

The War on Gaza: Towards Palestine's Independence Despite the Doom and Gloom

Part VI

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“Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.” (Sun Tzu)[1]

Right from the outset of this analysis of the war on Gaza, I posited that this war is different from the others in many crucial respects and will have lasting and far-reaching consequences. It even has the potential to fundamentally remake the entire Middle East region. So far, the emphasis has been put on the highly important and necessary historicisation and geopolitical contextualisation of the century-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is today reaching its pinnacle.

From now on, we’ll shift our attention to what’s next for the Palestinians, for Israel, for the Middle East region and its impact on the global order. More specifically, and to start with, we’ll address Khaled Elgindy’s insightful observation according to which all parties concerned concur that there’s no going back to the October 6 untenable status quo, and try to answer his challenging question, “Where do we go from here?”[2]

On the Meaning of Victory in Ancient and Modern Warfare

More than 2,000 years ago, in his timeless treatise *“The Art of War”* (also known as *“The Thirteen Chapters”*), the great Chinese military strategist and general Sun Tzu asserted that war was an extension of politics and should be pursued in the interests of the greater good for all, the conqueror and the conquered. He believed that for [warfare](#) to be defined as anything other than a waste of life and resources, one needed to win. And for victory to be achieved, it is imperative to know yourself and your enemy:

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”

For most historians the conventional view is that Sun Tzu has lived, fought, and composed his master work during the Spring and Autumn Period which preceded the Warring States Period (c. 481-221 BCE) during which the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) was declining, and the states once bound to it fought each other for supremacy and control of China.[3]

Likewise, the no less famous 19th century Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz claimed in his magnum opus military strategy book "*On War*"[4] that

"War is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means. We deliberately use the phrase 'addition of other means' because we also want to make it clear that war in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different. That intercourse continues, irrespective of the means it employs. The main lines along which military events progress, and to which they are restricted, are political lines that continue throughout the war into the subsequent peace."

It follows that

"The political object – the original motive for war – will thus determine the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires."[5]

Clausewitz described military victory as a condition where the enemy's ability to enter battle, resist or resume hostilities is destroyed. He stated that "*The key to victory lies in the ability to deny the enemy their objective*", thus emphasising the importance of not only achieving one's own objectives but also preventing the adversary from attaining theirs. By depriving the enemy of their goals, a military force can strategically weaken and ultimately defeat them. It is interesting to note that Clausewitz's manuscripts were inspired by the stunning military successes during the Napoleonic Wars between 1803 and 1815, which nevertheless, as history has recorded, proved ephemeral. Conversely, Clausewitz's Prussia was convincingly beaten in 1806 in the Jena campaign but came back militarily in the 1813 and 1814 campaigns and again at Waterloo in 1815.[6]

This paradigm encompassing both the linkages between war and politics and the notion of victory, has traditionally constituted the norm and the yardstick for assessment and judgement through much of history and up to the 21st century. However, in modern wars – wars which have occurred since the end of the Cold War – while the former component is still largely valid, contemporary strategists and military affairs analysts tend to diverge on the latter element, that is the notion, or more precisely the meaning of victory. This is particularly the case regarding asymmetric warfare – a form of war between belligerents whose relative military power, strategy, or tactics are significantly different, and often involving a wide variety of non-state actors, insurgents or resistance movement militias.

I dealt with this subject in an article[7] I wrote in 2018 in which I explained that numerous careful studies have shown that the United States and its allies are blindly following those insurgents' worldview and game plan, which is to "*perpetually engage and enervate the United states and the West in a series of prolonged overseas ventures*" in which they will undermine their own societies, expend their resources, and increase the level of violence, thereby setting off a dynamic that William Roe Polk has reviewed in length in one of his books[8]. Indeed, Polk reveals a pattern that has been replicated over and over throughout recent history. That is, invaders are naturally disliked by the invaded population, who disobey them, at the start in small ways, eliciting a forceful response on the part of the invader, which in turn increases opposition and popular support for resistance. The ensuing cycle of violence then escalates until the invading forces are obliged either to withdraw, or to resort to methods and means that amount to genocide to gain their ends.

Recent examples of battlefield victors eventually losing the war, or the defeated coming out as winners have been provided by many prominent scholars. In 2006, the University of Stanford rightly pointed out that

“Many wars do not result in unambiguous victory for one side or the other. Fatigue, a recognition that the cost of total victory is too high, or the prospect of endless conflict, leads the players to agree on a cease-fire.”

