



Palestinian-Arab perspective on the delay of the IDF ground maneuver in the Gaza Strip

October 28, 2023

Overview¹

- ▶ In addition to documenting events in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian and Arab media have given extensive coverage to the IDF's preparations for the next phase of the war in the Gaza Strip, i.e. the ground maneuver. The media follow the preparations, including the increased number and deployment along the Gaza Strip border of fighters, weapons, tanks and APCs, and visits by senior officials such as Defense Minister Galant and Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi and their conversations with the soldiers. They also ask why the ground maneuver has not yet begun.
- ▶ Monitoring Hamas, Palestinian and Arab sources has revealed the following:
 - ◆ **Hamas** shows great confidence in its military capabilities and its ability to prevent Israel from achieving its objectives in the war. It has identified the difficulty Israel is having in making decisions, hesitancy at the military and political levels and considerable embarrassment, difficulty in dealing with international pressure and the hostage situation along with concern of ground warfare against the skilled military operatives in the Gaza Strip, who are equipped with special weapons.
 - ◆ **The Palestinian media** publish cartoons warning the IDF against a ground incursion into Gaza and even mocking it for its "cowardice." Various Palestinian sources disagree as to whether the IDF will actually carry out the ground maneuver because of the complexity of the operation and the expected number of casualties.
 - ◆ **The Arab media** review a variety of reasons, including international reasons, for the delay in the ground maneuver.

¹ Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.



Right: Media coverage about the reinforcement of IDF forces at the Gaza border in preparation for the ground maneuver. Left: A report on Defense Minister Galant's visit near the border with Gaza (al-Mayadeen, October 24, 2023)



Monitoring the IDF's preparations for the ground maneuver in Gaza (al-Hadath Twitter account, October 24, 2023)

Key Information

Hamas

► Sources in Hamas attribute the delay to various causes, including the fact that the Gaza Division, which had knowledge of the plans and which was supposed to lead the movement, was almost entirely eliminated on October 7, 2023. Hamas also claimed the shells and anti-tank bombs dropped from the air by their UAVs deterred the forces, and the IDF was busy finding ways to overcome the threat.

► **Ahmed Abd al-Hadi, the Hamas representative in Lebanon**, told television interviewers that one of the reasons for the delay was that today Israel had no knowledge of how to deal with the Gaza Strip because Hamas' military wing eliminated the entire Gaza Division, and its officers and soldiers who had the knowledge, and the data on the subject, were currently being held by Hamas (Lebanon website, October 19, 2023; LuaLuaTV Twitter account, October 19, 2023).

► A "reliable source" in Hamas' military-terrorist wing told an al-Jazeera correspondent that according to information in their possession, apparently Israeli field commanders refused to enter the Gaza Strip without a practical solution for the anti-tank weapons dropped by Hamas' UAVs. "The source" claimed that the IDF's ground forces department had been tasked with providing solutions for every tank and APC that would enter the Gaza Strip, lest in the future the army commanders be held accountable. That was also the reason, he claimed, that the IDF tanks near Gaza had been covered with special camouflage nets.

► According to "the source," on October 7, 2023, Hamas' military wing had destroyed 65% of the Gaza Division's strength, there were dead, wounded who would never recover and prisoners. He added that according to military theory, a loss of 30%, was sufficient to neutralize a force, and Hamas' military wing had caused twice that amount of damage (al-Jazeera TV website, October 23, 2023).

► **Ibrahim al-Madhoun, a Hamas-affiliated Palestinian journalist,**² wrote that Israel was threatening a ground war when it was "fearful and terrified." He claimed that the "resistance" [terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip] wanted a ground war and could fight for six months comfortably and a year under pressure. He claimed he had spoken to a Hamas field commander who told him they "smell heaven and see victory," and could not be defeated even if the whole world united against them (Ibrahim al-Madhoun's Twitter account, October 23, 2023).

► In another tweet, al-Madhoun wrote that the advanced al-Yassin shells and bombs dropped by the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades' UAVs were a key reason for the delay in the ground attack. He claimed the IDF soldiers refused to enter Gaza before a practical solution to the weapons had been found, and they asked IDF headquarters for solutions, otherwise "defeat was certain" (Ibrahim al-Madhoun's Twitter account, October 23, 2023).

► **Fayiz Abu Shamala, a Hamas-affiliated Palestinian political commentator from Khan Yunis,** posted several tweets claiming that Israel's concern was the cause of the delay. He claimed that everyone who thought American pressure was the reason the ground attack had

² Al-Madhoun is Gazan journalist and Hamas activist who has been in Turkey since late 2018. He is the CEO of the Palestinian Information Association known as FIMED, the acronym of its name in Turkish, and whose objective is to market the Palestinian narrative to Turkish society. It is headed by senior Hamas figure Sami Abu Zuhri and its office is in Istanbul. Al-Madhoun was previously featured on the Hamas website as a member of the national relations department of Hamas "abroad."

been postponed ignored the weakness of the Israeli army, its moral defeat and its inability to approach the Gaza Strip, and they "ignore the presence of heroes [sic] in Gaza [who are] the size of mountains" (Faiz Abu Shamala's Twitter account, October 21, 2023). In another tweet he wrote, "What is this lie: the Israeli army is rejecting the ground attack against Gaza at the request of the United States, in order to solve the issue of prisoners?! The truth is the Israeli army is too cowardly to enter Gaza. The defeated do not think of an attack" (Twitter account of Faiz Abu Shamala, October 23, 2023).

