

*Israel stages large overnight ground raid into Gaza, taking lessons from U.S. war manuals*

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Gaza City, October 26 (RHC)-- Israeli troops and tanks have carried out a brief yet relatively large overnight ground incursion into Gaza ahead of a widely expected full-scale ground invasion after nearly three weeks of devastating air raids on the besieged Palestinian enclave. According to one expert, the brief invasion, withdrawing after only a few hours, is the same technique used by the United States in military actions.

Political analyst Elijah Magnier told Al Jazeera the brief overnight raid is part of Israel's strategy to test the Palestinian fighters' readiness and capabilities. "We see a new technique from the Israeli army – little raids where they withdraw after just a few hours instead of staying for some time as they normally do," he explained. "It's what the U.S. used to do in Iraq: drive very fast in and out to see the amount of fire they would be exposed to, and they would do it from different parts until they prepared for a bigger attack."

Such an approach comes from a lack of intelligence on what to expect. "They understand that there are tens of thousands of Hamas and [Palestinian] Islamic Jihad fighters waiting for them, but they don't have enough intelligence or knowledge on what kind of preparation the Palestinian resistance has," he said.

Video of the overnight action issued by the Israeli army on Thursday showed armoured vehicles proceeding through a sandy border zone. A bulldozer is seen levelling part of a raised bank, tanks fire shells, and explosions are seen near or amid a row of damaged buildings.

"Overnight, the IDF conducted a targeted raid using tanks in the northern Gaza Strip, as part of preparations for the next stages of combat," the Israeli military said in a statement on Thursday. "The soldiers exited the area at the end of the activity."

Israel has already made several limited advances into the Gaza Strip over the past two and a half weeks, but this was the biggest incursion of the current war, according to Israel's Army Radio. "There have been similar attacks in the past where soldiers crossed into Gaza. What makes this one unusual is that it is the first time that tanks have been involved," said Al Jazeera's Alan Fisher, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem.

"According to the Israeli army, they moved in with specific targets in mind. The Israeli army claims to have killed a number of Hamas fighters and to have damaged a significant amount of infrastructure that could be used by the Palestinian group."

"They also stated that they had targeted antitank posts that had been set up. This is clearly in preparation for what the next stage of the war will be," our correspondent said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday evening that along with the heavy bombing campaign of Gaza, "we are preparing for a ground offensive."

Al Jazeera's Fisher said, "Netanyahu has mentioned that the preparations are in their final stages, and the Israeli war cabinet will make a unanimous decision on when to proceed."

The ground raid comes after the United Nations warned it is on the verge of running out of fuel in the Gaza Strip, forcing it to sharply curtail relief efforts in the territory, which has also been under a complete siege since Israel launched strikes that have killed more than 6,500 Palestinians in less than three weeks.

The strikes began after a Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7, which killed 1,400 Israelis.

Palestinian health officials said the Gaza death toll was soaring as Israeli jets pounded the enclave. Workers pulled dead and wounded civilians, including many children, out of landscapes of rubble in cities across the territory.

Meanwhile, in the occupied West Bank, Israel is continuing raids and arrests; Palestinian authorities say more than 1,200 people have been detained by Israel, and at least 103 have been killed since October 7.

The rising death tolls in Gaza are unprecedented in the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even greater loss of life could come if Israel launches an expected ground offensive aimed at crushing Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007 and survived four previous wars with Israel.

The conflict has also threatened to spread across the region. The Israeli military said it struck military sites in Syria in response to rocket launches from the country. Syrian state media said eight soldiers were killed and seven wounded.

Air strikes in Syria also hit the airports of Aleppo and Damascus, in an apparent attempt to prevent arms shipments from Iran to regional groups, including Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Israel has been exchanging near-daily fire with Iranian-backed Hezbollah across the Lebanese border.

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