

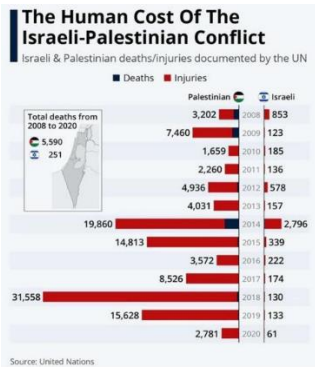
NFI The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

The Human Toll in Gaza

By Jacob Van Veldhuizen

Some 3,478 Gazans have been killed, along with at least 69 Palestinians from the Occupied West Bank, as of October 19th. There have also been a reported 12,065 injured in Gaza along with 1,300 in the occupied West Bank. An estimated 1,400 Israelis have also been killed and 3,800 injured during this conflict, primarily during the initial Izzeldin AlQassam Brigades attack on October 7. Civilian casualties are nothing new in conflicts between Palestinians and Israelis; but the death toll has been larger than in any previous clashes.

A particularly alarming (and unfortunately common) issue has been the Israeli lack of effort to differentiate between civilian and military targets. Schools, hospitals, and places of worship have all been bombed. There have been several instances where those fleeing the conflict (as instructed by the Israeli Defense Forces) were also targeted. There have also been at least 11 journalists, 28 medical staff, and 14 United Nations workers killed. A third of those killed have been children. Half of the 2 million people that live in Gaza are under 18.



In the past, a disproportionate number of those killed during escalations were Palestinians. Around 4,000 Palestinians and under 100 Israelis died in the previous 3 confrontations. These took place in 2008-9, 2012, and 2014. This conflict is the first time that there have been many casualties on the Israeli side whether soldiers, settlers or civilians. This magnitude of loss is unprecedented; and the rage is being enflamed by racist and dehumanizing rhetoric from members of the Israeli government. Yoav Gallant, the Israeli Defense Minister, referred to Gazans as human animals, for example.

Israel has yet to launch their ground invasion as of this writing. A ground offensive is expected to cause a dramatic increase in civilian casualties. 3 Israeli officers have stated that the immediate goals of the invasion are to destroy Gaza's infrastructure, demolish the Izzeldin AlQassam Brigades' tunnel network, and push the people back to the Egyptian border, no matter how many civilian casualties are caused. There seems to be little concern about civilian casualties and this trend will likely continue. Israeli forces will also likely suffer heavy casualties. They will be walking into an unfamiliar urban landscape with the potential for boobytraps and ambushes around every corner.

It does not appear the Israeli Defense Forces intend to differentiate between civilians and militants. The impossible-to-follow evacuation order coupled with the continued dehumanizing rhetoric being used by Israeli politicians indicates that the Israelis are trying to blunt the international, as well as internal, outcry that will come as civilian casualties continue to rise. The evacuation order appears to have been little more than a public relations stunt. There is nowhere for residents of Gaza City to go; and even those able to move are being

bottlenecked and bombed on their way south. Many Gazans also fear another mass displacement. Half of Gaza's 2 million people are already refugees from areas now controlled by the Israelis. The shortage of fuel and electricity also compounds the difficulties already faced.

Another worrying detail is that there is neither an off-ramp nor a clearly stated end goal. Israeli measures have so far appeared to be reactionary, although numerous pundits posit that the engagement was either orchestrated or that the Israelis view it as an opportunity to settle scores with the Iranians. The American and west European responses to the situation lend credence to this speculation. Nevertheless, there is little idea of what a post-war future looks like. There is currently no room for peace talks or even a temporary truce to allow humanitarian relief; and so, it is impossible to estimate the scale of the impending humanitarian crisis. Resolutions from the U.N. are being blocked by the United States. It is unclear if the Israeli forces intend to occupy Gaza during this offensive, which would be disastrous for both sides, or simply pave the way for future encroachment. One thing, however, is clear. Many more innocent people will die.