



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات  
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Situation Assessment | 6 November 2023

# Israel's War on Gaza City: Goals and Projections

Unit for Political Studies

# Israel's War on Gaza City: Goals and Projections

Series: [Situation Assessment](#)

6 November 2023

## Unit for Political Studies

The Unit for Political Studies is the Center's department dedicated to the study of the region's most pressing current affairs. An integral and vital part of the ACRPS' activities, it offers academically rigorous analysis on issues that are relevant and useful to the public, academics and policy-makers of the Arab region and beyond. The Unit for Political Studies draws on the collaborative efforts of a number of scholars based within and outside the ACRPS. It produces three of the Center's publication series: Assessment Report, Policy Analysis, and Case Analysis reports. .

Copyright © 2023 Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All Rights Reserved.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is an independent research institute and think tank for the study of history and social sciences, with particular emphasis on the applied social sciences.

The Center's paramount concern is the advancement of Arab societies and states, their cooperation with one another and issues concerning the Arab nation in general. To that end, it seeks to examine and diagnose the situation in the Arab world - states and communities- to analyze social, economic and cultural policies and to provide political analysis, from an Arab perspective.

The Center publishes in both Arabic and English in order to make its work accessible to both Arab and non-Arab researchers.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat

Al-Dayaen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

[www.dohainstitute.org](http://www.dohainstitute.org)

# Table of Contents

Military Objectives .....	1
The Challenges of a Ground Offensive against Gaza City .....	1
Rallying Public Opinion behind the War .....	2
Conclusion .....	3



The unprecedented three-week aerial bombardment campaign against the Gaza Strip has killed more than 8,000 Palestinian civilians, most of whom children and women, left 20,000 with serious injuries, and destroyed tens of thousands of homes. After more than 20 days of targeting hospitals, mosques, schools, and churches, and displacing about a million Palestinians to the south of the Strip, the Israeli army launched its ground invasion on 27 October by bombarding northern Gaza from land, air, and sea.

## Military Objectives

Through “Operation Al Aqsa Flood” on 7 October 2023, Hamas was able to storm dozens of Israeli settlements and military sites in the vicinity of the Gaza Strip, inflicting heavy losses. The Israeli military and civilian leadership specified that their goal in waging war on Gaza is to eliminate Hamas as a movement and the Strip’s governing body. There have been lengthy discussions between Israeli military leaders on how to pursue this goal, which cannot be achieved without a large-scale ground offensive. These deliberations, thus, have come to revolve around whether to conduct a full ground invasion or to carry out limited, high-precision military operations accompanied by airstrikes.

This dilemma has only intensified in light of the army’s insufficient preparedness to launch a ground offensive and carry out urban warfare. In recent decades the Israeli army has invested heavily in developing its airpower, technology, and cyber-intelligence capabilities – especially by waging its so-called “war between the wars” against targets in Syria – at the expense of the combat readiness of its ground forces.<sup>1</sup> Military leaders have also taken interest in improving conditions of military service for army officers, the air force, and cyber-intelligence; meanwhile, administrative corruption within the army has intensified and training exercises for reserve troops have declined.<sup>2</sup>

The condition of the Israeli army – particularly that its ground forces lack the necessary preparedness and expertise in urban warfare – has not been lost on the Biden administration, whose standpoint on the issue has impacted the deliberations of the Israeli “War Cabinet”. The US Department of Defence dispatched Lieutenant General James Glynn and several other high ranking military officers with urban warfare experience (in Iraq) to Tel Aviv for professional military consultations with the Israeli army on how to execute a ground offensive against Gaza and manage urban warfare.<sup>3</sup> In light of these sessions, the War Cabinet decided that the IDF ground invasion of the Gaza Strip would be gradual, proceeding slowly and cautiously to minimize losses.

## The Challenges of a Ground Offensive against Gaza City

On 28 October, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that the second stage of the war against Gaza had come underway, at which point the army would begin its incursions from the

1 Ofer Shelah and Carmit Valensi, *The War between the Wars at a Crossroads, 2013-2023: What Next?*, memorandum no. 225, Institute for National Security Studies, July 2023.

2 Amos Harel, “From Unpreparedness to False Self-Confidence: Indications of Negligence Were Present but They Failed to Identify Them”, *Haaretz*, 20-10-2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/aiqGI>

3 “US Fears Israeli Army is Unprepared to enter Gaza and Lacks Attainable Goals”, *Haaretz*, 24-10-2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/yBNT7>



north of the Strip. For the first few days of the ground offensive, mobilization began very slowly and cautiously into agricultural lands in the north.

The Combat Engineering Corps marched in front of the attacking forces, themselves led by bulldozers, tanks, and other armed vehicles backed by air support comprising drones, helicopters, and combat aircraft. Two days later, Netanyahu issued a statement following a War Cabinet meeting stating that “the first and second phases of the war are complete” and that “the time has come for the third phase to commence by expanding the ground invasion of the Gaza Strip”.

