

When and Where Will Israel's Aimless, Endless War End?

By [Bharat Dogra](#)

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If most people are unable to understand the war aims of Israel, they should not be surprised as it is quite possible that even Israel's rulers pushing this aggression relentlessly are not clear about their aims.

Israel's Channel 13 recently reported that army commander Herzi Halevi had told Netanyahu that without plans in place to create an alternative (non-Hamas) Palestinian government in Gaza, the military effort to defeat Hamas would be like a 'Sisyphean effort'. This was a reference to a character in Greek mythology who was condemned to endlessly keep pushing a huge boulder which was destined to roll back again. The effort could be made forever without achieving any real result.

Hence what the Israeli general said in effect was that the way in which the Israeli war effort was being shaped did not show any promise of achieving any results that could end the war on a satisfactory note even from the very narrow, one-sided perspective of Israel. This is the view of a senior Israeli general, not of a critic of Israeli aggression. Meanwhile, every day in this aimless war, innocent people including women and children are being killed, injured, disabled, displaced, starved and devastated in other ways. How long will this continue?

In fact it may be useful to pursue the Greek analogy a bit more. Sisyphus was the king of Ephyra. He was a terrible tyrant who even killed visitors to show off his power. Angered by this, gods punished him by ordering him to roll an immense boulder to the top of a mountain, and at the same creating such conditions that the boulder would invariably roll back once it came near to the top of the mountain. Hence Sisyphus the tyrant was condemned to pushing the boulder till eternity.

Is Israel unintentionally trapping itself into such a situation where it could go on shifting its aggression from one area to another without really achieving a durable satisfactory result, even from its own narrow point of view? Of course the bigger concern for most people in the world is that in the pursuit of such an aimless war so many more innocent people will be killed or devastated. What is more, on each day of continuing war in a situation of multiple possible points of escalation, the possibility of a much bigger and wider war remains dangerously close.

This is why most people at world level are so anxious to achieve ceasefire and durable peace as early as possible. But what have the much discussed recent high-profile peace efforts, with mediation by Qatar, Egypt, the USA and others really amounted to?

On May 14 the Prime Minister of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said that ongoing peace talks have reached a stalemate due to Israel's operation in Rafah. However it is what he stated about the earlier course of talks that is more significant. He stated,

"There is one party that wants to end the war and then talk about the hostages and there is another party who wants the hostages and wants to continue the war. As long as there is not any commonality between two things it won't get us to a result." (Quoted in a Reuters report published in The Hindustan Times May 15).

This description of the stand taken by two sides by someone who was closely involved in the mediation is shocking because this reveals that the two sides were not coming close to each other at all on basics, while the earlier picture conveyed on the basis of several reports of peace talks was that these held hope of reaching an agreement.

So the chances of early peace appear to be quite remote on the basis of the situation existing today. What is more, the worried world does not even know Netanyahu's plan, if at all there is a plan. What we know with reasonable certainty is that Netanyahu has no plans of early peace, and that he has a strong personal stake in prolonging the war and ending it only when some sort of a victory can be somehow claimed by him, no matter how costly this is in terms of the distress and devastation caused and no matter how big the dangers of escalation and threats to world peace.

The USA and its close allies appear disinclined to take the kind of strong action that is needed to stop this disastrous course from unfolding. The UN appears increasingly to be a helpless onlooker, its peacemaking role marginalized to a shocking extent and even its humanitarian help role reduced by fund cuts.

Hence in this very difficult and dismal situation, all countries and all people should make the maximum effort possible, with increasing unity and with more planning to achieve better results, to try to achieve peace as early as possible, followed by a big relief and rehabilitation effort.

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Bharat Dogra is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include

When the Two Streams Met, Planet in Peril, A Day in 2071 and Earth without Borders. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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