

Hamas's War of Numbers: A Strategy of Exaggeration and Dissimulation

written by Prof. Kobi Michael | 21.01.2024

In the best tradition of Hamas's methods, which it has been gradually refining ever since Operation Cast Lead, Hamas effectively exploits the civil and humanitarian issues in order to bash Israel on the international stage and establish empathy, solidarity and support of the organization and of the Gaza Strip's residents as being victimized by Israel's brutality. Hamas, which has adopted and honed the victimhood doctrine [1], is now acting to perfect it while availing itself of entities in the international community and on international media. Hamas makes it a point to frame Israel's actions as war crimes, culminating in accusing Israel in the International Court in The Hague of committing genocide, through South Africa acting as Hamas's proxy, with financial and political backing by Qatar [2], as well as for reasons of domestic politics as elections in that country draw near.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip and its reports regarding the Palestinian victims are an important tool in the consciousness engineering perpetrated by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. That ministry, just like every national and civil institution in the Gaza Strip (and largely also the U.N. and UNRWA organizations), is under Hamas's full control and authority. Therefore, it is clear to any reasonable person that the reports of the Palestinian Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip are not objective, neutral or professional, but rather are intended to serve Hamas's interest in cementing its victimized image among the international media and community, as part of the organization's doctrine of victimhood.

Beyond the fact that the inflated reports regarding the number of fatalities and injured people do not include even a single Hamas operative (all fatalities are being reported as civilians), the fact that many entities in the media and in the international community tend to treat these reports as reliable is merely a ludicrous and sad absurdity. The reported number of fatalities is close to 23,000, and the number of injured is 60,000 (as of January 14, 2024). Moreover, the

Palestinian Ministry of Health's reports indicate that 70% of the casualties are women and children, and as everyone knows, Israeli bombs can clearly distinguish between men and women and children and consequently are able to specifically target women and children, in the process whizzing past every man in their path.

A previous article on the subject [3] presented quite a few questions that should really have been entertained by all those entities who consider the reports of the Palestinian Ministry of Health - meaning, of Hamas - to be reliable. For example, where exactly have so many fatalities been buried? Where are so many wounded being hospitalized, when the World Bank's report indicates that the number of hospital beds in the Gaza Strip does not exceed 3,000? Even if we were to assume that civilian facilities such as schools have been converted into hospitals, that hospital beds have been added at field hospitals set up in the strip's territory, or that the existing hospitals have been tightly packed, doubling the number of hospital beds - the reported number still does not conform with the known data. Moreover, how is that that, with such high numbers of injured and seriously injured people, so few of them have been taken to Egypt to undergo further treatment?

Still, beyond such sporadic questions, the issue requires additional analysis. First, consideration must be given to the casualties in the Gaza Strip injured by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations in the strip. An analysis of the IDF Spokesperson's Unit's data (January 14, 2024) indicates that a total of approximately 13,000 rockets have been fired in Israel since the start of the warfare, of which 9,000 entered Israel's territory. This means that approximately 4,000 of the rockets fired were failed launches which landed inside the strip's territory; for example, the failed launches which ended up hitting the Al-Ahli and Al-Shifa hospitals in Gaza City. It can safely be assumed that, with such a large number of failed rockets falling within the boundaries of the strip, and in the absence of protective measures, many casualties will occur among the Palestinians themselves. Furthermore, some Gazans have been hurt as a result of being directly fired upon by Hamas gunfire while attempting to flee the warzone to the south of the strip, or after being forcibly held hostage and used as a human shield. Therefore, even if we were to conservatively quantify the scope of Palestinian casualties caused by other Palestinians as a result of the three factors mentioned, it can be assumed that approximately 1,000 of Gaza's residents were

killed as a result of harm done by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the other organizations in the strip.

Therefore, given an official report by the IDF Spokesperson's Unit (January 14, 2024) stating that over 9,000 Hamas terrorists have been killed since the start of the warfare - with an additional approximately 1,000 more people having been killed by Hamas (either by failed rocket launches or by direct gunfire), we arrive at an estimate of approximately 10,000 fatalities. Even if we were to fully grant the report of the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza, it would indicate the number of civilian fatalities to be approximately 13,000. This figure signifies that the ratio of noncombatant to combatant fatalities in the Gaza War is 1/1.3. The known ratio for Western who have in recent decades been involved in the wars in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan is 1/3-1/5. The range was established because not all cases have a consensual number of civilians/noncombatants killed. This is exemplified by the estimates regarding the number of civilians killed in Mosul range between 12,000 and 40,000. In any event, the data indicates the lowest ratio of harm caused to civilians/noncombatants. Even if the numbers we present are merely approximations or a rough estimate, and the numbers may be found to be slightly higher after the war is over - that is still a low rate of harm done to noncombatants. Similar comparisons can also be drawn regarding the scope of the destruction caused to buildings. This is exemplified by the customary estimates regarding the scope of the damage done in Mosul following 9 months of bombings by the U.S.-led international coalition. The range proposed in those estimates is between 65% and 80% of all buildings in the city (whose residents had numbered approximately 1.5 million) having been completely destroyed.

