

Opinion | Don't Believe the IDF and Israeli Analysts. There's No Solution to Hamas' Tunnels

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Based on the information I have received from soldiers and officers fighting in the Gaza Strip since the war started, I have reached the following conclusion: The spokesman for the Israel Defense Forces and the military analysts in television studios are presenting a false picture of the thousands of Hamas dead and the face-to-face fight being waged between our forces and theirs.

The number of Hamas members killed by our forces on the ground is much lower. Most of the war isn't being fought face-to-face, as the spokesman and the analysts claim. And most of our own dead and wounded have been hit by Hamas bombs and anti-tank missiles.

Hamas terrorists emerge from tunnel openings to plant bombs, set booby traps and launch anti-tank missiles at our armored vehicles, and then they disappear back into the tunnels. And the IDF currently has no quick solutions for the fight against Hamas, most of whose members are hiding in the tunnels.

It's clear that the IDF spokesman and senior defense officials want to depict the war as a great victory before the picture becomes clear. To this end, they are bringing embedded reporters from the major TV channels into Gaza

to film "victory pictures." This is the most photographed war ever waged by Israel, perhaps even in the entire world.

But creating images of victory before we have even gotten close to achieving our goals could prove very damaging if those goals – destroying Hamas' capabilities and freeing the hostages – ultimately aren't achieved in full. It would have been better to be more modest.

This reminds me of how those same reporters and analysts from the major TV studios, alongside retired generals, told us before the blow that Hamas dealt us in southern Israel that the IDF is the strongest army in the Middle East and our enemies are deterred. Unfortunately, these very same reporters, analysts and retired generals are continuing to forge images of this kind, as if they learned nothing.

Destroying Hamas' tunnels will take many years, and it will cost Israel many casualties. Even the army now admits that there are hundreds of kilometers of tunnels, located deep underground, with multiple branches. Some even have multiple stories, with many good spots to stage a fight. Hamas built them over the course of decades, with advice from leading experts. They link the length and breadth of Gaza, and also connect it to the Sinai Peninsula under the city of Rafah.

The idea that Hamas was deterred persisted for many years. Consequently, all the plans for fighting in Gaza and its tunnels – and all the possible tools for doing so – were scrapped. That's why our experts didn't sit down to study, plan and manufacture equipment suitable for underground warfare. And that's why, today, we're trying to improvise

solutions. But these don't provide an effective response.

Many officers fighting in Gaza have told me that it will be very hard, if not impossible, to prevent Hamas from rebuilding itself, even after all the destruction the IDF has wreaked on its bases.

This effort will require us to maintain large forces in Gaza for many years to come and continue to fight Hamas fighters, who will emerge from the tunnels, fire anti-tank missiles, plant bombs, set booby traps and cause the IDF many losses. Consequently, we will need to leave the dense urban areas and act more surgically, through raids and airstrikes based on precise intelligence.

Are the politicians and senior defense officials capable of coping with such a scenario? Or are they capable of thinking of other creative solutions, in which we wouldn't emerge as the big winners with everything we wanted, but also wouldn't be the big losers?

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