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## Israel-Palestine War: How Hamas Views the Gaza Conflict and Why It Thinks It Can Win

Hamas acknowledged the high price being paid by the people of Gaza, he said. But he believed most would choose to stay, rather than flee a second Nakba, referring to the 1948 displacement of 750,000 Palestinians from their ancestral homeland. For most, there is no choice: Gaza's border with Egypt and its border with Israel are closed and nowhere is safe from bombardment.



A source close to Hamas' political leadership says the group believes it can defeat Israel, but acknowledges the heavy price being paid by those on the ground.

A senior Arab source has described the Hamas attack on October 7 as "the greatest miscalculation in history of all miscalculations." An operation that, according to people briefed on the details of its planning, was to be a tactical mission aimed at securing two dozen military hostages at most, turned into a chaotic rampage when Israel's Gaza Military Division collapsed.



People inspect destroyed buildings in Gaza City following Israeli airstrikes on Oct. 28, 2023 (AP)

As Hamas fighters and other armed actors from Gaza stormed southern Israel, attacking military bases, kibbutz communities and a music festival, the assault produced grisly images of the worst massacre of Israeli civilians since the state's creation.

Human rights groups [accuse Hamas](#) of "deliberate killings of civilians, abductions and indiscriminate attacks" during events that are now the subject of an active investigation by the International Criminal Court.

Up to 250 hostages were kidnapped, some of them foreigners. In response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to eradicate Hamas from Gaza.

A retaliatory bombing campaign aimed at pushing more than a million people from the northern half of the country south and toward the Egyptian border is about to enter its fifth week, and Israeli soldiers and Hamas fighters are locked in a battle.



Contradictory Pressures": Enraged by Israeli Plans for Gaza, Egypt Strikes Back

The bombardments have swept through northern Gaza and killed more than 9,000 [Palestinians](#), according to figures from the Palestinian Health Ministry. The conflict shows no sign of abating, as Israel and the United States resist mounting international pressure for a ceasefire.

Hamas' political bureau in Doha remained aloof from the decision of Mohammed Deif, commander of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, to launch the incursion, Middle East Eye was told.

But as part of the leadership, Hamas' political wing has had to assume its responsibility and is currently a key player in [Qatar-mediated negotiations for the release of hostages](#).

This is the balance seen from outside the militant group, but it is not how Hamas itself sees these events.

To find out what Hamas thinks, MEE spoke to a senior Palestinian source in contact with Hamas' political leadership.

MEE asked him three main questions. Why did the attack occur when it occurred? Are Israel's war aims achievable? What will Hamas think it has achieved when the war ends?

*Why now?*

The trigger for the October 7 attack was Hamas' concern over the intention of far-right Jews to slaughter an animal at the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, thus laying the groundwork for the demolition of the Dome of the Rock shrine and the construction of the Third Temple, it said.

Hamas had closely followed Israeli plans to institute a permanent Jewish presence in the al-Aqsa compound. Al-Aqsa is considered the third holiest site in Islam and a symbol of Palestinian identity. In Israel it is known as the Temple Mount.

The daily presence of far-right Jews at Al-Aqsa had already been achieved, with two daily raids in the morning and afternoon on routes protected by heavily armed police and lasting between 30 minutes and an hour.

According to some Messianic religious sects such as the Temple Institute, a red heifer without blemish must be sacrificed to purify the soil before the Third Temple can be rebuilt.



Sacred cow! Can a heifer herald the Third Temple and the end of the world as we know it? Can a red heifer radically change the world? Mira Fox Graphic

Red Angus cows have been imported from the USA for this purpose. A Third Temple group said earlier this year that it hoped to [slaughter five imported heifers](#) during next year's Passover holiday, which falls in April 2024.

The MEE source claimed that al-Aqsa had already been divided in time and noted that settlers had performed "plant sacrifices" at the site.

This appears to be a reference to a [raid a month ago](#) by dozens of settlers carrying palm fronds to commemorate the Jewish holiday of Sukhot.

"The only thing missing is the slaughter of the red heifers that were imported from the United States. If they did, it would be the signal to rebuild the Third Temple," the source said.

Hamas had previously warned Israel that it was playing with fire by trying to establish arrangements in al-Aqsa similar to those at Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque, which are shared by Muslims and Jews.

