

Netanyahu and IDF downplay mounting Israeli deaths and severe injuries in Gaza

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11 January 2024

The price paid by Israelis for the Netanyahu government's genocidal assault on Gaza is being concealed to shore up public support for the mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians.

The mounting toll of deaths and severe injuries in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) threatens public confidence in the government's declared military objectives of eradicating Hamas, securing the return of the remaining 140 hostages and forever ending any security threat to Israel.

Public confidence in the government is already rock bottom. There is widespread anger over the exposure of claims that it received no warnings of Hamas's October 7 attack, the fact that military forces were stood down to facilitate this and provide a justification for moving against the Palestinians, and that the IDF's helicopter and tank assault on Hamas fighters was responsible for killing hundreds of Israeli civilians and soldiers.

As of last Monday, at least 185 Israeli soldiers had been killed since the ground invasion of Gaza began on October 27, including nine reservists, combat engineers, killed when a tank stationed nearby fired shells at a building as the soldiers were assembling explosives to demolish a tunnel. This is already nearly three times the 67 soldiers killed in the month-long assault on Gaza in 2014, but there is a growing belief that IDF deaths have been underreported, given the government's tight censorship of information related to military casualties, with every press release regarding wounded soldiers requiring approval.

On November 18, when the military claimed that a total of 60 soldiers had died in Gaza, David Oren Baruch, the director of Israel's military cemetery on Mount Herzl, Jerusalem, said that 50 Israeli soldiers had been buried there in the previous 48 hours, "We are now going through a period every hour there is a

funeral, every hour and a half a funeral."

Adding to suspicions of underreporting, the IDF had initially, unlike in previous wars, refused to disclose the number of wounded soldiers. Only in December, when *Haaretz* planned to publish its report on the number of soldier casualties based on hospital sources, did this change. *Haaretz* reported "a considerable and unexplained gap between the data reported by the military and that from the hospitals," with hospital data showing the number of wounded soldiers was "twice as high as the army's numbers."

Yedioth Ahronoth reported that "the cumulative numbers since October 7 are astronomical: More than 2,000 soldiers, policemen and other members of the security forces have been officially recognized as disabled."

Limor Luria, head of the rehabilitation department at the Ministry of Defense, said, "We have never been through anything even similar to this. More than 58 percent of the wounded who are taken in by us have severe injuries of arms and legs, including those that require amputations. About 12 percent are internal injuries—spleen, kidney, tearing of internal organs. There are also head and eye injuries."

On Monday, the IDF released data showing that nearly 13,000 soldiers have required some level of medical care since the start of the war, with 2,335 transferred for treatment in hospitals, including 155 soldiers who suffered eye injuries and 298 who suffered damage to their hearing. The data revealed that about 9,000 soldiers have received psychiatric treatment since the start of the war, with nearly one quarter unable to return to combat, and 275 soldiers are receiving treatment at a rehabilitation centre for significant mental health complications.

The daily losses at the front take place amid

mounting economic and social dislocation within Israel itself.

The mass call-up of reservists, amounting to nearly 10 percent of the workforce, has impacted Israel's high-tech industries, public services and small, family-run businesses, while the displacements and knock-on effects of the war have idled up to 20 percent of the workforce.

The October 7 attack led to mass evacuations from Israel's southern towns and villages, while the fighting in the north has displaced tens of thousands more, as Lebanon's Hezbollah has forced Israel to move all civilians from the border area. As a result, some 175,000 people are now living in hotels and temporary accommodation. Schools were closed for weeks, leaving parents scrambling for childcare, while the opening of the new academic year at universities was postponed to January 1.

Israel's gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea, shut down early in the war, are only now beginning to operate.

Tourism has all but collapsed, with the Old City in Jerusalem bereft of foreigners and Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem cancelled. Construction, which relies on Palestinians in the West Bank, has ground to a near-halt after Israel suspended the work permits of more than 100,000 Palestinians after October 7.

A poll by the charity group Latet found that 45 percent of Israelis admit they are worried the war will bring economic hardship. According to the Bank of Israel, there has been a 20 percent rise in late mortgage payments since the war began.

Israel's own Palestinian citizens have been particularly badly affected: they have seen a 10-percentage point rise in unemployment from 5 percent to 15 percent.

According to *Yedioth Ahronoth*, the cost of Israel's war on Gaza is running at \$272 million a day and will cost at least \$60 billion, more than 10 percent of the country's GDP, even before a wider war with Lebanon's Hezbollah or Iran and Syria is factored in. It said, "After tabulating every aspect of the war thus far, the price tag stands at around \$60 billion. This includes the war budget itself as well as the various forms of financial aid for every civilian that saw his income dwindle because of the conflict."

The newspaper added, "State budget is looking at a \$30 billion deficit as is, which will require both budget cuts and tax hikes to the tune of over \$18 billion, which will be felt keenly in terms of quality of life and reduced services for the Israeli public at large."

This takes place as tax revenues have plummeted and Israel's credit ratings are set to fall. The Bank of Israel has forecast lower rates of growth, falling from 3 percent in 2023 to 1 percent in 2024, with some economists predicting contraction.

The IDF's announcement that it is to scale back its ground and air campaign in Gaza to "a more targeted phase" that will require fewer ground troops, and will be carried out by brigades of the regular army, is in part a response to this mounting crisis. Reservists serving near the border with Lebanon will also be discharged and replaced by regular units.

IDF spokesperson Daniel Hagari said the return of some of the reservists "to their families and their jobs," at least temporarily, "will allow significant relief for the economy." With reservists notified they must serve at least another month later in the year, this is already the largest burden since the 1982 Lebanon War even as Netanyahu warns that the offensive "isn't close to finished." On Saturday, he said, "The war will last for many more months."



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