Currently, the primary objective of Israel’s military mobilization is to cordon off Gaza City from various directions until it is entirely isolated from the south of the Strip, then to continue advancing toward the city centre and gradually occupy the city, neighbourhood by neighbourhood.<sup>4</sup> Attempting to occupy Gaza City is likely to be very difficult and to inflict significant losses on the Israeli army given fierce opposition by the Palestinian resistance and its proficiency in urban warfare – to say nothing of its knowledge of the land and extensive network of tunnels. Despite having a qualitative advantage in terms of armaments and air support as well as greater numbers, the Israeli army leadership is apprehensive about the prospect of incurring major losses in its ranks, especially upon infiltrating the streets and alleys of the city. There, it will be difficult for tanks and other armoured vehicles to manoeuvre and air support will be rendered less effective, exposing Israeli forces to attacks by Palestinian militants.

To minimize losses, the army leadership accords a sizeable role to the various aircraft accompanying the ground troops.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Israeli military uses white phosphorous and smoke bombs to disrupt the movement of resistance fighters and, based on the lessons it has deduced from the 7 October attacks on military bases, has assembled rail networks to improve the capacity of tanks, half-tracks, and bulldozers to resist gunfire and even kamikaze drone attacks.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these attempts, the Israeli army reported 15 fatalities among its forces on the second day of the assault on Gaza; this is without yet reaching urban areas, where the resistance is expected to be stronger. Most Israeli analysts believe that to occupy greater Gaza City will be difficult, very dangerous, and likely to result in significant casualties within the ranks of the army that the public may not be prepared to accept as the military launches a protracted war of attrition against the Palestinian resistance.<sup>7</sup>

## Rallying Public Opinion behind the War

Unlike the Israeli army’s past campaigns against the Gaza Strip, there is consensus around this war, yet without the confidence of Israeli society in its military and political leadership. Only half

4 Yoav Zeitoun et al., “Armoured Vehicles on Gaza Beach”, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 30-10-2023, print edition.

5 Ron Ben-Yishai, “In Gaza the Israeli Army Has Advanced, No Change Regarding Hostages, We Have a Problem on the Legitimacy Front”, *Ynet*, 30-10-2023, at: <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/rkepfbaga>

6 Ibid. For more on the importance of Hamas’s drone arsenal, see: Liran Antebi and Matan Yanko Avixis, “Life and Death in the Hands of the Drone: The Small, Cheap Devices Early in the Swords of Iron War”, Tel Aviv University, Institute for National Security Studies, 24-10-2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/hnsyY>

7 Nahum Barnea, “The Blockade and Dismembering of Gaza”, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 01-11-2023, print edition.



of Israeli society, according to a 1 November public opinion poll by published by *Yedioth Ahronoth*, has confidence in the army leadership in this war, and a mere 7% has confidence in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's leadership therein.<sup>8</sup>

The army command and political leadership have managed to mobilize Israeli society extensively in support of the war on Gaza, exploiting the rampant desire for vengeance following "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood" on 7 October. The delay in launching the ground campaign against Gaza is due in part to concern for the fate of the Israeli prisoners and declining rescue opportunities once the assault has come underway. As such, broad support has emerged within Israeli society for making a deal with Hamas by which all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention facilities would be released in exchange for the release of the Israeli prisoners.

Whether or not a prisoner exchange agreement comes to fruition in the next few weeks, support for the war in Israeli society is projected to gradually diminish the longer the war goes on and the more fatalities the Israeli army incurs. Moreover, that the war might last many months contradicts with the principles of Israeli military doctrine around resolving wars as quickly as possible, as the IDF relies on army reserves. Since the outset of the war, the Minister of National Security has summoned around 360,000 reserve troops, bringing total troop numbers above 520,000. Though it is very difficult to keep reserve forces in military service for months on end, it will also be a challenge to partially or fully demobilize the reserves so long as Israel's war on Gaza continues and the possibility remains that Hezbollah might enter total war against Israel. Moreover, Israel has faced other important problems since the beginning of the war on Gaza, such as relocating at least 130,000 Israelis from regions bordering Gaza in the south and those bordering Lebanon in the north to central Israel, which negatively impacts the economy and Israeli society.

## Conclusion

The Israeli army is unable to ascertain how long its war will take to occupy Gaza City and attempt to eliminate the Palestinian resistance therein, nor the costs associated with doing so. In any event, several variables will shape the course and outcome of the war. At the forefront of these is the Palestinian resistance's resilience and ability to defend the city and inflict losses upon the Israeli army that may compel it to consent to a ceasefire. There is also the intensity of regional and international pressure on Israel to halt its aggression against Gaza, as well as the extent to which military pressure can be applied on the northern front, which entails the possibility of total war between Hezbollah and Israel.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.