Palestinian Resistance and the War in Gaza

written by Toufic Haddad | February 8, 2024

Dana Morgenstein

Toufic Haddad is a Palestinian author and academic living in Jerusalem. His book *Palestine Ltd.: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Territory* was published in 2016. He was interviewed on Zoom by *New Politics* editorial board member Phil Gasper on November 25, 2023. The transcript was edited in December.

New Politics (NP): *Let's start with October 7. The Hamas attack on October 7 certainly took the Israeli government by surprise[1], but it took most other observers by surprise as well. Should we have seen this coming? Were people in Gaza and the West Bank surprised by this as well? Or was this something that we should have expected given the terrible conditions in Gaza over the past many years?*

Toufic Haddad (TH): For those who are paying attention to the military-political dynamics in Palestine, October 7 was not entirely a surprise. The situation was ripe for something to happen given the increased marginalization of the Palestinian issue globally and regionally, broad indifference to Palestinian suffering under a particularly virulent settler colonialism and siege, and the strengthening conviction amongst Palestinians that armed struggle was needed to defend what remained of the Palestinian position in light of having other avenues toward acquiring Palestinian rights closed in their face.

Looking back, there were definitely signs that something was in the works although the extent and scope of the attack was difficult to fully anticipate. I did a long interview with *International Socialism* journal that was published on October 5, and in that I spoke of the military potential that was developing and accruing amongst Hamas and that I have witnessed and written about as an academic, journalist and political observer for the last 20 odd years.[2] In 2018, for instance, I published an academic article called "Insurgent Infrastructures," which speaks about the "city below the city" of Gaza composed of 500-plus kilometers of tunnels.[3] It was clear that Hamas had not abandoned armed struggle and was preparing, while the organization also dropped a lot of hints in its rhetoric about its plans that basically fell on deaf ears. But if we look at the larger historical-political dynamics, and the particular calculus that emerged between Israel and the resistance factions in the Gaza Strip, we do need to acknowledge that Hamas had never demonstrated such a capacity on this scale previously.

With this said, you had 17 years of siege and a kind of perverse situation that emerged where the international community and Israel had conspired to essentially end any political process attempting to resolve the Palestinian question. We had 30 years of the Oslo process, which essentially allowed Israel to solve important demographic "separation" and military objectives, and allowed it to hide these beneath the excuse of "security."[4] Part of that plan ended up meaning the suppression of any major Palestinian national-political project that could represent or demand Palestinian rights.

Then, of course, when elections happened [in 2006], the international community did not observe the results, which saw Hamas as hands-down winners, and instead opted for a divide-and-rule strategy over the Occupied Territories, with a Hamas-governed Gaza Strip and a Fatah-governed West Bank, and Israel given Jerusalem. This approach to dealing with the Palestinian question did not attempt to solve the political issue in anyway, and instead aimed to manage the "externalities" that emerged from this situation while using aid and military maneuvers to keep Palestinians divided and ensure no political process happened, but also ensuring that no major humanitarian crisis emerged.

In this light, the Gaza Strip became the most explosive concentration of all the contradictions because it is an untenable territory. Around 2012, the UN declared it "unlivable." Its huge pockets of poverty, unemployment and political grievance made it a perpetual boiling cauldron of hardship and anger, as the territory underwent 17 years of siege and 14 different cycles of significant military conflagrations, where Israel routinely "mowed the lawn,"[5] deciding when and how it did that. After each of these rounds, aid would be used as a form of blackmail against the Palestinians, perpetually creating this horrific situation where Gazans—most of whom are refugees of the 1948 war—were kept in a state of extreme vulnerability and oppression that made it a ghetto, "open air prison,"[6] or even "concentration camp"[7] by some observer standards. Basically, Hamas was able to glean the lessons of this situation and adapt accordingly within a long-term vision of not giving up Palestinian rights, while building a civil and military infrastructure that could position it to act as a new nucleus of a revived Palestinian national project, with an armed military potential.

This was seen as more important in light of the broader regional marginalization of the Palestinian issue at the expense of the Arab revolutionary processes, and Israeli-Arab normalization deals, which had collectively led to less attention and finance to the Palestinian issue. We should also not forget the heightened importance of Israel to EU and U.S. regional plans, as well as the fact that Israel is envisioned to play a regional hegemonic role as an alternative natural gas supplier to Europe in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Let's also not forget that Hamas did not exclusively go military. It was a democratically elected power that repeatedly signaled it was open to playing the official international political game. It changed its Charter in 2017[8] and openly declared its intentions to join the PLO. It also supported the nonviolent resistance campaign of the "Great March to Break the Siege and for Return" in 2018-19, which developed out of the mobilization of grassroot actors.[9]

I think this latter initiative is a very important backdrop to what's happening today. Hamas political leaders were literally standing in front of pictures of Martin Luther King and Gandhi, attempting to support a nonviolent approach to getting Palestinian rights back. Though Hamas did not initiate the movement, at a certain stage it did become a main player in it, and allowed the movement to continue for a good six months before it dissipated because of its high cost and ineffectiveness to mobilize significant international attention to the issues it was mobilizing around—breaking the siege and advocacy for the issue of refugee return. The movement in fact was brutally crushed, leading to horrific casualty figures—around 8,000 Palestinians were shot by snipers with live ammunition and roughly 250 people killed.

So, you have Hamas together with allies abroad and Palestinian society attempting to play a political game while using nonviolent means, all of which were disregarded or crushed. Remember that these attempts were taking place for a full 17 years. Don't forget the Mavi Marmara incident [in 2010] and other international attempts to break the siege on Gaza using flotillas.[10] These too were brutally crushed with lethal force. So basically, a military option was seen as the only means left for Hamas, with this opinion shared by all other factions in Gaza and Gazan society as well. In fact, Hamas was critiqued for not responding enough to this popular demand, as evidenced for instance in the movement's nonparticipation in the 2022 conflagration that targeted the Islamic Jihad organization.[11] In this context, it should not be surprising that Hamas never abandoned their military interests and sought to develop them without fully declaring their intentions and plans.

