**Tackling Hamas Comes with a High Price Tag**

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The repetitive nature of history and the constant reoccurrence of unexpected events underscore the apparent inability of the human race to learn from past experiences. Jerry Friedheim, the US Defense Department spokesman, made a statement on October 24, 1973, exactly 50 years in the past, “We will continue to provide military assistance to Israel until they feel adequately armed.” Astonishingly, the prevailing environment today in the Middle East is not much different as history repeats itself endlessly for those who are unwilling to learn. While the specifics remain uncertain, there is a strong likelihood of Israel undertaking a ground offensive in the Gaza Strip aimed at crippling Hamas permanently. It would necessitate intense fighting on land, in the air, and at sea. Such an assault would present immensely challenging tactical battles, involving room-to-room combat and tunnel warfare, resulting in massive casualties. Israel’s invasion will undoubtedly test the patience of the international community as the conflict unfolds at a slow and gruelling pace, leading to substantial devastation.

The densely populated regions of the Gaza Strip, specifically Gaza City, Khan Younis, and Rafah are characterised by towering concrete buildings and tunnels. Unfortunately, these structures were often hastily constructed and were vulnerable to collapse against artillery bombardments or airstrikes. Consequently, the mobility of attacking troops is severely hindered due to the destruction inflicted on urban infrastructure. Streets blocked with rubble force assaulting troops into open areas prone to high casualties, further complicating the manoeuvrability.

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Urban warfare places extraordinary demands on all fighting components, particularly on specialised personnel such as combat engineers, snipers, medics, heavy weapons teams, and drones. While it may seem land-centric, the Air Force always plays a critical role in this type of fighting. A crucial aspect of ground manoeuvrability lies in the effective utilisation of airstrikes, which can be executed by piloted aircraft, drones, or advanced robotic systems like kamikaze and explosive-laden drones. The strategy is the synergy between different types of military capabilities, where an enemy dispersing to avoid airstrikes becomes exposed to ground attacks, and one focused solely on combating ground forces becomes prone to aerial attack. The significance of gathering information through aerial and space-based sensors cannot be overstated when attempting to comprehend the complex and intricate urban environment. Additionally, the circumstances heavily involve elements of cyber warfare and electronic warfare.

Hamas has meticulously developed an intricate network of defences within the Gaza Strip. They have constructed one of the most extensive tunnel systems ever witnessed recently in urban combat. This web of underground passages spanning over 300 miles poses a significant challenge to the assaulting troops in the upcoming battle. The nature of subterranean warfare, particularly in tunnels located perilously close to the coast, exposes them to periodic flooding. To address this, the utilisation of robotic and autonomous systems, such as drones capable of exploring and engaging enemies in underground or underwater environments, becomes crucial in clearing these underground passageways. Additionally, flooding, tear gas, and other tools can prove effective in combating adversaries within tunnels, basements, or closed spaces. However, it is important to acknowledge that employing such methods in localities occupied by noncombatants carries the potential for catastrophic risks of human rights violations. Ultimately, there is no substitute for infantry attacks when it comes to the physical clearing of these tunnels. Equipped with weapons, sensors, specially trained dogs, and night-vision devices, soldiers play an indispensable role in this arduous task. It is important to recognise that this offensive will be exceptionally challenging, deadly, and painstakingly slow.

Operating within its territory, Hamas showcases a unique blend of technological prowess and deep-rooted influence. Its fighters work in small, interconnected teams equipped with highly lethal weapons that were traditionally only available to regular armed forces. Hamas employs a range of tactics, including network defences, where they hold strategic positions to impede and disrupt the advancement of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Simultaneously, standby mobile units are ready to counterattack or reoccupy areas that have been cleared by the adversary. Additionally, Hamas has proven its ability to wage a sophisticated information war.

Probably, once Israeli forces are fully engaged in combat on the ground, other regional actors such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iranian-backed militias in Syria, or even Iranian guerilla forces themselves may seize the opportunity to be involved in the battle, thereby turning into a multi-front conflict. The potential scenario might compel Israel to consider a preemptive strike against these regional players before entering Gaza. However, such a decision would entail significant risks and consequences for the Middle East.

Amidst the ongoing information warfare, the potential consequences of property destruction, civilian casualties, and mass displacement cannot be overlooked. These actions would undoubtedly be portrayed, at best, as an attempt at ethnic cleansing; further eroding Israel’s deteriorated moral standing. Consequently, such a city-based warfare could lead to a political impediment in the Middle East Peace Process, regardless of any previous headway made. In light of these considerations, it is apparent that embarking on a ground attack in Gaza would pose a daunting and arduous mission, resulting in significant repercussions.

“History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce”. (Karl Marx)

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