Also, as to the injured, it is important to present an explanation or analysis that has no bearing when talking about fatalities. As stated above, Hamas entirely avoids reporting the scope of casualties from among its ranks; but if the fatalities are approximately 9,000, and if the customary ratio of fatalities to injured casualties is 1 to 5, meaning, for every one fatality there are five injured casualties (and the ratio in the current war among IDF soldiers is regrettably much higher), and even if we were to assume that, in Hamas's case, the ratio in question amounts to merely 1 to 3 - then the number would be approximately 30,000 injured casualties, which is about one half of the number of injured people reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

In addition to the number of fatalities and casualties from among Hamas's ranks,

consideration must also be given to the incorrect data concerning the number of internally displaced persons in the strip. A U.N. report (apparently relying on reports made by UNRWA, which are dictated by Hamas) has stated that there are 1.9 million IDPs in Gaza [4]. This figure, too, is unfounded, since according to all estimates, the total of evacuees from the north of the strip amounts to approximately 800 thousand (out of one million), with another approximately 200 thousand from Khan Yunis and the camps in the center of the strip; amounting to approximately one million displaced persons - which is about one half of the number reported by the U.N. and quoted as fact by many entities in the international community and media. If we accept the figure presented by the U.N., then almost all of the strip's residents are displaced persons (1.9 million out of 2.2 million); a patently absurd "fact".

Hamas has perfected its psychological warfare strategy in every aspect, including in the aspect of the conflict's victims. The guiding logic behind Hamas's strategy in this context is exaggeration, dissimulation and taking advantage of, at best the ignorance, and at worst the inherent anti-Israel biases, of media and international community entities. Hamas has certainly been impressively successful in this context. This is exemplified the report of 500 fatalities at Al-Ahli Hospital, on the third week of the war, when competent inquiries conducted since - and not just by Israeli entities - have clearly shown that incident to have been the result of a failed rocket launch which landed in the hospital's parking lot rather than inside the hospital proper, and that the number of fatalities was about 30. Yet the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip nevertheless continues to include the number 500 in its reported reckoning of the fatalities. On the other hand, Israel has to this day undoubtedly failed to fight back psychologically and undermine Hamas's narrative, which is gradually becoming an accepted truth. The time for change has come, and Israel should muster its best talents and abilities to strike back psychologically; better late than never.

If there is any actually encouraging sign, it can be found in the fact that the scope of the casualties - both fatalities and injured - among Hamas and the other organizations, is immense, even dramatically so. This means that Hamas no longer operates as an organized paramilitary organization, that Hamas operatives' erosion coefficient is very high and that the course of action taken by the IDF is indeed leading to the dismantling of Hamas's military capabilities. Dismantling the military and government capabilities does not mean whittling the

organization down to its last terrorist or rocket, but rather neutralizing Hamas's ability to operate as an effective military organization and government. Hamas will always have some residual capability remaining, which will be expressed in terrorism and guerilla actions, but such residual activity should in time become marginal and controlled, as has been the case with the terrorist capabilities in Judea and Samaria, where the IDF and Shin Bet have been successfully - and rather impressively and effectively - "mowing the grass."

Our basic assumption and premise should be that, whenever we find ourselves in a reality of a persistent and prolonged conflict with the Palestinians, and being unable to bridge profound and substantial gaps between the two sides - we would have to live with the Palestinians' terrorist motivations and with actual terrorism. In this context, we would also do well to internalize the fact that, even under conditions that would allow us to bridge the gaps, and even were progress to be achieved toward a diplomatic agreement, or even the implementation of such an agreement - there will always be people deeply motivated to foil any such agreement or arrangement and to continue waging terror against Israel. Therefore, under any conditions, and certainly in a reality where no such agreement is in sight, Israel must have permanent and continuous security and intelligence control and continue retaliating against terrorist instigators wherever they may be. Only thus can we significantly reduce the potential damage threatened by terrorism and guarantee an optimal level of security as a condition for the continued development and prosperity of the State of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish People.

[1] Gabi Siboni and A.G. Will Hamas Be Better Prepared during its Next Confrontation with Israel? Insights on Hamas' Lessons from Operation Protective Edge, Military and Strategic Affairs, Volume 7, No. 2, September 2015.

https://www.g-bina.com/_files/ugd/d48d94_84f22a904afd40b892f1f3af7cee5510.pdf

[2] South Africa's Diplomatic Campaign Against Israel - In Service of Hamas and In Cooperation with Hamas' Patron, Qatar, MEMRI, January 18, 2024.

<https://www.memri.org/reports/south-africas-diplomatic-campaign-against-israel-%E2%80%93-service-hamas-and-cooperation-hamas>

[3] Kibi Michael, Hamas's 'numbers warfare', JNS, November 14, 2023.

<https://www.jns.org/hamass-numbers-warfare/>

[4] Gaza: Forced and protracted displacement of Palestinians would constitute a serious breach of international law and an atrocity crime, National Refugee Council, December 26, 2023.

<https://www.nrc.no/news/2023/december/gaza-displacement/>