Gaza always had a tunnel network, which did not emerge out of a military resistance dynamic per se, but out of a commercial-survivalist one. Hamas simply invested in this experience and understood the strategic significance of tunnels in protecting resistance actors and assets, giving the movement supply lines and safe spaces to operate when everything above ground was closely monitored and targeted. Hamas organized the opportunities created by the conditions they were operating within, laying the foundations for Gaza to become the basis of Palestinian resistance and a new Palestinian national project, with an active military potential.

The Hamas leadership is composed of educated doctors, engineers and businessmen from refugee backgrounds, who were distinct from Fateh in organizational praxis in so far as they were seen to have a more meritocratic approach to institution building, according to Harvard academic Sara Roy.[12] Developmentally, they were able to organize the army of unemployed within Gaza to build the tunnel network, while also establishing a small to medium-size (we don't know exactly how big) military industrial complex there that produces everything from Kalashnikov bullets to mortars, anti-tank magnet bombs and, of course, rockets of many sizes. There has always been a wing of Hamas that believed quite strongly in the role of the military, but the movement developed leaps and bounds throughout the past three decades on this front. Military dimensions also gave a strong emotional boost to Palestinian morale and exposed Fateh and the PA [Palestinian Authority] in the West Bank as insufficiently responding to Israeli colonialism, especially the variant imposed under the current "far-Right" Israeli government.

Another important issue that needs to be inserted in discussions of October 7 is the issue of Palestinian prisoners. You have to take into consideration that the Palestinian political leadership today, except that which is located in Gaza, is mainly in Israeli prison—6000 of them before October 7. These are the field and political leaders of the OPT [Occupied Palestinian Territory], and are primarily now from the West Bank. Some of these prisoners were never released by the Oslo process, while a great many of them are also political leaders of the Second Intifada [2000-05], folks like Marwan Barghouti.[13] You have their worsening conditions with many deaths due to medical negligence.[14] You had the prisoner Khader Adnan, who died on hunger strike in April.[15] You have people from the Shalit prisoner exchange deal [in 2011] re-arrested—major figures like Nael Barghouti, who has now been in prison for a total of 45 years.[16]

Yahya Sinwar [the leader of Hamas in Gaza] spent 23 years in an Israeli prison. He knows these people well, is loyal to the Palestinian prisoner issue, and understands the importance of political leadership in enabling a confident and mature struggle. If you go back and listen to his speeches, you hear him speaking very clearly about the fact that Israel was ignoring all gestures to try and bring about a prisoner-release deal with four Israeli prisoners [captured by Hamas in 2014].[17] He said explicitly in December 2022 that if Israel continued to ignore gestures for a prisoner-exchange deal, the movement would seek other means to free its brothers. So, this is also an important warning that was ignored or not taken seriously.

Much has also been made of Hamas' ability to deceive many people—the Israeli military and political class, but also several Palestinian observers—making them believe that it had become some form of pacified Palestinian national movement concerned exclusively with governance and local power. I think for any astute observer of things, you couldn't have really believed that. But for some people it was too easy to think this. Israel and the international community, in their arrogance, believed their strategy of siege, occasional "carrots," and "mowed lawns" had tamed Hamas. Palestinians, frustrated with the inadequacy of their leaderships both in Gaza and the West Bank, also raised criticisms that Hamas and the PA in the West Bank had merely become self-serving elites.

This is not a fully accurate reflection even of what Fatah is doing in the West Bank, although there are aspects of it that are true. In Gaza, there are also elements of this analysis that are correct, with Hamas clearly interested in establishing a monopoly on power and in economics on the turf they "hold." But it was clear at the same time that Hamas was also doing something totally different. And in that regard, I think we really do need to look at the political trajectory of Gaza and its leaders and of Hamas, which brought it to this point.

Of course, on the other side of the coin, you also have the Israelis themselves and the international approach and thinking, which became repetitive, assumptive and cynical—that they could indefinitely manage the externalities generated by the situation but not attempt to solve the conflict. I call this the "Oslo Ostrich syndrome" where the international community backing the peace process politically and financially, essentially stuck its head in the ground, thinking that the "threat" of Palestinian national organizing and demands would disappear because the apparatuses of control established by Oslo were seen as robust and effective. Let's not forget, Israel and the U.S. were playing this divide-and-rule game with Hamas and the Palestinian movement overall before October 7 whereby they were allowing $30 million in briefcases to come in monthly via Tel Aviv and the Qataris, believing this was a way to buy-off Hamas by enabling it to pay its civil servants to run their public administration. Ever since 2006, Fatah refused to have their public administrators work for Hamas, while the international community would not have their money go to pay for Hamas civil administration. But everyone acknowledged that there was a need for civil administration in Gaza.

So, the U.S. and Israel made sure these monies came in, with these streams financing one institutional constellation in Gaza, while another was being funded in the West Bank under Fateh, dividing-and-ruling Palestinian politics through donor aid. Here Israel just became arrogant and assumptive about the situation they oversaw. Some people call it the "Fauda fallacy," which comes from the Netflix series in which Israel is portrayed as all-knowing and powerful, capable of infinitely keeping Palestinians down through high tech means and special operations.[18] And Hamas taught them a very big lesson in that regard.