It cited as examples the invasions of Iraq and Lebanon by the US and Israel, respectively, saying:

“Israel realised that the cost of its invasion of Lebanon was more than it had bargained for and agreed to a cessation of hostilities. Initially the Jewish state had announced its aim as freeing the two soldiers captured by Hezbollah, disarming that organisation, and removing it from a position in which it could threaten Israel. It achieved none of these aims but still declared victory. Following that lead, President George Bush could declare victory in Iraq. Whether one wishes to view Israel or the United States as a victor depends on whether the glass is half full or half empty.”[9]

In these examples as well as in the case of Afghanistan, the strategic success could not be achieved notwithstanding a superior military force and an immense mismatch between the opponents in terms of firepower and technology at their respective command. The main reason for that is that victory required not only the defeat of the opponents’ military capabilities but also the successful resolution of the deeper problems at the root of the conflict.[10]

In understanding victory, says William Martel[11], a clear distinction between the political aim (the end) and the military aim (one of the means to achieve the end) is essential. Victory can be looked at as an outcome (result), a descriptive statement of the post-war situation, or as an aspiration (ambition or goal) being the driver to accomplish specific objectives through use of force. That’s why most scholars and analysts seem to agree that military victories alone do not determine the outcome of modern wars. They consider victory to be the achievement of a predetermined end state.

The notion of a desired end state implies that victory occurs if the outcome of the war corresponds with previously articulated aims, that is, a relation between war aims and war outcomes.[12] It is then critical to define the end before the war begins, and to clearly follow it. War, says Michael Anderson, *“is a fluid, complicated thing, and it isn’t beyond reason for war aims to morph during a conflict, but at each of those points there must be a clear and understood process for the changed goals to be achieved as there was leading into the war in the first place. A change in war aims can seem like a new war in itself.”*[13] Indeed, if it’s unknown how a war is supposed to end, then how can it be known if, or when the endgame has been achieved?

Nowadays, as stated by de Landmeter, it is almost inconceivable to wage war without considering the post-war period. Ideally, the object of policy extends into the period after hostilities, and victory is closely linked to concepts of conflict termination and conflict resolution that seek to find lasting solutions.

In answering the big question of what constitutes victory in modern war, Gabriella Blum contends that

“With wars becoming about long-term change, requiring a mix of benevolence and aggression that is carefully tailored to individual targets, the political and civilian dimensions of victory have outgrown the military one. As the attempts to define what success looks like in Afghanistan or Iraq show, the formulation of victory now requires more long-term, abstract, and complex, less tangible and immediate terms. War, in other words, can no longer be reduced into a military campaign.”[14]

To put it another way, victory in the *“true sense implies that the state of peace and of one’s people, is better after the war than before.”*[15] Such a victory, however, requires considerable patience, because *“while the military contest may have a finite ending, the political, social, and psychological issues may not be resolved even years after the formal end of hostilities.”*[16]

So, how does this paradigm translate in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? More precisely, has violence meted out on the Palestinians forcing them to do under duress what Israel wanted in the short term brought a settled, durable peace? It has obviously not. For Peter Layton, the Israelis are a perfect contemporary example of the validity of said paradigm:

“...they (the Israelis) have won many seemingly decisive battles but are still searching for victory. The Palestinians may be scattered and partly live in occupied lands, but Israel is unable to compel them to come to a peaceful resolution of their territorial disagreement. The two side’s political differences remain unresolved, so their political interaction – their human intercourse – continues, sometimes violently and occasionally at times through war.”[17]

Since October 7, this situation has worsened in an unprecedented manner, as it has set in motion a succession of tragic events of Dantesque proportions. What is unfolding right before our very eyes is no less than a fight for survival from the point of view of all the belligerents, namely Israel and the Palestinians, as well as the latter’s allies in the potent “axis of resistance” composed of Lebanese Hezbollah, Yemeni Houthis, Iraqi resistance factions, Syria and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Quite understandably, Wesley Clark’s shocking utterance *“we’re going to take out seven countries in five years”* has never ceased to loom over the region.

Collectively Trapped in an Existential Zero-Sum Game

On 21 January 2024, The Palestinian Resistance Movement Hamas issued a 16-page document entitled *“Our Narrative...Operation Al-Aqsa Flood”*[18] to clarify the background and dynamics of the surprise attack, which the Palestinian Resistance leaders decided to launch on 7 October, considering it *“a necessary step and a normal response to confront all Israeli conspiracies against the Palestinian people”*.