Other Palestinian groups, including the [Palestinian Authority](#), have also warned Israel about the possibility of changing the mosque's status quo.

In the three weeks leading up to the assault, there were three Jewish festivals, which ended with Sukhot. "Hamas' sentiment in Gaza was that al-Aqsa was in imminent danger," the MEE source said.

Long-term factors also played a role in the decision to launch the attack.

The fate of the 5,200 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel was a "great responsibility" for Hamas leaders, the source said.

"Hamas thought every day about how they could be released."

The third reason for the attack was Gaza itself, after 18 years of siege since Israel withdrew its settlers from the strip.

"The U.S. and regional powers left Gaza lifeless but not dead, as if Gaza was hunched in a corner on life support, struggling to get food, money or a generator." The October 7 outbreak was a great message that Gazans can break the siege," the source said.

*Can Hamas be brought to an end?*

It was not the first time that Israeli leaders had vowed to wipe out Hamas, and all previous wars had ended with Israeli withdrawal.

Hamas leaders acknowledge that the scale of the devastation is different, but they continue to believe that another Israeli withdrawal will be the end result, he added.

"Israel can destroy half of Gaza, but I think in the end the result will be the same. The problem for [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu will be how to end the battle with a good image to offer to the people."

"But he's got a big problem. Even if it succeeds in its military goal of eliminating the Hamas leadership in Gaza, it continues to face questions about its responsibility for the October 7 attack."



A group of people in Tel Aviv call for the release of Israeli hostages on October 26. The banner in Hebrew reads: We won't stop until everyone is back (AFP)

The source dismissed the prospect of Israel achieving its main goal. He said it was physically impossible to wipe out Hamas because of the size of the group and its dependents in Gaza.

"Hamas is part of the fabric of society. There are the combatants and their families. There are the charities and their families. There are government workers and their families. If you put all that together, it's a very important part of the population."

Although Hamas did not foresee an Israeli response of this magnitude, it has an extensive network of tunnels, stretching for "many hundreds of kilometers," another source told MEE.

The idea that Hamas would cease to operate if it lost Gaza City, which Israeli forces are trying to encircle, is therefore less likely.

Similarly, Hamas is not dependent on Hezbollah joining the war, but many within the movement see its participation as inevitable.

They say that if Hezbollah allows Hamas to be wiped out, it would only be a matter of time before Israel turns against the Lebanese group.

*What will Hamas have achieved when this battle is over?*

Hamas does not believe that the clock can be turned back until October 6, when the war ends, and Gaza will start all over again.

"The October 7 attack gave a direct and accurate message that the Palestinians have the ability to defeat Israel and get rid of the occupation. For Hamas that is now a fact," he said.

Hamas believes the attack has broken a pact that existed between the Israeli army and the people since the declaration of the state in 1948.

The unspoken pact was that the people would send their sons and daughters to the army and the army would protect the country in return.

According to the source, Hamas believes that the current conflict has "led the Palestinian people and the Palestinian resistance to victory and liberation."

He added: "I think Israel lost a lot of confidence in the future."

Hamas acknowledged the high price being paid by the people of Gaza, he said. But he believed most would choose to stay, rather than flee a second Nakba, referring to the 1948 displacement of 750,000 Palestinians from their ancestral homeland. For most, there is no choice: Gaza's border with Egypt and its border with Israel are closed and nowhere is safe from bombardment.



More than 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homeland by Zionist militia in 1948 (AFP)

"All Palestinians know that they have to stay on their land, even though it has turned into rubble and they live in tents," he said.

Hamas believes that Israel made a huge strategic mistake in rejecting the multiple Arab peace initiatives that would have ended the conflict.

"Their strategy was to have it all. Because of that, they will lose everything. They underestimate the Palestinians," the source said.

He said that while Western capitals hoped for a post-Hamas era, the Palestinian resistance confidently hoped for an era in which they could live in a state of their own.

He recognized that the Israeli army had an overwhelming military advantage. But he insisted that the results of war do not always depend on the balance of power.

"Look at Vietnam, look at Afghanistan, look at Algeria. Look at how these colonial wars ended," he said.

*By David Hearst in Doha*

*Original: [Israel-Palestine war: How Hamas sees the Gaza conflict unfolding – and why it thinks it can win](#)*

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