What actually happened on October 7 still needs to be studied more closely and explained, because there's a lot of it that we still need to understand. Its central aspects are known though and were effectively executed from a military perspective. "Operation Al Aqsa Flood" (*Toufan Al Aqsa*)—the term Hamas named its operation—was a major military offensive against the holistic regime and apparatus of control that contained, starved, and repressed Gaza militarily, politically, and in terms of civilian life. The operation was a strategic gambit in an effort to change the rules of the game, both in the long term as well as the short. They wanted prisoners as bargaining power, that's for sure. They also wanted to destroy the Gaza Command—the military regime that oversees, controls and represses Gaza and which is located throughout the Gaza envelope in military bases and settlements, with headquarters in Re'im—incidentally right next to where the NOVA rave was taking place. In this respect the hapless rave-goers—whose casualty figures composed more than half of the Israeli "civilian casualties"[19]—were unwittingly located in an area that was to absorb the tip of the Hamas attack spear. Israeli police at the rave even directed them to escape southward from their

forest location, which actually sent them into the "lion's mouth" of the attack.[20] Such details together with the chaotic atmosphere in which Israel attempted to regain control—in some instances, firing hundreds of hellfire missiles at the Gaza envelope without adequate intelligence as to what was being struck[21]—certainly creates enough evidence to suggest that the Israeli narrative of what Hamas did on October 7 also needs to be critically investigated and read with more nuance, particularly in light of Israel's declared intention not to investigate the potential of friendly fire incidents.[22]

The Hamas attack targeted the "Gaza Command," which tends to be overlooked in the sensationalism generated by the gory details of atrocities that certainly were committed there, even though exactly what, how many, and by whom, needs still to be determined. The Gaza Command operates a comprehensive military and civilian infrastructure of domination over the Gaza Strip, ensuring enforcement of the siege and suppression of Palestinian national mobilization there. It is this regime that oversees the siege—what and who goes in and out. This regime even developed the means of counting the number of calories that were entering Gaza, ensuring enough got through so Gazans didn't starve, but no more.[23] This Orwellian and Machiavellian regime of control was invisible to those who did not suffer beneath it, and partially explains the insistence of the Hamas military leadership to research and target the Gaza Command's main bases and personnel, in some cases even taking sensitive computer hard drives back to Gaza, while also killing the equivalent of four Generals who oversaw it on October 7, out of a total of 318 service member and 59 police officers killed—including 62 police and army officers.[24] In total, 695 Israeli civilians were also killed, including 36 children, and 71 foreigners, bringing the total to 1,139.[25]

The Gaza Command's military wing was responsible for drawing up the list of targets for each round of "mowing the lawn." It was responsible for recruiting and mobilizing collaborators, while also preventing movement in and out of the Strip, including for life saving medical needs. It literally blackmailed women with breast cancer who needed to travel to get chemotherapy, and would deny them this access if they did not collaborate.[26] So it was a brutal system of control that Gazans despised and which Hamas dared to confront.

By Hamas's own admission, smashing the Gaza Command was the central focus of the attack.[27] This included its military infrastructure and personnel, together with the civilian settlement envelope it was embedded within. In this regard, many of these kibbutzim are what are known as "Nahal settlements," which means that they were originally military outposts established by the ambitious Zionist youth movements that were supposed to transition into civilian settlements, but which would always have a military dimension to them, including in infrastructure and materiel.[28] They were built as "pioneering" forward military-civilian settlements on Israel's periphery to detect invasions while also ensuring a presence on Palestinian refugee land—refugees who happened to be in Gaza only a few kilometers away.[29] Kibbutz Nir Oz, for instance, was roughly 2 kilometers from the Gaza armistice line, and had less than 400 residents before October 7. The kibbutz nonetheless controlled 20 square kilometers of land. On October 7, it suffered 25 confirmed casualties, and had about 80 of its residents taken back to Gaza—composing roughly a third of captives held there, and a quarter of the entire kibbutz.

For me, October 7 is at least three different things. You have the initial attack on the envelope. You have a second wave of Gazans coming out to a collapsed Gaza envelope. And then you have the third wave, which is the Israelis attempting to retake the envelope, first on an individual basis by people who are in those communities or who try to come save them, and then a bit more of an organized attempt to take it back within the next 24 or 48 hours, or whatever it takes.

So, October 7 shouldn't be seen as a singular event, but a series of events that unfolded over a wide

geography, in multiple locales and at different times, with dimensions that were not entirely planned and had their own dynamics. We can prove this from different aspects of that day which came out. A lot of video was shot by Palestinians in the Gaza envelope once it collapsed, showing them celebrating being on ancestral land; showing them amazed and enraged at how the kibbutzim were living in leisure, showing them taking whatever they could in the way of supplies, etc., to haul off back to Gaza.

There were also, of course, Palestinians who voluntarily took weapons and joined the fighting, and who took Israeli captives back to Gaza. I assume that the majority of Israeli civilians taken to Gaza came from these actors—particularly those which Hamas would have known had less "value" in terms of exchangeability and were even problematic to manage—the elderly, children, and so on. A few of the kibbutzim that were very close to the Gaza border—like Nir Oz, Nahal Oz, and Be'eri—accounted for most of the Israeli civilian captives, while most of the remainder came from the rave, which accounted for more than half of those killed. When Hamas was attempting to negotiate and engage in a prisoner exchange during the ceasefire [in late November], it couldn't even pull together the entire list of where the captives were and who had them, because the movement simply did not know or control everyone who was taken, while the vicious Israeli assault began almost immediately.

There's still a lot more to understand, but to answer your question "Could we have seen October 7 happening?"—no, I don't think we could have seen it, but the military development of Hamas has been very clear. We are talking of a military sophistication that apparently even includes the production of drones and even anti-aircraft weaponry, with all of this working in synergy with an underground infrastructure. So, we're talking about something that's been well thought out, traces of which were evident, but with plenty still kept secret.

In my article about Gaza's tunnels complexes, I speak about an incident where seven tunnel diggers died in the collapse of a tunnel shaft in 2016. At the time, Ismail Haniyeh, one of the heads of Hamas, went to the community and gave a speech there to commemorate the fact that these people died and to absorb some of the feeling that "our kids are dying for you to build these tunnels, but for what, and what's going on?" So, he says, "Listen, they didn't die in vain. We're building tunnels that will double the size of what the Vietnamese had, and these tunnels will take us to Jerusalem and liberation." When I read that, I began researching what the Vietnamese built in Củ Chi City in Vietnam. The fact that he was mentioning Vietnam was an indication that the movement was really studying guerrilla tactics systematically at this stage.

