

Can Israel Win Against Hamas?

WASHINGTON – I do believe that Israel's invasion of Gaza in order to destroy the tunnels that Hamas built as conduits for getting into Israel itself is fully justified.

End game?

That said, I fail to see a successful end game. First of all, Israel will pay a horrendous public relations price for this necessarily messy and bloody military operation.

As we know, Gaza is densely populated. Even with the best of intentions, there is no way to have a major military assault against Hamas positions, while avoiding or minimizing civilian casualties.

And how do you explain to the world that the death of hundreds of Palestinian women and children is really Hamas' fault, as they purposely hide their facilities and command centers in the midst of the local civilian population?

How do you define victory?

That said, beyond this huge PR liability, how do you define "victory" here? The only real victory would be a defeated and discredited Hamas that will be finally rejected by the Palestinian people.

A real victory would be the end of the double talk and double standards whereby it is OK for Palestinians political leaders to negotiate with Israel, while Palestinian militants keep using terror tactics against the Jewish people. (And the world, mind you, is supposed to accept this *modus operandi* of negotiations plus terror as "normal", because –you must understand– people under perennial military occupation will resort to desperate tactics).

Hamas likely to survive

This being the case, I wish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu good luck, but I doubt that this major assault against Hamas will change much.

Destroying all or most of the tunnels built to get into Israel, while degrading Hamas' missile launching capabilities, may amount to a major tactical victory for Israel.

But, as long as Hamas survives this onslaught, this is still only a tactical victory. Indeed, for the time being, Hamas is supported by other Arab states. This means money, weapons, and more.

Support for Hamas

To the extent that other players in the region continue to believe that it is a smart idea to keep funding and supplying Hamas militants in Gaza, there will never be an end to this mess.

And funding Hamas is cynically viewed as a cheap way to keep Israel in a constant defensive mode, always worried about what may come next.

Real peace requires a change of heart

Real peace will not come because the Israeli army destroyed the tunnels. It will come after all the Arab players will finally decide that this endless fighting is fruitless, and that there is a lot more to be gained by establishing genuine peaceful relations with Israel.

But I am not sure that we will see this change of heart any time soon.