



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on January 18, 2024

Israel Needs “Years” to Dismantle Gaza Tunnels, Expects Another Year of War Against Hamas

The Israeli military has been “astonished” by the size and quality of the tunnels that the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas has constructed under Gaza, as per an [article](#) published in *The New York Times* on Tuesday.

Hamas’ tunnel network was originally estimated to include 250 miles of underground passages and bunkers. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has since amended these estimates to 350-450 miles or more.

Two officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said there were close to 5,700 separate shafts leading into the tunnels under Gaza. None of the numbers could be independently confirmed, however.

It could take “years” to disable the tunnels, one Israeli official admitted to the *Times*. These tunnels need to be mapped, searched for Israeli captives, and “made irreparable,” he said, admitting that recent efforts to destroy the tunnels by flooding them with seawater “have failed.”

Another official testified that Israel is employing a “triangle” model to locate the tunnels, which presumes they will be found under any hospital, school, or mosque in Gaza.

Based on the *Times* reports, the IDF has underestimated the “extent and importance” of the tunnels to Hamas, which the media outlet characterized as an “intelligence failure.”

The IDF has not revealed the number of its soldiers killed and injured in tunnel warfare. Officially, almost 190 soldiers have been killed and 240 or so gravely injured in the fighting since the start of the ground campaign in Gaza.

One soldier, who spoke with the *Times* on condition of anonymity, said that he had participated in destroying about 50 tunnels in Beit Hanoun, in the northeast of Gaza. All of them were equipped with bombs and other explosives, programmed to be activated remotely.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also reportedly told local council chiefs from communities near Gaza that fighting between Israel and Hamas militants in the Palestinian enclave could carry on for another year and possibly longer, the *Times of Israel* news outlet stated, citing a local TV report.

During the meeting, which is said to have been held at the IDF headquarters in Beersheba and was also attended by other security cabinet ministers, Netanyahu allegedly told the council chiefs that the war against Hamas was expected to drag on into 2025.

The Israeli leader also agreed to revise a defense ministry framework meant to aid and encourage Israeli residents to return to their communities within several kilometers of the Gaza border.



AP Images
Israeli strike on Gaza



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Many of the people living near Gaza escaped the region following Hamas' brutal October 7 attack on civilians, which left some 1,200 people dead and witnessed the capture of more than 200 hostages. Local community leaders allegedly told Netanyahu that most of the residents who fled these territories had no wish to return to their homes at this point owing to ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hamas.

According to the Israeli TV report, the council chiefs petitioned Netanyahu to delay the process of returning people to their homes near Gaza until the summer and also requested that the state continue funding their stay in temporary accommodation until then. Netanyahu accepted the chiefs' request and instructed relevant officials to make the necessary arrangements.

In addition, Netanyahu recently proclaimed that Israel's main goal is to "demilitarize and deradicalize" Gaza. At the same time, he underscored that Israel had no plans to permanently occupy the enclave or displace its civilian population, elaborating that the IDF was doing its "utmost" to avoid civilian deaths in its bombardments of Gaza. Israel has pledged to continue its operation against Hamas until the terrorist group is totally eradicated and all hostages captured are freed. There are still an estimated 132 people being held captive in Gaza, based on figures by Israeli authorities.

Israel's strikes on Gaza have so far led to more than 23,000 casualties, according to Gaza health officials. The UN has declared Israel's barricade of Gaza as a humanitarian catastrophe, while other countries have accused Israel of committing genocide. South Africa has even filed a lawsuit with the UN against the country for "engaging in genocidal acts," despite its own dismal track record against its white minority population since the African National Congress (ANC) came to power in the 1990s.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog has vehemently rebuffed genocide accusations, calling them "atrocious and preposterous." He maintained that it was Hamas that should be blamed for the civilian deaths after allegedly using people as human shields.

On Sunday, Hamas commemorated the 100th day of the conflict in Gaza by publishing a clip showing three Israeli hostages it still is holding since its incursion into Israel on October 7.

In the 37-second-long video, which was posted on social media, the captives identified themselves as Noa Argamani, 26; Yossi Sharabi, 53; and Itay Svirsky, 38, and asked the Israeli authorities to work toward their release.

The undated footage ended with two captions in Arabic, Hebrew, and English. One of them read, "Tomorrow we will inform you of their fate," and the other, "Your government is lying."

A clip of Argamani's abduction at the Supernova music festival was one of the first to appear online on the day of the attack on Israel by Hamas.

Noa's mother, Liora Argamani, who is in advanced stages of cancer and uses a wheelchair, spoke on January 14 in front of 120,000 people at a rally in support of the hostages in Tel Aviv. "Noa has been held captive by Hamas for 100 days, and I don't understand how it can be, how she is still there. I hope I will be able to see her before my last day," she said.

Sharabi and Svirsky were also captured by gunmen on October 7 from the Be'eri kibbutz, based near Israel's border with the Gaza Strip.

Hamas freed around a half of the hostages during a week-long truce with Israel in November. According to Israeli authorities, Hamas presently holds 132 people, while 25 captives have been killed in the fighting.



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Hamas spokesperson Abu Obeida cautioned on January 14 that continued attacks on Gaza by the IDF are putting the lives of Israeli captives in danger. "The fate of many of the enemy's hostages and detainees has become unknown in recent weeks.... Most likely, many of them were killed recently, the rest are in great danger every hour and the enemy's leadership and army bear full responsibility," Obeida warned.



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