Hamas definitely starts as a movement of folks who are translating how to make bombs from university chemistry books and who graduate to a whole other level of being able to achieve different forms of military expertise, while also knowing the local terrain and popular needs well. In that regard, the October 7 attack combines a kind of thinking that has intimations of the Tet Offensive of the Vietnamese movement, where 30-odd regional capitals in South Vietnam were hit at the same time, taking the struggle from the countryside to the cities, and shaking the mythology of U.S. control to its core.

There are some amazing quotations that show the extent to which there is parity in how the Americans were so confident about their positioning in Vietnam, similar to the Israeli myopia which couldn't see October 7 coming. The oversight was deadly, as Hamas was apparently able to overrun the entire Gaza Command in three hours. The second parallel, of course, is the battle of Dien Bien Phu, which is the decisive French defeat in Vietnam, where 11,000 French soldiers were taken prisoner.

In the Israeli case, the taking of 240 different people from Israeli communities and military bases is

also a very significant haul. It's a huge hit for the Israeli army both on a personnel and intelligence level. Hamas did its homework and Israel was assumptive and arrogant, believing it had gotten to the stage of omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience at the same time. We also know that its political class was preoccupied with infighting, while its military class was more concerned with the developments in the West Bank, even moving three battalions there in the weeks before the attack was launched.[30]

NP: *You've drawn the parallel with Vietnam and other anti-colonial struggles, so I want to ask you about longer-term strategy. What is Hamas's strategy? They must have anticipated the Israeli response and the devastating Israeli attack on Gaza. Even if October 7 had been less chaotic, there would probably have been the same response. Even if it had been virtually nonviolent, I suspect there would have been a very similar response from Israel. So where does that leave the struggle at this point?*

The parallels with Vietnam are interesting, but fighting a foreign occupier is very different from fighting a long-established settler-colonial state. Because you can drive the French out, you can drive the Americans out—they have somewhere to go. I don't know about France in the 1950s. but obviously by 1968 there was very significant opposition to continued U.S, presence in Vietnam in the United States itself. But what is the longer-term strategy that Hamas envisages? Do they think the attack has had the effect of demoralizing the Israeli occupiers and that this will put them in a stronger position to… well, to do what next?

TH: I think there are many tactical and strategic things at play regarding how Hamas sees things both near and long term. I think the most important thing that they did here was that they shook the Israeli state to its core in terms of launching an attack that took and held territory, that killed significant numbers of people, that was not able to be predicted, and that also took significant numbers of prisoners back as bargaining chips into Gaza. In that regard, it was a significant tactical if not strategic victory, at least from the beginning, although it remains to be seen whether Hamas can fully cash out all the victorious potential of what they have accomplished so far. On some level, it might be argued that it was "too successful" because the unanticipated aspects of the attack—particularly the sacking of the Gaza envelope after its collapse and the accusation of atrocities—laid the basis to wage horrific Israeli assaults, which is described by Israeli political leaders as an attempt to impose a "Gaza Nakba."[31] Certainly there are questions around the costs that a "Hamas victory" entails.

But this aside for the moment, when it comes to trying to understand Hamas's gameplan for the near and long term, we can say the following. The attack certainly put the Palestinian issue back on the map as a political issue, and not merely a humanitarian one, which it had been transformed into under Oslo. It also unleashes unknown dynamics and processes in every locale where the question of Palestine can be raised—from happenings across the OPT, to contradictions in Arab states, to Western states that support Israel and the war crimes it is committing in full view. We can assume that the unleashing of this dynamic is something Hamas believes it can cultivate and use to make further gains for the Palestine movement, though it is too early to know if this can translate into something tangible and long lasting, while acknowledging that it also certainly entailed a dangerous gamble.

With this said, the movement clearly has a developed infrastructure for waging a kind of urban guerilla war against an invading force, with supplies they argue can last months, and in a calculus that the movement argues has been well studied, with different responses prepared for different contingency scenarios. Unfortunately, we cannot know or independently verify how accurate or well-founded this logic is and these preparations are. Clearly, it's not nothing and the movement has also shown considerable sophistication in what they have already achieved. With that said, is it enough to

hold off an Israeli ground assault with Western state backing? We will see, though the costs are obviously enormous on the population of Gaza, with this dimension alone raising questions as to whether anything could or should have been done to prepare or protect Gazans from Israel's wrath.

Hamas remains insistent that they maintain command and control and that the real battle is actually only about to come about—the battle on the ground between its fighters and those of other factions, pitted against the Israelis. Aerial bombardment eventually has its limits and if Israel is to be effective towards its declared goals it will need a sustained campaign on the ground which Hamas has home field advantage for, and has been preparing for quite some time. Israel will need to indefinitely hold territory in Gaza which is something they were already unable to do before, opting for the 2005 disengagement and imposition of siege. But this is not enough after October 7, though it is unclear if it will be effective in enforcing its rule or a transition to what it deems "acceptable rule" after the fighting—international, Arab or otherwise—*if* an "after" ever comes.

So far [by late November], Israel has killed what, 13,000 people in Gaza? But over 70 percent of these are women, children and the elderly. Even according to the best Israeli estimates, you only have around 3,000 killed who are fighting age men. But of course, we have no idea that these people are militants. Maybe some are, but certainly many would also be civilians. Even if we presume they are all militants, that's less than ten percent of Hamas's power, in an organized military sense. Perhaps even less, if we consider that Hamas oversees not only a paramilitary force—the Izzedin al Qassam Brigades, with special forces within this—but also organized *aljeish al-sha'bi*—a popular army, that also prepared military and civilian supplies for the eventuality of an Israeli invasion. In this regard, I believe Hamas retains the large majority of its personnel, as well as enough of its infrastructure, buried up to 50m beneath Gaza's soils, while also having plenty of weapons. In fact, we know that they have many weapons that have not yet surfaced—particularly the anti-tank Kornet rockets that are much more effective against tanks than the RPGs which are already dogging the Israeli advance. Hamas also continues to demonstrate determination, will, and morale, to say nothing of their control of homefield advantage. They also have the advantage of the unknown, which is quite important, I would say.