► The **Hamas al-Risalah magazine** published an article claiming the IDF and Israeli intelligence suffered a severe blow after the attack on October 7, 2023. The image of the invincible army collapsed completely and so did the IDF's deterrence. Given the situation, he claimed, Israel was evidently apprehensive about entering into ground fighting in Gaza. It was true Israel had mobilized 300,000 reservists "to restore its honor," but it was afraid to use them because a ground entry meant close-range combat with the fighters of the military wing of Hamas and other [terrorist] organizations. He added it would be difficult for the IDF to achieve significant objectives in urban warfare in Gaza City, and the "resistance" fighters would outflank them and emerge from tunnels to surprise them with ambushes and attacks from the rear. The article mentioned the fighting during Operation Protective Edge when Hamas' military wing operatives defeated IDF infantry brigades in Shejaiya and prevented the IDF from a depth incursion. The article boasted of the strengths of the "resistance" in Gaza, including ambushes, IEDs, a "tremendous and threatening network of tunnels" and a variety of weapons against armored vehicles. Furthermore, the article claimed the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades had a qualitative advantage over the IDF soldiers because they were thousands of well-trained, highly experienced fighters with a fighting spirit and the desire to die a "martyr's death."

► The article also dealt with the issue of the hostages. It claimed Israel had to choose between a painful deal for their release, which it was unwilling to do, and sacrificing them in a savage campaign [the "Hannibal Procedure"³], as a necessary price for restoring some dignity, but at a price that the Israeli public would not accept.

► Therefore, in light of the above, the author concluded Israel would not be able to achieve its goals in the war. He predicted a campaign similar to its predecessors in Gaza, but more

³ An IDF order regarding rules for immediate action in the event of a soldier being kidnapped by the enemy.

violent. He predicted Israel would continue to “destroy” Palestinian civilians, sow destruction, tighten the siege on Gaza, but ultimately would not be able to weaken the "resistance" (al-Risalah, October 16, 2023).

The Palestinian media

► The senior figures in the Palestinian Authority [PA] have not addressed the subject of the ground maneuver planned by the IDF. The media publishes only the opinions of a number of relatively low-level activists and political commentators, who mainly claim the delay is due to the concern over the losses IDF forces would incur during a ground maneuver.

► **Mustafa Barghouti, Secretary General of the Palestinian National Initiative**, told an interviewer from the Iranian Arabic-language al-Alam channel that Israel had to deal with a serious crisis due to the failure of its plan for the mass migration of residents from Gaza, which did not actually happen. Therefore, Israel was currently making "a thousand calculations" before reaching a decision to launch a ground maneuver, which could lead to a "general explosion" in the area and inflict heavy losses on it (al-Alam, October 24, 2023).

► **Muhammad al-Masri, a Palestinian political commentator from Ramallah**, said the IDF currently had no choice but to carry out ground maneuvers in Gaza after the massive attacks carried out by the Air Force in recent days. In his opinion, the IDF was aware of the losses it would incur because of the heavy fighting it would have to wage against the military-terrorist wings of the organizations in Gaza. He also noted that the IDF had been very surprised by the level of the military operatives' fighting in Gaza since the beginning of the war (al-Ghad TV, October 25, 2023).

► **Hassan Kharisha, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council from Tulkarm**, claimed Israel understood that a ground maneuver in Gaza would not be in its favor, despite the pressure exerted by IDF commanders on the political echelon and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He claimed the IDF had been defeated on October 7, 2023 by "resistance" operatives from Gaza, so currently it was taking revenge on the residents of the Gaza Strip and not engaging in actual warfare (al-Ghad TV, October 25, 2023).

The Arab media

► Al-Jazeera TV aired a short broadcast which cited a number of reasons for the delay, including the abductees in Gaza and the pressure exerted by their families on the Israeli government, internal disagreements within the Israeli government, waiting for the arrival of

American forces in Israel, concern over the many casualties of a ground incursion into Gaza ,and concern over opening additional fronts in the north with Hezbollah and Iran, which would turn the war in Gaza into a regional war (al-Jazeera TV, October 23, 2023).



An al-Jazeera TV broadcast about the reasons for the delay in the ground maneuver
(al-Jazeera TV, October 23, 2023)

► **Rizq al-Khawalda, a strategic military expert**, told an interviewer from al-Sharq TV that the international pressure currently exerted on Israel because of the war in Gaza and the efforts vis-à-vis Hamas to free the abductees were delaying the ground maneuver (al-Sharq, October 23, 2023).

Cartoons



Right: The world supports Israel in the ground maneuver (al-Quds, October 24, 2023). Left: Israel entering the blood-soaked Gaza Strip anyway (al-Quds, October 22, 2023)



Right: Palestinian cartoon mocking the delay of the ground maneuver. The Arabic reads, "Gaza and the Zionist occupation" (al-Quds al-Arabi, October 24, 2023). Left: Palestinian cartoon mocking the concern shown by the IDF (Muhammad Sabaana's Facebook page, October 23, 2023)