The report is mainly intended to the steadfast Palestinian people, the Arab and Islamic nations and the *“free peoples worldwide and those who advocate for freedom, justice and human dignity”*, in light of *“the ongoing Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and as our people continue their battle for independence, dignity, and breaking free from the longest-ever occupation during which they have drawn the finest displays of bravery and heroism in confronting the Israeli murder machine and aggression.”*

The document is structured around five sections. The first section deals with the reasons behind Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, explaining that the battle of the Palestinian people against occupation and colonialism did not start on 7 October 2023, but rather 105 years ago, including 30 years of British colonialism and 75 years of Zionist occupation. It recalls that in 1918, the Palestinian people owned 98.5% of the Palestine land and represented 92% of its overall population. And even after the mass Jewish immigration campaigns coordinated between the British colonial authorities and the Zionist Movement, the Jews controlled no more than 6% of the land of Palestine and represented only 31% of its total population prior to the creation of the “state of Israel” in 1948. Over these decades, the Palestinian people suffered all forms of oppression, injustice, expropriation of their fundamental rights and the apartheid policies, and *“After 75 years of relentless occupation and suffering, and after failing all initiatives for liberation and return to our people, and also after the disastrous results of the so-called peace process, what did the world expect from the Palestinian people to do?”* the document asks. Should they keep waiting and keep counting on the helpless UN? Or take the initiative in defending the Palestinian people, lands, rights and sanctities, knowing that the defence act is a right enshrined in international laws, norms and conventions?



Our Narrative...

Operation Al-Aqsa Flood



Screenshot from [Palestine Chronicle](#)

The second section titled “*The events of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood*” describes the occurrences of that day and debunks some of the Israeli lies, highlighting the fact that

“the Palestinian resistance was fully disciplined and committed to the Islamic values during the operation and that the Palestinian fighters only targeted the occupation soldiers and those who carried weapons against our people”, and adding that “If there was any case of targeting civilians, it happened accidentally and in the course of the confrontation with the occupation forces”.

It also indicated that many Israelis were killed by the Israeli army and police, especially

those who were in the Nova music festival, as reported by Israeli Yedioth Ahronoth and Haaretz newspapers.

In the third section titled *"Towards a transparent international investigation"*, the report recalls that being a member-state of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its Rome Statute since 2015, Palestine asked for an investigation into Israeli war crimes committed on its territories, but was faced both with *"Israeli intransigence and rejection, and threats to punish the Palestinians for the request to ICC"* and Western powers completely siding with Israel's narrative and standing against the Palestinian moves within the international justice system, thereby keeping Israel as a state above the law and ensuring it escapes liability and accountability. That is why, the document goes on,

"We urge these countries, especially the US administration, Germany, Canada and the UK, if they are meant for justice to prevail as they claim, they ought to announce their support to the course of the investigation in all crimes committed in occupied Palestine and to give full support for the international courts to effectively do their job."

In the fourth section, titled *"A reminder to the world, who is Hamas?"*, the group describes itself as a *"Palestinian Islamic national liberation and resistance movement"* who *"gets its legitimacy to resist the occupation from the Palestinian right to self-defence, liberation and self-determination."* It further insists that it *"does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine."* In so doing, the report says,

"We stress that resisting the occupation with all means including the armed resistance, is a legitimised right by all norms, divine religions, the international laws including the Geneva Conventions and its first additional protocol and the related UN resolutions", mainly UN General Assembly's Resolution 3236, adopted on 22 November 1974, which affirmed "the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Palestine, including the right to self-determination and the right to return to 'their homes and property from where they were expelled, displaced and uprooted."

The fifth and final section is related to *"What is Needed"*. The document says that *"Occupation is occupation no matter how it describes or names itself, and remains a tool to break the will of the peoples and to keep oppressing them"*. It also emphasises the fact that throughout history the experiences of the peoples/nations willing to break away from occupation and colonialism confirm that *"resistance is the strategic approach and the only way to liberation and ending the occupation"*; a process which requires *"struggle, resistance or sacrifice"*. Believing that humanitarian, ethical and legal imperatives should normally lead *"all countries around the world to back the resistance of the Palestinian people and not collude against it"*, Hamas calls for the immediate halt of the Israeli aggression on Gaza, a cessation of the crimes and ethnic cleansing committed against the entire Gaza population, the opening of the border crossings and the entry of the humanitarian aid into Gaza including the reconstruction tools. It also urges to *hold the Israeli occupation legally accountable for the human suffering it caused to the Palestinian people, and to charge it for the crimes against civilians, infrastructure, hospitals, educational facilities, mosques and churches*. Moreover, it calls upon the free peoples across the world, especially those nations who were colonised and recognise the suffering of the Palestinian people, to take serious and effective positions against the double standard policies adopted by powers/countries that back the Israeli occupation: *"We call on these nations to initiate a global solidarity movement with the Palestinian people and to emphasise the values of justice and equality"*

and the right of the peoples to live in freedom and dignity.”

Hamas’s report also addressed the issue of post-war Gaza, a day after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu doubled down on his opposition to Palestinian statehood. It states:

“We stress that the Palestinian people have the capacity to decide their future and to arrange their internal affairs” adding that “no party in the world” had the right to decide on their behalf.

It goes without saying that the October 7 sophisticated military operation must have been orchestrated after months, if not years of planning, training, and military and intelligence gathering. Liberation is the heart of Hamas’s strategic vision for Palestine, and during these last years, its leaders have assessed that “victory is nigh”.