On the other hand, we have a murderous, revenge-driven Israeli assault taking place, genocidal in its intentions and proportions. So far, it is remote from achieving its declared objective of returning captives and destroying Hamas. We don't see Hamas losing command and control. We don't see significant senior leaders that are taken out, though there appear to be many field commanders who have been killed. But the movement maintains an ability to conduct operations on the ground whether this be large rocket barrages or special ambushes. I also don't fully trust Israeli casualty figures right now, but there is talk about 1,600 soldiers who are injured with 70 killed in the actual ground invasion. Such figures are of course very small compared to those on the Palestinian side, but the real question is to what extent can Israel maintain its operation over time, especially if casualty figures increase and international pressure builds. Clearly Israel is recalibrating its own "casualty tolerance" under the circumstances. But the real question will emerge around the extent to which demonstrable achievements can be made toward the declared military objectives Israel set out for itself, as well as the longer-term political horizon of the Israeli campaign—and at what expense.

Let's not forget that Israel was going through significant historical divisions before October 7, which included significant distrust in leadership. Now this very leadership, which also could not predict October 7—and which many Israelis accuse of abandoning them on October 7—this leadership is attempting to lead a major military campaign in Gaza on territory it has not been in for 18 years, and against a movement that has already outsmarted it once. So, if I was an Israeli reservist, I would certainly be worried, especially in the context where the aerial assault is so vicious and indiscriminate and poses a threat to Israeli captives themselves. So, the political and social

grounding of the Israeli assault is less firm in that regard. Hamas is certainly betting on these dynamics taking shape.

A lot will be determined on the "battlefield" of the Gaza strip that has already largely been turned into rubble and displaced four out of every five Gazans. On one level, if Hamas survives, it wins. An optimistic scenario could theoretically see greater gains if the dynamics unleashed by the attack mature, although it is impossible to overlook the enormous costs Israel is exacting as well. In that sense, a brutal calculus is indeed at play.

On the other hand, Israel has set itself a very high task to complete. I don't want to say it's impossible, because it has incredible amounts of power. On the other hand, it's very difficult for Israel to achieve, while it's also important to acknowledge that the goal of "eradicating Hamas" is hazy and can mean many things. Killing the leadership? Killing the militants? Killing anyone who voted or expressed sympathy for Hamas? Killing the idea of Hamas? This vagueness provides room for maneuver for the Israeli leadership, but also creates an indefinite open-ended battle—one that would seem to perversely serve a political and military class that is intent on getting its revenge, getting the "egg off its face," and that seeks to improve individual positioning through performance on the battlefield, to improve an anticipated "post-war" investigation of what happened on October 7. With this said, the fact that Israel is already making deals around recovering the civilian captives is a bit of a deviation from the initial declared goal: Israel is making a deal with an actor it said it was going to destroy. We'll see where those dynamics end up.

I think the larger point here is, on the one hand there is the potential to at least deny Israel's objectives. Remember, Israel was already forced out of the Gaza strip in 2005 because it found it impossible to control from within. Hamas is certainly banking on this dynamic. It is also waging a significant psychological campaign against Israeli society, releasing videos that aim to increase distrust in the leadership and in the military goals of the campaign overall. These are relatively sophisticated psychological operations, which in the context of the breakdown of trust and the "surprise" potential of Hamas, certainly engender dynamics that could split Israeli society and politicians between camps which prioritize different objectives of "captives" versus "destroy Hamas." This already appears to be happening and may strengthen in light of the first prisoner-exchange deal.

Bear in mind that the Gaza envelope was not something that was marginalized in terms of the amount of money that was being poured into it for military infrastructure or security or whatnot. It was routinely turned into a military frontier where rockets were exchanged and invasions were taking place for the last 20-25 years. And the wall around Gaza was also the third incarnation of a barrier there since 1994. Israel was triumphant regarding the sophistication and impenetrability of its latest edifice completed in 2021, which cost $1.3 billion and was claimed to be the highest scientific achievement.[32] But in minutes it fell, with a Hamas tactical plan that enabled it to be on the doorstep of these military camps and settlements very fast after taking out the "eyes" and "ears" of the Gaza envelope with drones and snipers. That is extremely worrying from a military perspective and even more so if you were an Israeli in a settlement who believed the state could ensure security by detecting and deterring attacks.

Now that Gaza has been largely turned into rubble, the terrain has become even more difficult tactically for Israel to control and maneuver in. There has also been talk for years that the army is not well trained for large-scale urban combat operations and that its reserves are unprepared.

When we speak about Hamas' attempt to achieve certain tactical and strategic goals, certainly the prisoner issue is a very important one for them. It is seen as a topic that is also unifying as it encompasses leaders from all factions, while almost all Palestinian families have a direct experience

with the Israeli prison system. Prisoners also are associated with the politics and organizing that Israel wants off the streets so to speak. So, releasing that dynamic from a Hamas perspective is also important as it strengthens the "sea" within which its politics can operate and build momentum. This, in a broader context of the anemia generated by the post-Oslo order, with the national movement and its causes transposed into circumscribed institutions like the PA, NGOs, and UN humanitarian agencies, which do nothing to address larger historical injustices or prevent Israeli colonialism. So, Hamas is attempting to ignite (or reignite) a new dynamism, vim and impetus to Palestinian organizing.

Of course, it's a major gamble. A Fatah leader critiqued Hamas claiming it "took on America and the Israelis with only 15 Kalashnikovs." Certainly, they have more than 15 Kalashnikovs, but they also clearly do not have significant means to deter the Israeli aerial superiority which is waging such unprecedented and genocidal destruction on Gaza. It is horrific and frightful to witness, especially when we combine this with the known history of Zionist ethnic cleansing, and the declared annihilationist rhetoric that is coming out of the entirety of the Israeli military and political establishment, not to mention significant aspects of its population. Without being on the ground in Gaza it is difficult to tell to what extent people are trustful, engaged and prepared for managing and resisting what has been unleashed. In the absence of this information, it can only be speculated, as all actors attempt to declare and demonstrate their advantage.

