

Israeli BDS/anti-apartheid activist Ofer Neiman on military perspectives for war in Gaza and politics inside Israel

Wednesday 29 November 2023, by [NEIMAN Ofer](#), [REIMANN John](#) (Date first published: 28 November 2023).

Israeli anti-apartheid and BDS activist Ofer Neiman discusses:

- **Is Israel boxed into a corner militarily in Gaza?**
- **The special role that Gaza City plays in Gaza itself and how that relates to the overall military perspectives. (An important point that we outside of Palestine are often unaware of. See below.)**
- **Has Netanyahu been forced to accept a ceasefire under cover of the prisoner/hostage exchange?**
- **Israeli society domestically being torn apart by different political forces.**
- **What we in the U.S. can do to help the real opposition forces in Israel**

John Reimann : We're talking again with Ofer Neiman, who is an Israeli anti apartheid activist and BDS supporter in Jerusalem. And we wanted to get your take on both the political situation inside Israel right now, and also on the military situation in in Gaza. And I would like to do a screenshare, Ofer of something that you sent me that's this here. And in it, it describes, basically, Hamas activists just openly talk, you know, walking around and parading in Gaza City. So can you comment on that and your take on the military situation?

Ofer Neiman : Yeah, so I'm not a reporter. I'm not an expert on whatever is going on right now inside Gaza. But according to the reports showing this map, the location on the map where the Israeli captives were released, apparently, Hamas wanted to send a message to Israel, which is supposedly in control of Gaza City right now. Not the entire Gaza Strip, we're talking about Gaza City itself, and Hamas was telling Israel "You don't even control Gaza City, we are still free to move around in Gaza City and release the captives in central Gaza". So apparently, that was what Hamas wanted to do.

John Reimann : I was talking with a friend of mine who has some military background. And he was saying that in the kind of house to house fighting, that Israel would need to do to take control of Gaza City, you have to accept something like 20% casualty rate of your own soldiers. And is that something that you think the IDF politically would be able to do?

Ofer Neiman : So the idea for the IOF, you know, Israeli Occupation Forces or Israeli Apartheid Forces, they are quite reluctant to go that way, because losing so many soldiers will not go down well with the Israeli public. Nowadays, in this war, there is more willingness to sacrifice soldiers for what they see as a very just cause. But still, they would like to avoid that. And we saw in earlier stages of the war, that on some days the Israeli army was losing soldiers when they had to face Hamas face to face. So it's definitely on their mind. And now that they've destroyed most or large parts of Gaza City, there's no point in carpet bombing from the air facing pockets of resistance in

Gaza City. Even more so. If they go for Khan Yunis, the city in the south, where apparently the main command center of Hamas is located. This will be more costly. And as for the south, we have to know that there are many refugees from northern Gaza in the southern part. So the number of civilian casualties is likely to be higher among Palestinians. Of course, Israel doesn't care, doesn't have compassion for Palestinian civilians right now. It's committing a genocide in Gaza. But it will not be good from their own perspective, will not be good for diplomacy efforts or for Israeli advocacy abroad.

John Reimann : You know, in recent decades the Israeli Occupying Forces have kind of operated with impunity in the West Bank. They can go in, raid a house, kill family members do anything they like. And there's no repercussions as far as their own forces being killed. And I was just wondering, would it be the case that Israeli society has gotten used to that, that the Israeli military can just go in and do whatever it likes, and no Israeli soldiers are killed, and now they're facing a very different situation militarily, and they don't quite know how to deal with it. Not just the military itself, but how to deal with the with that with a general attitude, perhaps, that exists in Israeli society as a whole.

Ofer Neiman : That's one aspect. However, as noted previously, there is right now more willingness among the Israeli public to sacrifice soldiers for this cause, because most people, unfortunately regard this as a very necessary war, you know, against so-called monsters and human animals. So right now, there is more willingness to sacrifice soldiers in Israeli society than what we had, for example, three, four months ago, a year ago, two years ago. But still, to a large extent, the military and the government are careful about that, because it's still a sensitive issue and I don't think Israelis are willing to sacrifice 1000s of soldier soldiers for this cause. So the Israeli government wants to be careful here.

John Reimann : Yeah, you know, like, in the Vietnam War here, many Americans, I would say the great majority supported it in the beginning. And the attitude was, "well, yeah, we're gonna have some American soldiers killed, but we need to do it." But then when the reality hit home, and in every community, families were losing their sons. (At that time, it was only male soldiers that were at least in in combat.) When the when the body bags started piling up, then the attitude started to change, when they saw what it really meant.

Ofer Neiman : Yeah. It's interesting, I'm not sure what Israel's military options are right now, because they've destroyed, pulverised Gaza City. So many refugees down in the south going into Khan Yunis, and these areas in fighting in the south is going to be very costly in terms of Israeli public relations, in terms of harming civilians, and also in terms of losing soldiers. But what we're reading is that Israel is prepared for the next stage, which will be the takeover of the southern part of Gaza. That could be sort of a trick that they're trying to play - psychological warfare. And, apparently, in terms of locating the major tunnels, or at least where the captives are being held, it's mostly not in Gaza City, it's probably down in the south. So there's a question of what Israel can do right now. To me, and I'm not an expert, they seem to be quite stuck right now.

John Reimann : You know, one thing I was wondering about: you have right now, under a different name, in effect a ceasefire for a few days with the prisoner exchange. And I was just wondering if Netanyahu has not been forced to accept this. What is in effect the ceasefire, in part, partly is because of the political pressure, you know, the Israelis want the hostages released, but also in part could it be because they don't quite know. And they've hit kind of a, maybe a stumbling block militarily and they don't quite know how to proceed militarily. You think that's possible?

