

## Factors Affecting the Beginning of Israel's Ground Operation Against the Resistance and Gaza Strip

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Up to this moment, Israel has demonstrated clear confusion and hesitation regarding launching its ground operation against Hamas and Gaza Strip (GS). Indeed, it has postponed the operation more than once for various pretexts, starting with bad weather conditions, the need to complete the mobilization of the forces necessary to launch the operation, responding to the US administration's request to delay the operation to allow the release of civilian detainees, and then waiting for more US military support, which raises questions about the factors affecting the Israeli decision to launch a ground assault.

One of the most important factors is the desire to restore the image of deterrence which collapsed and was greatly damaged in the October 7th attack, as well as, restoring the Israelis' confidence, especially the settlers of the Gaza envelope, in the ability of their government and army to protect them and provide security for them. The Israeli political and military leadership realizes the difficulty of achieving this through mere air operations since, despite their brutality and size of human losses and destruction, Hamas still maintains its strength and capabilities and continues to engage in battle and fire rockets without interruption.

Also, Israel's declared goals of its current war, which are to end Hamas' GS rule and knock out its military capacity, are difficult to achieve without a large ground invasion. Netanyahu and his ruling coalition know that Israelis assessment of the war's outcomes will be based on the achievement of declared ambitious goals.

In addition to the above, there is widespread and unprecedented Israeli political and popular support for launching a large-scale ground invasion that would destroy Hamas's military capabilities and ends its danger and threat. In addition, there is immense Western support for Israel to take the necessary military steps to punish Hamas for its recent attack under the pretext of self-defense, which constitutes an encouraging factor to pursue the ground war option.





However, there are other opposing factors, increasing the complexity of Israeli calculations, making the government hesitant and pushing towards delay. Mainly, the facts on the ground and the extent they make the Israeli leadership sure it would achieve military victory rather than getting involved in a new military failure that would be added to the fiasco of October 7th. The Israeli leadership is aware of the Palestinian forces readiness to engage in a ground confrontation and believes that Hamas did not launch a successful and accurate attack without preparing a defense and confrontation plan for a certain Israeli reaction. The strong reactions of the resistance to some Israeli exploratory maneuvers to approach the GS outskirts in the Khan Yunis area have shown the extent of the resistance's vigilance and readiness for confrontation and ground clashes.

The psychological and moral dimension also plays an influential role in Israeli calculations. For Israel is aware of the collapsed morale of its military, and the need for time and effort to boost it before going into an extremely ferocious battle. Perhaps this what made Israel seek US forces assistance that the US administration claims have arrived as advisory missions.

It has become clear that proceeding with the systematic destruction of the Strip and its infrastructure, the brutal killing of civilians and the application of the scorched earth policy would be a preferable temporary option before achieving complete readiness of the Israeli army and US logistical presence. This policy could also serve as an attempt to further exhaust the advocates and supporters of the resistance and create situations of restlessness among them, as well as exhaust the resistance, deplete its ammunition, and destroy as much of its infrastructure as possible. However, Israel might not find it suitable to embrace this policy indefinitely in light of the escalation of Arab and international popular momentum against the killing of civilians, the steadfastness of the resistance and the restlessness of the Israeli home front as well as the decline in the international cover for the occupation.

The US position stands out as an influential factor in forming the Israeli decision to start the ground operation, which was highlighted by the discrepancy and disagreement between the position of Benjamin Netanyahu, who was influenced by US advice to delay the operation, and the position of his Army Minister Yoav Galant and the rest of the army leaders who are eager to launch it. At the same time, the US military buildup in the region seeks to support the Israeli side and is a warning message to Iran, Hizbullah and the resistance forces, not to intervene effectively. Hence, it provides better conditions for the Israeli ground military attack that wants to deal a devastating blow to Hamas, the resistance forces and GS.



Moreover, the hesitant US position is influenced by the fear that the ground war will cause the conflict in GS to spill into a regional confrontations with Hizbullah and other parties, who are threatening to engage fully in the confrontations in the event of a ground invasion. The strikes on US bases in Syria and Iraq by some Iran-affiliated groups have given additional indications of the potential dangers of starting the ground operation. The US does not hide its concerns about the expansion of the current confrontation in a way that exhausts its efforts and constitutes an important challenge to its strategy of calm and de-escalation in the region. It wants to focus on the challenges of the Ukrainian war and the escalation with China in the Taiwan file.

In addition to the above, there is the issue of civilians detained by Hamas, a number of whom hold US citizenship. In this respect, the US administration prefers to provide an opportunity to release them before resorting to the option of ground war that might put their lives in danger.

The possibility of mass casualties among Palestinian civilians in GS due to the ground attack is no longer an influential factor and sensitive issue for Israel, however, the matter may seem relatively different to the US side. For the US has confirmed its support and endorsement of Israel's right to defend itself and target Hamas, but at the same time, it has mentioned the importance of avoiding killing civilians and the necessity of bringing humanitarian aid to the Strip.

In conclusion, the possibilities of launching a ground operation against Hamas and GS are still strong and have many strong justifications, which makes it expected at any time. Its calculations are mainly related to field considerations and are influenced by the anxious and hesitant US position.

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