Hamas in any case, has been very clear about its objectives from the start, declaring its desire to end the occupation, the siege, and achieve national liberation. In a speech delivered on October 7, Hamas head Ismail Haniyeh declared *Kaffa lal'arbadah*—"Enough of thuggery." His words resonated with every Palestinian who witnesses the actions of the Israeli state toward Palestinians, and the impunity it enjoys. There was no paucity of things he could refer to: attempts to change the status quo in Al Aqsa, the Israeli settlement drive, the unhinged nature of the settlers, the fact that there's no political process, that Gazans were gunned down in their thousands when they were trying to demonstrate peacefully, the ongoing siege, and the failure of the internationals to lift a finger to any of this situation. In this sense, Hamas demonstrated clarity, logic, agency and determination in its actions, and explicitly called on others in Palestine and beyond to join the struggle. It's true that some commentators have accused it of engaging in "magical thinking,'[33] miscalculation and overstepping its potential. There are certainly elements of its discourse and practice that can be read as such. But overall, the jury remains out as to what all this will ultimately bring about, though everyone can agree that the stakes are high on all sides, and that Gazans have already paid a severe cost, which in historical terms is in the realm of what happened in 1948, at least in terms of casualties.

Of course, the fear is that without effective mobilization of other frontiers, it will be difficult to reap longer-term gains from the sacrifices now being made in Gaza. The movement before October 7 was in an unenviable position of having its cause whittled away piecemeal by internal divisions and the Oslo straightjacket—especially when seen in light of Arab normalization deals with Israel, the fact that nobody was really holding Israel to account, etc. Hamas's attack—which was widely supported by Palestinians—together with the Israeli assault, has plunged Gaza society and the movement overall into circumstances it was not prepared for, although this does not necessarily mean it can't adapt. "Rising to the occasion" is not beyond the pale, although the latent institutional bent of international institutions and Western states and media certainly advantages Israel and the Western agenda/narrative in this game. This frontier nonetheless appears to be key to stopping the Israeli war machine though there is still a lot of terrain that needs to be covered to get to that point.

With all this said, and with the recognition that October 7 was a strategic gambit whose end is unknown, and whose costs have been extraordinarily high, Palestinians support the resistance—out of necessity or conviction—because they have lost all hope in the Oslo track, the Palestinian

Authority model or international institutions, and they are also on the brink of a possible coming transfer. In this regard, many are willing to endure the sacrifice, though of course there will be basic material and human limits. The real question will be whether Gazan society can survive what Israel is doing, staving off hunger, thirst, disease and bombs. The answer is not clear at all.

In this sense, developments have ignited a new sense of urgency and mobilization amongst Palestinians and their allies everywhere, while instigating a process of people trying to problem solve how they're going to take October 7 into their locality one way or another, and to bring up all the questions that it raises in terms of the siege, the occupation, Gaza, refugees, the Gaza Nakba, the barbarity of the Israeli regime and the need for a political horizon for the Palestine question based on justice and an end to colonialism.

After the images that we're seeing and how horrific they are, I don't see it as realistic that Gaza can be put under international control or even be retained under Israeli control. These ideas seem fantastical to me, at least at this stage. I also don't see how Israel can avoid a drastic increase in pariah-ization.

But this whole dynamic is dependent upon building effective pressure from other frontiers as well as from the fight on the ground in Gaza. In that regard, we've seen very impressive as well as shocking things. Impressive in terms of seeing a million people on the streets of London; shocking in terms of the speed with which some of the European governments circled wagons and became Israel's cheerleaders and weapons providers. Indeed, Gaza shockingly has revealed how the world's "liberal democracies" unflinchingly supported a far-right Judeo-supremacist and fascistic government to advance toward genocidal ends.

In this regard, there are bigger humanist and moral questions that are coming out of what's happening in Gaza that all political actors, including those on the Left, can't ignore. I mean, even somebody like Bernie Sanders today, takes a horrible stance and can't even support a ceasefire, despite being considered the "radical Left" of the Democratic party.[34] So, unfortunately, the fate of Gaza has a lot to do with the struggles that will happen outside, and in the West in particular. It will also be fought within Jewish communities, between governments and their peoples, and amongst the Palestinian solidarity movement regarding what can be built or not. These struggles are ongoing and although we see some important things taking place there, it's still too early to see how or where they will lead.

At the same time, we have to realize that the political dynamics that are being unleashed right now are so horrifying and shocking, and portend such evil that there is no time to waste. Thousands have already been killed while tens of thousands more are in danger from dying because of the prevention of fuel, water, electricity and medicine. Israel is also declaring that it seeks a transformation in Gaza equivalent to what the Japanese and Germans went through after WWII.[35] On top of this are perverse interests pushing these dynamics forward, including ideological motivations, historical and careerist "legacy" opportunities for ethnic cleansing, political jockeying for after the "war," the desire for revenge, the desire to solve the problem of '48 more definitively, which Gaza very much represents.

There's even a perverse military-industrial incentive, because Israel as a major international arms supplier was discredited on October 7. If you had bought a set of sensors, or remote-controlled machine guns, or a "smart fence" from Israel before October 7, Hamas has just shown everybody how these can be overcome. That's a big hit to their military-industrial doctrine and advertising "sex appeal."

Israel was also going to feature prominently in Western designs to reconfigure the region—containing Iran, while securing trade and fuel for East-West passage. Israel has always been

the West's most secure ally, but it became more important in the context of the Arab uprisings. And the West backed Israel's interpretation of the Oslo process and gave it the excuse of security for it to set up this apartheid regime. So, America and the West have doubled down on their Israeli regional bet. These are a set of important geostrategic factors that are reinforcing the horrors that are taking place now.

So, I'm scared for the future right now. I see terrible suffering in Gaza and I feel it too, because these are places that I know and where I've been, and everyone I know from my days in Gaza has lost multiple people. All the places I used to work were demolished. I mean, it's shocking to see the images of what they've done there. And that is only this stage of the war.