Clear evidence for that line of reasoning was provided by the convening of a conference which passed almost unnoticed despite – or perhaps because of – its very conspicuous title and theme. In effect, a conference titled “*Promise of the Hereafter*[19] – *Post-Liberation Palestine*” was held at the Commodore Hotel in Gaza City on 30 September 2021, under the patronage of Hamas leader in Gaza Yahya Al-Sinwar, with other Palestinian factions in attendance. The conference discussed preparations for the future administration of the state of Palestine following its “liberation” from Israel.[20]

According to an English translation provided by The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), the conference’s concluding statement[21] says:

“the Promise of the Hereafter Institute held the first strategic vision conference of its kind: the Promise of the Hereafter Conference, which formulated ideas and methods of operation [to be implemented] during the liberation of Palestine in various areas that were discussed at the conference. This complements the strategies that have been formulated by the Promise of the Hereafter Institute since its establishment in 2014, with the aim of providing a clearer vision for those in charge of liberating Palestine.”

The following are some of the recommendations formulated at the conference:

- The liberation of Palestine is the collective duty of the entire [Islamic] nation, first and foremost of the Palestinian people. It is [therefore] crucial to formulate a plan for utilising the nation’s resources and dividing the labour among its different components, each according to its abilities. That is the responsibility of the Council for the Liberation of Palestine.
- The Council for the Liberation of Palestine will be headed by a general secretariat, led by a steering council, which, upon the liberation of Palestine, will become an executive council headed by an interim presidential council until the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections and the formation of a new government.
- Immediately after the liberation, the liberation forces will issue a Palestinian independence document setting out the Palestinian principles, highlighting the Palestinian national identity and its Arab, Islamic, regional and international depth. The formulation of this document will be overseen by a team of experts in the spheres of politics, law and media, for this will be a historic document on the legal and humanitarian levels, a direct continuation of the Pact of ‘Umar Bin Al-Khattab[22] and of the announcement issued by Salah Al-Din upon his liberation

of the Al-Aqsa Mosque [in 1187].[23]

- The liberation forces will declare a series of interim laws, to be formulated in advance, including a land and real estate law granting [these forces] control over all state lands and assets, as well as laws [regulating the activity of] the civil service, the interim government, the Palestinian army, the judiciary and security [apparatuses], the return [of the refugees], the [state] comptroller and the municipal authorities.
- An announcement will be addressed to the UN declaring that the state of Palestine has succeeded the occupation state and will enjoy the rights of the occupation state, based on the articles of the 1978 Vienna Convention on Succession of States.

The concluding statement ends with the affirmation that

“time has come to act. Preparations for the liberation of Palestine began with the spirit of liberation that emanated from this conference, and from the preparations of the fighters whose souls yearn to liberate the land of Palestine and its holy places. We are headed for the victory that Allah promised his servants: ‘O you who have believed, if you support Allah, He will support you and plant firmly your feet [Quran 47:7]’; “They will say: ‘When is that?’; Say, ‘Perhaps it will be soon.’ [Quran 17:51]”

In his statement before the conference, Yahya Al-Sinwar underlined that “*the battle for the liberation and the return to Palestine has become closer now than ever before*”. He emphasised the importance of preparing for what was to come, giving as an example the “Sword of Al-Qods” battle of May 2021, and noting that

“the conflict can end only with the implementation of the promise of victory and control that Allah gave us – that our people will live with dignity in its independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. To this end, we are working hard and making many efforts on the ground and in its depths, in the heart of the sea, and in the heights of the heavens... We [can already] see with our eyes the [imminent] liberation and therefore we are preparing for what will come after it.”

It is noteworthy to mention that Al-Sinwar used similar words in a speech he delivered only three months earlier before Palestinian academics in the Gaza Strip.[24] He notably boasted that Hamas had won the last round of fighting with Israel and praised the Palestinians in Jerusalem for resisting Israeli “*schemes to Judaize Jerusalem, divide al-Aqsa Mosque and carry out ethnic cleansing*.” The last round of fighting with Israel, he added, represented only a “*small battle*” and the next war will be more significant and “*will change the shape of the Middle East*.”

For his part, the representative of the Islamic Jihad Khader Habib declared that

“The Resistance is engaged in an existential conflict with the Israeli occupation, and it will emerge victorious, as promised by Allah.” He added: “The only conflict which the Qur’an discusses in detail is the conflict between us and the Zionist enterprise, which is the pinnacle of evil on the global level.” Calling on the Palestinians to be prepared for the ramifications of the divine victory, he noted that “the end of the Zionist entity is mentioned in the Quran, and is certain and credible.”[25]

All these goals and considerations expressed by Palestinian leaders are obviously not lost on

the Israeli political leaders, strategists and think tanks in particular.

