

Commander's death in Gaza fighting shows 'victory' is far off

Amos Harel

Colonel Ehsan Daxa, commander of the regular army's 401st Armored Brigade, who was killed on Sunday in the northern Gaza Strip, was the fourth brigade commander the IDF has lost in this war. Preceding him were the commanders of the Nahal infantry brigade, the multi-dimensional unit and the southern Gaza brigade, who were all killed on October 7, 2023, during the first hours after the Hamas terror attack on the Israeli communities near the Gaza border. The circumstances were different this time, and reflect the changes in the nature of the long war going on since then.

Those three brigade commanders were killed during the desperate defensive battles in the areas surrounding the Gaza Strip, against Hamas forces with superior numbers that broke into the communities. The fighting now is being conducted deep in the Gaza Strip, in the third operation by the IDF inside the Jabalya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. The force commanded by Daxa arrived in two tanks at the outskirts of the refugee camp, and they got out for the commanders to observe the area. Daxa was killed and one of his battalion commanders was seriously injured when they were hit by an explosive device placed there.

Hamas still operates hundreds of armed men in the area of Jabalya. Many have been injured, but the contin-



Relatives of Col. Ehsan Daxa gather in Daliat al-Carmel Sunday after learning of his death in combat in the Gaza Strip.

Rami Sllush

ued fighting in the refugee camp shows how exaggerated the Israeli claims of having achieved victory against Hamas really are. In the areas where the IDF leaves, and given the lack of any strategic alternative to Hamas in light of the Israeli government's stubbornness,

the terrorist group has returned and is maintaining its hold on the ground.

Pentagon leaks

The large leak of documents from the Pentagon, on the eve of the planned Israeli attack on Iran, teaches us

quite a bit about the present state of relations between Washington and Jerusalem. It is hard to believe the leak is the result of a decision by the Biden administration – in such a case, the material would probably have reached The New York Times and not the Tele-

gram channel of pro-Iranian hackers, and wouldn't have included pictures of secret documents either.

But the very publication of the documents at this sensitive time testifies to the American discomfort with Israel's actions. Someone in the chain dealing

with it – it could even be a junior intelligence officer who sympathizes with the Palestinians, for example – was angry enough to take the risk and distribute the secret information. The Pentagon's announcement

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IDF strikes target Hezbollah financial institutions in Beirut

Yaniv Kubovich, Jonathan Lis, Eden Solomon, Jack Khoury, Adi Hashmonai and Reuters

The Israel Defense Forces on Sunday ordered Lebanese residents to stay away from branches of Al-Qard Al-Hasan, a financial institution operated by Hezbollah.

"We are going to attack the economic power of Hezbollah," Hagari said, adding that "the goal is to damage the trust of the operatives in the organization." According to Hagari, Hezbollah pays its operatives through a series of Iranian associations and organizations.

"This bank, which is not part of the international system, serves as a bank for everything," he said, adding that "the IDF is going to attack these branches." Hagari said that the army will also attack the organization's finance department, which manages Hezbollah's civilian and military affairs,

and that the IDF would issue evacuation warnings to residents of Beirut and other parts of the country.

Hagari added that Hezbollah was the main employer in Lebanon until now, and that it paid its operatives an average salary of \$500, because the Lebanese currency is depreciating and

No alternative to Hamas

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the dollar is worth more. "In the coming days we will reveal how Iran finances Hezbollah's terrorism through the use of civil institutions, associations and organizations as a cover for terrorist activity," Hagari continued.

More than 320 rockets were fired from Lebanon into

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High-ranking Israeli officer killed in northern Gaza

Yaniv Kubovich and Ofer Aderet

The commander of an Israeli armored brigade was killed by an explosive device in northern Gaza, the military said Sunday. Col. Ehsan Daxa, the commander of the 401st Armored Brigade, is the highest-ranking officer to be killed since Israel began its ground invasion of Gaza over a year ago.

Daxa, a 41-year-old from

the Druze town of Daliat al-Carmel in northern Israel, was killed when he and other officers exited their tank and walked to an observation post where the device had been planted. Another officer, Yehuda Shalev of the brigade's 52nd Battalion, was seriously wounded in the incident, and two other officers were moderately wounded.

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Top negotiator: Sinwar's death didn't change Israel or Hamas' positions

Bar Peleg and Amir Tibon

A senior member of the hostage negotiating team said that the killing of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar has not led to any changes in either side's positions in the negotiations, Haaretz learned. The senior official added that to restart the talks Israel must soften its stance.

In a conversation that

took place between the official and families of hostages within the last few days, the senior negotiator said the killing "didn't really change Israel's positions. There was no call for any kind of move or concession on its fundamental positions. And on Hamas' side, too, they're busy at the moment with [finding] successors, and there's no willingness

to soften or change their positions."