On the other hand, when you listen to the Arabic press and you have your finger on the pulse of things, you see an incredible mobilization of people coming together who are saying, "we're not leaving north Gaza. We're not going to leave our patients. We're not going to leave anything. We don't care. We don't have anything else to lose." Israel and the West basically pushed it to this situation in many senses. Of course, many people understandably will do what they can to protect themselves and go to "safe zones" or whatnot. But I assume that Hamas is not, by any means, entirely militarily defeated and is going to engage in a tactic of extended urban warfare that will play the clock, while also using special operations to demoralize Israeli society and its army and weaken them from within.

Of course, this has a huge cost, but over time I think military dynamics will be inconclusive for the Israelis. With that said, Palestinians remain in a very vulnerable position wherever they are, whether it's the West Bank or Gaza, or even '48 citizens. Regarding the latter, Israel arrested all of their political leaders for simply attempting to hold a demonstration that called for a ceasefire. Sami Abu Shehadeh, a Knesset member who headed one of the Arab lists in parliament, said at the time that "If I had been calling for ethnic cleansing, I would have been eligible to be a minister. But if I call for peace and a ceasefire, I'm arrested." I don't think the Western world has been aware of what la-la land Israel has been in recently.

NP: *The Palestinian resistance isn't going anywhere and you've outlined some of the tactical advantages it may have in the current situation. On the other hand, you've also pointed out this Israeli mindset, which is causing such incredible devastation. But at some point, the military phase of this current situation will come to an end and then the question is, what's the path forward? One of the arguments that the left has often made is that the resolution of the conflict will depend not just on what happens within the confines of Israel/Palestine, but on the whole regional balance of power. So, maybe you could say a little bit more about that.*

TH: There are certainly regionally important things happening that include military dynamics, too. What's happening on the northern border [with Lebanon] is not insignificant. I mean, you have significant losses up there. Israel has already withdrawn 80,000 people from the border region. It has mobilized 100,000 reserves as well, if they need them for a war. Hezbollah has taken out a lot of the eyes and ears of the Israelis on the northern border. So, it's certainly a worrying menace for the Israelis, not least, because Hezbollah is seen as significantly stronger than Hamas, and it could do far graver damage in an October 7-type scenario. This is deeply worrying for Israel and the communities who live up there.

The military dynamic that has existed there is also altering significantly. Before October 7, the slightest shot across the border would have resulted in potential war. But now we have Hezbollah actually pestering Israeli positions and killing personnel on the northern border and Israel is not able to do too much about it, fearful that retaliation could lead to open war. Of course, it can and does retaliate—100 Lebanese and Palestinians have already been killed in Lebanon—and Israel may

still escalate, but everyone is also aware that this would get very ugly, very quickly for both sides, and the West may ask Israel to back out of this "game of chicken," lest it too be dragged into another Middle East war.

The Yemen issue is also not insignificant. The other day there was the commandeering of a boat that passed through Bab el-Mandeb. Today a drone hit another Israeli-owned ship. This is a strategic choke point for global capitalism and trade, and if Israel and the West don't have safe passage through it, it's a major problem for them.

The Jordanian regime and its stability are also significantly threatened by developments as it sees a "successful" Israeli campaign in Gaza as essentially green-lighting an Israeli push to do the same in the West Bank, displacing this population across the Jordan river. It may not be able to retain its formal relations with Israel within this context, nor stop the mass mobilization of Palestinians and Jordanians organizing there now to help their brethren on the other side of the border.

So, I can see a situation emerge on multiple fronts where a war of attrition of different orders arises in Gaza, on the northern border with Lebanon, in Yemen, and possibly even Jordan, with these dynamics individually and collectively frustrating Israel, while creating arenas in which the "Israel problem" begins to shake up Western capitalist alliances, as well as possibly their capitals as well due to strengthening mobilizations for Palestinians from Western citizens and movements.

You talk about the military situation eventually somehow being resolved, but the key question is to whose advantage, particularly with the question of the prisoners being at the center of it. If Hamas by the end of this still exists as an organization and holds on to 100 or 150 different prisoners, they will have the means to clear the Palestinian prisoner population held in Israeli jails while positioning the siege of Gaza, if not the entire Palestine question, at the center of the international community's agenda in a way that is unavoidable. This would inevitably also entail an international reassessment of Israel as an apartheid state and even a possible fragmenting of Israel itself from within.

Let's not forget that before October 7, 30 percent of the Israeli population was actively looking to emigrate. Out migration was a serious potential before October 7 and it may become more significant if things end badly for Israel, especially if things go regional. A significant percentage of the Israeli population—don't quote me, but I think it's at least 40 percent—have other passports, which means they actually do have options to go elsewhere. It's not what Golda Meir said where "we have nowhere else to go." It's actually, "you came from Milwaukee, Golda Meir, and you can go back to Milwaukee." I'm not advocating this as a comprehensive solution to the conflict, which requires a larger, more precise analysis that incorporates legal principles. I'm saying this is a realistic scenario that we could see emerge. Israel has been an ideological project, but it has also often operated as an additional citizenship option for many Jews, who are free riding on seven decades of Palestinian disenfranchisement and ethnic cleansing, thanks to support from Western states and, ultimately, their taxpayers. It also has been a way for Western states to ignore addressing their own antisemitic and nationalist/fascistic pasts.

The United States also recently placed Israel on its visa waiver program, meaning we might see Israelis seeking ways to escape the madness they are engulfed by, relocating themselves in the U.S. or other Western states. For a long time, this has been a dynamic within Israeli leftist circles. After October 7, the composition and character of this out-migration might change to include non-ideological individuals who do not want to carry the weight of citizenship and service in an apartheid state, living under constant threat of war, where this state obsessively preoccupies itself with Jewish identity politics, colonialism, militarism, and repression, while locked in intracommunal infighting. The cost of being Israeli is certainly rising, while its returns are becoming more questionable.