As Ramzy Baroud rightly suggested in a well-documented article[26], while it is true that Zionism is a modern political ideology that has exploited religion to achieve specific colonial objectives in Palestine, the subject of religious prophecies and their centrality to Israel's political thought was once more highlighted following remarks by former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, in an interview with the Hebrew-language newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth. Barak expressed fears that Israel will "disintegrate" before the 80th anniversary of its 1948 establishment. Throughout the Jewish history, he said,

"the Jews did not rule for more than eighty years, except in the two kingdoms of David and the Hasmonean dynasty and, in both periods, their disintegration began in the eighth decade."[27]

Like Ehud Barak, Benjamin Netanyahu had expressed similar fears about looming existential threats at a Bible study session in his house in Jerusalem. He was quoted as saying that *"Hasmonean state [also known as the Maccabees] lasted only 80 years, and we needed to exceed this."*[28] Although belonging to different political schools, both leaders share the belief that Israel's survival is at stake and its demise is only a matter of time.

Moreover, this belief is far from confined to the Israeli political elites' sphere, nor are they a new phenomenon. Indeed, for instance, Benny Morris, one of the leading Israeli "New Historians" – who considers himself as a Zionist[29] – is of the opinion that in a matter of a generation Israel will cease to exist in its current form, albeit for other reasons mainly related to demographics. He stated in an interview that he doesn't see *"how we get out of it. Already, today there are more Arabs than Jews between the (Mediterranean) Sea and the Jordan (River). The whole territory is unavoidably becoming one state with an Arab majority. Israel still calls itself a Jewish state, but a situation in which we rule an occupied people that has no rights cannot persist in the 21st century."*[30]

Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé and Ari Shavit are today reiterating what they have been saying, long before the ongoing war on Gaza, about the occupation of Palestinian lands and its adverse consequences on the future of Israel as a "Jewish state". They all predict the demise of Israel "as we know it". In effect, more than a decade ago, these left-wing historians and journalist wrote acclaimed books[31] in which they all agree on one thing:

"the current status quo between Israel and the Palestinians is unsustainable. [They] see the writing on the wall. The occupation, the relentless expansion of illegal settlements, the construction of the monstrous 'security barrier' on the West Bank, the demolition of Palestinian houses in East Jerusalem, the flagrant violations of international law, the systematic abuse of Palestinian human rights and the rampant racism – all are slowly but surely turning Israel into an international pariah. No sane Israeli relishes the prospect of living in a pariah state that maintains an apartheid regime."[32]

Also, back in 2016, Ari Shavit wrote:

"It is not the United Nations and the European Union that will stop settlements. The only force in the world capable of saving Israel from itself is the Israelis themselves, by creating a new political language that recognises reality and that the Palestinians are rooted in this land. I urge you to look for the third way to survive here and not die."[33]

Needless to say, in the reflection about the future of the state of Israel and the existential threats it's facing, the think tank community is heavily involved. Maj. Gen. (ret.) Gershon Hachohen's recent analysis stands out in this regard. Adopting a skilful approach, he wrote a very perspicacious article[34] divided into three parts on the right-leaning Bar-Ilan University's Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies' website. Hachohen says that the fractures and divisions within Israeli society over the past year were seen as a divine omen that this was the time when the gates of heaven would open to herald the redemption of the leadership of Hamas in Gaza. Referring mainly to the above-mentioned "Promise of the Hereafter Conference", he reminds that Muslim religious leaders and military strategists predicted years ago that this period would mark the beginning of the end for Israel. He also strongly believes that as it defines the goals of the war,

"it is crucial that the Israeli leadership understand the religious logic guiding Israel's enemies. On the physical level, Israel must strive to dismantle the regional system that has been constructed with the support and intent of Iran. On the spiritual-faith level, Israeli victory must be decisive in a way that neutralises the belief among the leadership of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran that the day of Israel's destruction is at hand."

One more example[35] in this same vein is provided by Seth Frantzman who – unlike many political leaders and analysts who are busy devising about what the "day after" will look like in Gaza – considers that *"Gaza may not be where this is leading. In fact, the real 'prize' for Doha, Turkey, Iran, and others may be much closer to Jerusalem."*

The War to End All Gaza Wars and the Road Ahead

Based on the above-mentioned paradigm, how can we assess, thus far, the ongoing war aims and outcomes as per the belligerents? In other words, who's winning this war and who's losing it from the military, legal, moral and, more importantly, political standpoints? And what's next therefore?