"There's no disintegration there," he continued. "The system continues to function. The system there is stable. It's under pressure, but it's functioning. First, they'll appoint successors and reorganize, and they're

willing to continue the conversation from the same positions, without any softening. They may even harden them." The senior negotiator said that since Sinwar's death, security cabinet and several other meetings were held at which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

was briefed and given intelligence assessments about the hostages' condition, but in practice, there has been no change in Israel's positions. The defense establishment's view, he added, is that the killing should be leveraged to get a deal. But in his view, Israel will have

to make concessions to do so.

He also voiced hopes that operations in Lebanon and in the Jabalya refugee camp in northern Gaza, and a possible Israeli strike on Iran, would create better conditions for a deal. Nevertheless, he said, "to a large extent, we're in the same situation. The assassination didn't create flexibility. The goals of the war haven't

changed with regard to ending Hamas' rule. Consequently, the orders given the defense establishment also haven't changed."

Senior Biden administration officials are concerned that despite Sinwar's death, the likelihood of reaching a cease-fire in Gaza and securing the release of hostages remains low. This concern comes amid escalating

tensions on the Lebanese front and Israel's anticipated strike on Iran, which could occur in the coming days. While President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris recently stated that Sinwar's death could offer an opportunity to end the war, Washington professionals remain pessimistic about the chances of capitalizing on it.

Likud's path to settling Gaza **Editorial Page 5**

With the help of WhatsApp:

Settlers recruit reservists to guard West Bank outposts



A West Bank farm outpost.

David Bachar

Hagar Shezaf

West Bank settlers are recruiting reservists to protect farm outposts and even help establish them, with military positions already set up for reservists as part of the army's so-called regional defense battalions.

In these battalions, also known by the Hebrew acronym *hagmar*, settlers are recruited to guard settlements in the West Bank. The army

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Iranian hackers leaking sensitive info on top Israeli officials

Omer Benjakob

Hackers believed to be working for Iranian intelligence are leaking personal information ostensibly stolen from accounts belonging to former and current senior Israeli defense and political officials. Some of the hacked material includes sensitive details.

Among the leaked information are emails supposedly obtained from breach-

ing the personal accounts of two former officials and two who continue to hold official positions. One case involved an official's purported contacts list.

The material was posted recently on a dedicated site created by the hacker group. Links to the leaked information were posted on its Telegram channel. Over the past several days, it has threatened to leak more personal information about

two officials: Yair Golan, chairman of the Democrats party and formerly the military's deputy chief of staff, and Kamal Penhasi, the military's Farsi-language spokesman.

Israeli investigators are familiar with the group as one of the many arms of Iran's cyber warfare network, whose primary focus is running influence campaigns.

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Lisi Niesner/Reuters

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haaretz.com

'How can we celebrate this year when our hearts are broken?'

Shira Kadari-Ovadia

The members of the Hakahal Synagogue in Jerusalem saw Hersh Goldberg-Polin for the last time on Simhat Torah last year when he took part in the traditional hakafot (dancing with the Torah scrolls) on the holiday eve before setting out for the Nova festival at Re'im near the Gaza border. Today, as the congregation is due to celebrate its first Simhat Torah without him, the preparations pose a special challenge: How to mark the most joyous day of the Jewish calendar when there is so little to be joyful about.

"How can we celebrate this year when our hearts are broken?" asked one congregant, Oshrat Shoham, in an article she wrote. "The war isn't yet over and the pain is still fresh. How can we be happy when congregants and others dear to us were murdered, when the hostages haven't yet returned and cry out for freedom?"

The exact plans for the holiday have not yet been finalized, but one thing is certain, "It will be more moderate and calmer," says Na'ama Levitz Applbaum, the administrator or *gabai* of the synagogue. "Usually



Israelis celebrating second hakafot on Simhat Torah in 2018.

Tomer Appelbaum

we go outside to the courtyard, to celebrate in the street. We decided that this time we'll stay indoors."

Seventy-five kilometers (46 miles) from there, in Ofakim, city rabbi Shachar Butzchak has a different approach to this year's celebration: "More, and in a big way." In the upcoming Simhat Torah, the Jewish anniversary of the murderous attack in which 30 of the townsfolk were murdered, he

intends to march in the same streets he was on when the terrorists began their killing spree. This time not in an alarmed sprint with a gun in his hand, but dancing with Torah scrolls. "We'll dance there, not a little but a lot, and we'll pay our gratitude to them, because thanks to them we are alive," he says.

Butzchak, a resident of the city's Mishor Hagefen neighborhood where battles raged on October 7, left home

on the morning of the attack to take part in the battles. He was shot and one of his legs is still paralyzed. The decision to celebrate more intensely applies both to the holiday itself and to the customary second round of hakafot at the end of the holiday. "It's closing a circle," he explains. "Like completing what they took from us last time. The meaning of the

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