In any case, it's too early to say how the major social and political rifts in Israel will be affected by this, as the impact of October 7 on Israeli society is perhaps most prominently felt around the question of popular trust in the government. Moreover, the traumatic nature of October 7 will also affect it for generations to come, as areas like the Western Negev will hardly be seen as a viable or safe place to reside. In this respect, October 7 killed the Israeli national project to "Judaize the Negev," at least for the time being and likely for a long time to come. But then again, ethnic cleansing is actually on the table, and in principle Israel has enormous powers and drivers to attempt it, so in this regard, nothing should be taken for granted. This dynamic partially accounts for the genocidal dimensions of Israel's actions today—because it prefers a "us or them" equation, as the former demographic and geographic spread was inconclusive toward Zionist ends. That's what makes things so scary now, and what people need to recognize and mobilize around.

At the same time, October 7 has opened up so many questions and opportunities to expose, talk, and organize a whole new Palestine movement, which can and should also play a role in building new Left movements. The politics, determination and organizing that is required to stop the Israeli war machine entails a much more radical set of politics, tactics and strategies than those which have been attempted up to now. There are signs of this emerging in efforts that target ports or arms manufacturers linked with Israel, or facilities which transport things to feed this war machine. In this regard, it is also important to emphasize that the forces willing to struggle look different in each country and are on different levels in their preparation, awareness, coalition building, and tactical and strategic options, so this dynamic is not linear or even.

A key area of struggle will thus be to attempt to raise this level of mobilization and its maturation and to find ways for the working classes in particular to understand, identify and mobilize towards these ends, or to at least not be a part of making the situation worse. That's going to be key.

There are other parts of this struggle as well. The mobilization that we've seen coming from Jewish communities has been so important—the fact that you have Jews coming out saying "not in my name" after an attack of this nature, while Israel cynically justifies its actions based on an attempted Nazification of the Palestinian question. To have significant numbers of Jews rejecting this logic *tout court*, and coming out targeting transportation hubs and things like that, is enormously important.

We are quickly feeling that every institution and every locality will have some variant of this struggle played out. Folks need to take inspiration from the incredible bravery, ingenuity, and humanity of Gazans, while also not over-romanticizing them, and rejecting their exceptionalization.

On the other hand, something horrific has been exposed by what's happening, which has to do with the incredible level of suffering, humiliation and injustice that the world has tolerated in Gaza and Palestine at large for seven decades and more. Gaza was turned into an open-air prison, and the world ignored it, while Israelis and many internationals normalized this, feeling so comfortable or willingly ignorant about the situation that they organized large psychedelic raves right next door and partied till the sun came up. Someone has to account for these huge discrepancies and the enormous callousness that led to generations of humiliation and oppression, sponsored by the West, hidden behind lies that Israel was a form of protection against anti-Semitism or whatnot, when in truth it was building through force of arms a fascist-leaning, Jewish-supremacist, settler-colonial fantasy in a country that already had a major population in it.

While Israel has already been successful in establishing a state, the current battle is about challenging the settler-colonial and Jewish-supremacist identity of this state, and its particular Gaza corollary. Gaza now becomes an opportunity to talk about all these things and to organize accordingly. It's not like we're going to look for a solution to Gaza after this. That's part of the problem. The question is what's the solution to Palestine? What's the solution to Israel? If the debate

is about what we are going to do about Gaza, it's over, we've lost. Instead, the debate needs to ask: What is this entity called Israel that receives three or four billion dollars in U.S. aid every year, and then the minute an attack happens they get 10 billion dollars? What explains these dynamics? Why does this country merit so much attention and resources from Western governments when human rights groups identify it as practicing apartheid and committing mass war crimes? How is it that an international system might fail to prevent an obvious and declared intent to commit ethnic cleansing just because Israel's key allies veto resolutions simply calling for ceasefire? The question of Palestine's entanglement with historical and contemporary imperial and capitalist dynamics, together with the horrors of nationalism and fascism from the last century, necessitate that a resolution cannot come without reopening these questions.

Notes

1. On November 30, 2023, *The New York Times* published a report with the headline "Israel Knew Hamas's Attack Plan More Than a Year Ago." According to the article, "Israeli officials obtained Hamas's battle plan for the Oct. 7 terrorist attack more than a year before it happened," but they did not take the plan seriously. Ronen Bergman and Adam Goldman, Israel Knew Hamas's Attack Plan More Than a Year Ago, *New York Times*, Nov. 30, 2023.

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16. “‘Love Behind Bars’– The Story of Palestinian Prisoner Nael al-Barghouti,” *The Palestine Chronicle*, November 27, 2023.

17. “Who are the four Israeli prisoners held by Hamas?”, *Teller Report*, June 28, 2022.

18. Pauline Blistene, “Israel’s Fauda fallacy,” *Engelsberg Ideas*, October 18, 2023.

19. The “civilian” characterization is abused in Israeli reporting, insofar as Israeli private security guards for the kibbutzim, for example, are not listed amongst military casualties.

20. See Yfat Manhardt, “Israeli couple photographed kissing during Hamas attack recount moments of horror,” *Ynetnews,* October 24, 2023. Additionally, according to an Israeli report in Haaretz, most of the rave victims “were discharged soldiers or in the career army.” See Ronny Linder, “Worse Than After 9/11: The Race to Identify Israeli Victims of Hamas,” *Haaretz*, October 29, 2023.

21. Yoav Zitun, “Air Force pilots guided via WhatsApp after Hamas deceptions during murderous attack,” *Ynetnews*, October 16, 2023.

22. Yoav Zitun, “One-fifth of troop fatalities in Gaza due to friendly fire or accidents, IDF reports,” *Ynetnews*, December 12, 2023.

23. “Israel used ‘calorie count’ to limit Gaza food during blockade, critics claim,” Associated Press, October 17, 2012.

24. Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Swords of Iron: IDF Casualties”, Nov. 3, 2023.

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27. Hamas leader Saleh Arouri made this explicit in his October 12 appearance on *Aljazeera* (Arabic).

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