Like many other strategists and military analysts, Gershon Hachohen points out that Israel has continued to confront the threat of war according to the pattern of conflicts from the last century, from the "War of Independence" in 1948 to the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Thereafter, it has been struggling to grasp the implications of a new conception of warfare adopted by its enemies. This conception, he says, *"has thrust Israel into a state of continuous warfare, like a chronic disease without a cure."*

When he initially crafted his country's national security doctrine in the mid-twentieth century, the first Israeli Prime minister David Ben-Gurion acknowledged the fundamental weakness of the State of Israel in terms of its ability to withstand a prolonged war. Accordingly, he expected the IDF to decisively win wars fast, and developed an offensive striking force with the directive to transfer any conflict to the enemy's territory as quickly as possible. General Israel Tal – who designed the Merkava tank and reached the position of deputy Chief of staff – explained this perspective in length in his book where he describes the history of the Israel-Arab wars from 1948 onward and presents a security theory specific to Israel from which the fighting doctrines of the Israeli military derive. Tal concludes that previous security theory proved valid because it was based upon a decision to allocate the great portion of available resources, both intellectual and material, to secure national defence. He considered that this theory was no longer valid due to political changes in the Middle East and the development of modern military technologies.

Over the decades, Israel's security doctrine has been updated to encompass four fundamental pillars, namely deterrence, early warning, strong defensive capabilities, and decisive and quick victories.

Nevertheless, the Israeli need to end wars quickly was clearly understood and effectively integrated into the perception of warfare developed by Hezbollah and Hamas, with the backing of Iran. They formulated a concept of warfare that is aimed at swiftly negating Israel's decisive capabilities.

As explained by Hachohen, over the last 40 years, Islamic organisations have formulated the idea of an ideological-religious war guided by the concept of "Al-Muqawama", the Arabic word for "resistance." This idea *"represents a cultural perspective on the phenomenon of war that differs strikingly from that of Western observers. According to the Western cultural perspective, war is a deviation from the stable and peaceful order and is therefore conducted with the intention of restoring that order. The Al-Muqawama concept, by contrast, views warfare as a means of maintaining a constant momentum of conflict and struggle designed to ultimately bring about global Islamic religious conquest."*

It can thus be viewed as the inverse of Clausewitz's description of war as "the continuation of politics by other means". Politics therefore is seen as the continuation of war by other means, and negotiation is viewed not as a means to bring about the end of a war but simply as a pause that serves its continuation at a more opportune time under more favourable conditions.

According to the retired general, this concept of resistance has both a physical-military dimension and a cultural-spiritual dimension. The military dimension was described by the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Hossein Salami in 2022:

"The Palestinians are ready for ground combat. This is Israel's vulnerability. Missiles are excellent for deterrence (...) but they don't liberate land. Ground forces must be deployed, step by step, to liberate it (...) Hezbollah and Palestinian forces will move on the ground in a unified military structure."[36]

In truth, the new resistance strategy was essentially the brainchild of Qassem Suleimani, the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Al-Qods Force, who was assassinated in an American missile strike on 3 January 2020. Suleimani was keen on and fully invested in strengthening the coordination work between the different resistance groups around Israel; a strategy known as "Tightening the noose", which links religious, political, civic and military ideology.

Also, less than two months prior to October 7, Saleh Al-Arouri, Deputy Head of the Political Bureau of Hamas, said in an exclusive interview with Lebanese Al Mayadeen TV that:

"the Resistance alliance is prepared and motivated by reason, will, and common interests to partake in a regional war, and the active parties are ready and prepared for it", adding: "The all-out war will be a defeat for Israel, and we see that classical wars have changed, and this is evidenced by the conflict in Ukraine."[37]

Later on, the very day of the October 7 attack, Al-Arouri[38] declared in an interview with Al Jazeera that the group is engaged in a battle for freedom:

"This is not a [hit-and-run] operation; we started an all-out battle. We expect fighting to

continue and the fighting front to expand. We have one prime target: our freedom and the freedom of our holy sites.”[39]

Regarding the spiritual-cultural dimension, Hacohen says that Hamas’s leadership has taught us that its conduct is guided by a deep religious rationale, and

“Western cultural observers, who for centuries have separated religious motives from the political, diplomatic, and military considerations of state leaders, have no tools with which to understand the leadership of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas, which are driven by religious conviction and carry out their daily work guided by faith.” He added that “It is from this perspective that we can understand the logic employed by Yahya Al-Sinwar in his decision to go to war on October 7. From his point of view, after Hamas fulfilled its duty to take the initiative and act, trends would develop later that would advance the divine intention. If, for example, the war results in a situation in which Israel is forced to submit to American demands for the establishment of a Palestinian state and withdrawal from the West Bank, Al-Sinwar will be perceived as victorious. Despite the massive destruction he has brought down upon Gaza, he will achieve a historical status no less than that of Saladin.”

In Hacohen’s words, *“this insight must be integrated into the foundations of the Israeli security perception because in terms of comprehensive existential considerations, this perception extends beyond the concept of deterrence, which has repeatedly revealed itself to be fragile”*. What he was referring to is the failure of the ill-named “mowing the lawn” strategy, consisting for Israel to reestablish deterrence through a limited use of force each time a flare-up occurred in Gaza. As a matter of fact, this strategy allowed Hamas and the other Palestinian resistance groups to carry out a long-term buildup of arms and military infrastructure and to improve their operational capabilities, in particular through the construction of an amazingly extensive and highly sophisticated network of tunnels, even infiltrating Israeli territory.

