilians in Jerusalem, at Al-Aqsa Mosque, even in Israel's many prisons.

But a new coalition in Israel would complicate Netanyahu's mission even more. The cabinet has already declared a state of war, and potential new ministers want Netanyahu to commit that he must link that declaration of war to ending Hamas. Forever.

This is the first real Gaza war, they say. They also want it to be the last.

But if Netanyahu carried on killing civilians in Gaza, through airstrikes and shelling, as he and other Israeli leaders have done in previous military operations, neither Hamas, nor any other group would be eliminated.

The Palestinian Resistance is too careful to present themselves as easy targets for Israeli warplanes, drones and snipers. Their operations are conducted almost entirely underground.

It follows that destroying the Resistance would require a massive land invasion.

Not only has the Resistance anticipated all scenarios, including the land incursion, but an invasion of Gaza would surely lead to thousands of Israeli deaths; let alone, the harvesting of tens of thousands of Palestinian lives.

Moreover, the Israeli soldier has proven incapable of fighting a ground battle. Hamas has shown that in recent days, as Hezbollah in Lebanon demonstrated the same fact as well, in 2000 and, again in 2006.

But even if we assume that Israel will be able to carry out such an invasion, what will it do once Gaza is conquered?

In 2005, the Israeli army escaped from Gaza because of the intense resistance throughout the Strip. It evacuated its forces, and quickly redeployed, circulated Gaza from all directions, thus the notorious siege of today.

The Resistance back then was much weaker, less organized, and far less armed than it is now.

If Israel takes charge of Gaza again, it will have to fight that same Palestinian Resistance daily, and possibly for years to come.

It is unclear what direction Netanyahu will choose. But either way, no matter what will happen in the coming days and weeks, Israel has, in many ways, lost the war.

Let that sink in.