In essence, Hacohen concludes, the war of 1967 was the last military clash to unfold along the lines of World War II, and since then, the world of warfare has changed completely. As a result, he believes that *“to seek a victory along the lines of outdated patterns is like asking for the Red Sea to be split again.”*

Image: The UN says nearly 1.9 million people have now been displaced in Gaza. [AbdelHakim Abu Riash/Al Jazeera]



Undoubtedly, the era of intermittent cycles of fighting and cease-fires in Gaza is Over. There will be no going back to the previous state of affairs. For both the Palestinian Resistance and

Israel the only order of the day is the vital need to achieve a decisive military outcome. This idea has *“sparked extensive debate among experts and senior IDF leaders for many years about how to define ‘decisive outcome’ and ‘victory’ and how to apply them to conflicts with non-state actors and terrorist groups. Israel now understands that although the jihadi ideology of Hamas may persist (as have those of the Islamic State, or ISIS, and Al-Qaeda), the IDF must dismantle the organisation’s military capabilities.”*[40]

It’s a truism to say that because of its incomparable conventional military superiority to its adversaries, Israel knows full well that Hamas and the other Palestinian Resistance groups cannot go toe to toe with the IDF. How could a group of armed irregulars numbering in the low tens of thousands, besieged in a tiny territory and with little access to advanced weaponry, reasonably be a match to a nuclear state, ranked 17th most powerful military in the world[41], armed and backed by the world’s number one, that is the U.S.? Yet, as we said earlier when referring to insurgents’ worldview and game plan within the framework of modern asymmetric warfare, Israel in its turn will go down in the history books as another example of a mighty military power losing to a weaker opponent.

As Audrey Kurth Cronin says, *“For Israel, perhaps the most galling outcome of this asymmetry is that its armed forces may have played squarely into Hamas’s hands by striking Gaza with tremendous force”*[42] in response to the Al-Aqsa Flood military operation on October 7th. This operation, she claims, *“was intended to provoke the Israeli military into an overreaction that would undermine international sympathy for Israel, stoke an uprising in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and rally support for Hamas (...) In many ways, the group has succeeded”*.

Indeed, driven by a blind desire for vengeance, the IDF have called up over 350,000 reservists and launched ferocious attacks by air, land and sea in a collective punishment of the Palestinian civilians that has so far killed and injured close to 5% of the Gazan population, created a humanitarian catastrophe of Biblical proportions, and is increasingly raising the risk of a wider regional, if not world war.

With its savage military expedition entering its fourth month – making it the longest and deadliest it has ever experienced – Israel has yet to achieve any of its three stated strategic goals, which Netanyahu has just once again reiterated:

“We will not compromise on anything less than total victory (...) That means eliminating Hamas, returning all of our hostages and ensuring that Gaza will no longer pose a threat to Israel.”[43]

Worse still, Netanyahu is facing a deeply divided war cabinet and knows his right-wing governmental coalition is in great danger of being brought down at any time. Further evidence of this was given when Defence Minister Yoav Gallant who promised to *“wipe Hamas off the face of the earth”* is now replacing the previously equally sacrosanct third objective with a revealing new one, that is *“maintaining unity among the people of Israel.”*[44]

After only two months of fierce fighting, and despite the cataclysmic violence unleashed on Palestinians, an increasing number of establishment strategic analysts started warning that Israel was failing to achieve its political goals and could lose this war. By shattering a status quo that Palestinians find intolerable, Tony Karon and Daniel Levy say, *“Hamas has put*

politics back on the agenda. Israel has significant military power, but it is politically weak.”[45] They remind that “History also suggests a pattern in which representatives of movements dismissed as ‘terrorist’ by their adversaries – in South Africa, say, or Ireland – nonetheless appear at the negotiating table when the time comes to seek political solutions. It would be ahistorical to bet against Hamas, or at least some version of the political-ideological current it represents, doing the same if and when a political solution between Israel and the Palestinians is revisited with seriousness.” The authors conclude that “What comes after the horrific violence is far from clear, but Hamas’s October 7 attack has forced a reset of a political contest to which Israel appears unwilling to respond beyond devastating military force against Palestinian civilians. And as things stand eight weeks into the vengeance, Israel can’t be said to be winning”.

For former Prime minister Ehud Olmert, the odds of achieving the complete elimination of Hamas were nil from the moment that Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared it the chief goal of the war. Hamas, he wrote in an opinion,[46]

“Is not easily defeated. Of course Netanyahu knew from the get-go that his rhetoric was baseless and would ultimately collapse in the face of a military and humanitarian reality that would force Israel to reach an end point in the current campaign. That time has now arrived. The defeat of Hamas is a long way away. We haven’t even reached the point at which we are in control of the timetable of the war that began on October 7.”

To the question of what is to be done, he believes that *“the time has come for Israel to express its readiness to end the fighting. Yes, end the fighting. Not a pause and not a temporary cessation of two, three or four days. An end of hostility – period.”* This should be conditioned on the release of all the hostages and in exchange, Israel *“will have no choice but to release all the Hamas prisoners it holds.”*

Similarly, for Eyal Hulata, who was Israel’s national security adviser from 2021-2023,

“There is no way this will end when Israel can say we are victorious. Israel lost this war [on] the 7th of October. The only question now is if we are able to remove from Hamas the ability to do this again. And we might succeed, and we might not.”[47]

Leading Israeli columnist Nahum Barnea doesn’t think otherwise. In an op-ed he wrote in Yedioth Ahronoth, he called on Israel to adjust its objective of dismantling Hamas in Gaza and affirmed that:

“In the last three weeks, the war has not changed reality. It has cost the lives of soldiers, has increased the risk of a humanitarian disaster that Israel will be responsible for, has hurt Israel in the world and hasn’t brought us any closer to a victory which does not exist.”[48]

Also, former leader of the Shin Bet domestic security force, Ami Ayalon, said Israel will not have security until Palestinians have their own state, and Israeli authorities should release Marwan Barghouti, jailed leader of the second intifada, to direct negotiations to create one. He also shared the view that the nature of Hamas meant that its destruction was an impossible goal for a military. Hamas is not just a militia, he said, but *“an ideology with an organisation, and the organisation has a military wing. You cannot destroy ideology by the use of military power. Sometimes it will be rooted deeper if you try. This is exactly what we see today. Today, 75% of Palestinians support Hamas. Before the war, it was less than*

50%.”[49]

The same opinion was expressed by war cabinet Gadi Eisenkot, thus contradicting his own Prime minister. He said that “*A strategic achievement was not reached ... We did not demolish the Hamas organisation*”. [50]

Last but not least, former Prime minister Ehud Barak stated in an opinion in Haaretz that Hamas has not been defeated, and the chances of recovering the hostages are declining.”[51] He added that those who believe that Palestinians in Gaza can be encouraged to migrate voluntarily are delving into dreams that have no basis in reality.

The textbook case of genocide that Israel is carrying out against the Palestinian people has inflamed public opinion across the whole world as shown by the millions of pro-Palestinian protesters marching almost daily in rallies on the street of major world cities. These multitudes are united in one overarching demand: ending the Israeli bombardment of Gaza and Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Even in the United States, the staunchest supporter of Israel no matter how gravely damaging this blind support has been to the United States’ national and global interests, growing numbers of protesters are taking to the streets of New York City, Washington DC, Los Angeles and Dallas, among others.



More significantly, after losing the war of worldwide public opinion, Israel has suffered another blow when, on 26 January, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) rejected its petition to throw out a landmark legal case filed by South Africa concerning “*alleged violations by Israel of its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza strip*”. By an overwhelming majority of 15 votes to two, the ICJ’s panel of 17 judges issued an order[52], which has binding effect, indicating six provisional instructions to Israel to refrain from acts under the Genocide convention, prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to genocide, and take immediate and effective measures to ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza. Crucially, the Court also ordered Israel to preserve evidence of genocide and to submit a report to the Court, within one month, of all measures taken in line with its order. This ruling, critically enough, raises the possibility that Israel’s backers in Washington,

London, Berlin and other European capitals could face the prospect of being implicated in having aided and abetted genocide in some future date.[53]

As a result of all these momentous events, Washington is now openly and regularly calling for the implementation of the two-States solution. In the words of Maria Fantappie and Wali Nasr[54], Washington *"Can no longer neglect the Palestinian issue. In fact, it will have to make resolving that conflict the centrepiece of its endeavour. It will simply be impossible for the United States to tackle other questions in the region, including the future of Arab-Israeli ties, until there is credible path to a viable future Palestinian state."*

Better still, Secretary of State Tony Blinken recently asked the State Department to conduct a review and present policy options on possible U.S. and international recognition of a Palestinian state after the war in Gaza[55]. The simple fact that the State Department is even considering such options signals a major policy shift within the Biden administration. This is all the more important news as for decades, U.S. policy has been to oppose the recognition of Palestine as a state both bilaterally and in UN institutions and to stress Palestinian statehood should only be achieved through direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

And so, thanks to their steadfast resistance and indescribable sacrifices, Palestinians have at last, and against all odds, succeeded in having their just cause front and centre on the global stage. They have thus decidedly paved the way for a long-awaited independence and a dignified life on their stolen ancestral land.

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