Ofer Neiman : I think that's a possibility. Another possibility is increasing pressure from Western leaders for something that comes closer to a ceasefire, for example, if NATO's Secretary General, General Stoltenberg is calling either for an extended truce or for a ceasefire, I'm not sure exactly,

because someone told me that, it's probably coordinated with the US government. So we can conclude that there's more pressure on Israel, at least to extend the truce, if not to agree on a ceasefire. The other thing that you just mentioned is pressure from families of Israeli captives. I think that's going to be an increasing issue for Netanyahu. Because now, once the Israelis are seeing several of these people released, by now close to 40 or 50, there's pressure to release others. And this is not likely to be pressure in the form of "Bomb Gaza to release the captives", but probably to negotiate with Hamas to release them.

John Reimann : Do you think that Netanyahu will return to a military attack, including on Southern Gaza at some point?

Ofer Neiman : That's a possibility. And in fact, he's sort of painted himself into a corner, including what he did yesterday, when he went into Gaza. Maybe you saw the footage, wearing a helmet and a protective vest. So he went there to meet the soldiers and basically told the soldiers that "We're going all the way, complete victory". So now he has to sort of abide by his own commitments. So there is some contradiction here. I'm not so sure. But it's certainly a possibility that he will try to pursue the war in three, four days.

John Reimann : Wouldn't he be under a lot of pressure from the extreme the extreme right wing within his own government to continue the military war.

Ofer Neiman : Absolutely. From the far right, the religious far right, the settlers, people like Smotrich and Ben Gvir, they're also interested in expelling the Palestinians from Gaza, which is also an Israeli government plan endorsed by Likud. But Netanyahu probably understands this is impossible. The messianic right would like to expel the Palestinians and reestablish at least some of the Israeli settlements inside Gaza. So he will be under a lot of pressure.

On the other hand, he will be under a lot of pressure from the mainstream, or the center, families of Israeli captives in Gaza. And these forces are pulling in opposite directions. And in general, Israeli society is already being torn apart by these forces. I think we're going to see much more of it. If we have an extended truce or a ceasefire, because these struggles go way beyond the question of whether Israel should keep waging this war in Gaza.

It also revolves around the issue of settlements in the West Bank, you know, whether Israel should send large military forces into the West Bank to secure the settlements when they could have been used on October 7, to protect the southern border. And also the issue of which direction Israel should take in general right now, the struggle that we had during the protests in the summer, between those who supported the judicial reform and those who were against it. Those who want to see an even more religious, a right wing Jewish state, constitutionally, and those who are opposed to it, who support the underlying apartheid settler-colonial order, but would like to see an Israel that is still, at least superficially liberal and democratic. These struggles are not going away. And I don't know who's going to win when it comes to the question of whether Israel should keep waging the war in Gaza.

John Reimann : I want to get to the political situation. But just to return for a moment, if I understand you correctly, you seem to be saying that it's not clear if Israel will try to move into southern Gaza militarily? And if they do, would they carry out the same sort of bombing campaign, as they have in northern Gaza and Gaza City?

Ofer Neiman [on the central role of Gaza City] : That's an interesting question. If we want to be sort of cynical here, and we should be, I think that they had a special interest in destroying Gaza City, the commercial center, the cultural center of Gaza. They were not really going after military

targets. They're trying to destroy Palestinian society in Gaza. And that's the first stage towards ethnic cleansing, try to expel them to Sinai or abroad. We've seen calls even from so-called mainstream Israeli politicians, for Palestinians from Gaza to emigrate. So Israel is waging a war on Palestinian civilians and Palestinian civil society in Gaza. I think the idea was simply to destroy Gaza City to make it uninhabitable. And that's the major city in the Gaza Strip.

Will they do the same in Khan Yunis, I don't think they can do, or will do the same in terms of carpet bombing from the air. One reason is that by now, Israel has lost so much goodwill and support in the West. So if this carpet bombing campaign resumes, we're gonna see, I think, more disruption in the West, more calls to action against Israel. And even more protest, I think, by senior Western leaders. On top of that, after Israel told Palestinians to flee towards the southern border, if they starts bombing refugee concentration areas there. I think it's going to be created another sort of PR or political problem for Israel. Israeli leaders will be asked "You told Gazans they can move south and you're going to carpet bomb the area?" It doesn't make any sense, even for those who don't care, unfortunately, about Palestinian lives. So I'm not sure we're going to see that.

On the other hand going in with ground forces, house to house combat, that's also problematic. So one conclusion here is that Israel is stuck, that Israel is learning the limitations of its own power, military power and political power. And perhaps if they had some hopes, of destroying Gaza City to the extent of driving Palestinians south, then forcing them to emigrate, and convincing the Egyptian Government to receive them...and we know for a fact that Israel was trying to do that with some Western allies to convince the Egyptians to receive refugees - that hasn't worked. And so apparently, what Israel was trying to do is to sort of basically force as many Palestinians as possible out of the entire Gaza Strip. If this is impossible, then Israel is stuck. And I don't think it has good options when it comes to either carpet bombing or sending ground forces into southern parts of the Gaza Strip.

John Reimann : So in other words, it's a combination of, as I understand it, the more that the Israeli Occupation Forces attack Palestinians, the more support for a violent resistance, in this case support for Hamas, increases. So it's stuck in a way between on the one hand support for Hamas and resistance by Hamas. And on the other hand, the fact that Al Sisi won't accept that Palestinians go to Egypt, and even Biden, you know, as disgusting as his policies are, he faces some limitations and what he can accept. And so it seems to me that Netanyahu well, that what you're saying is that Netanyahu is stuck in an irresolvable. box.

Ofer Neiman : Yeah, I think he is stuck in that there's also growing pressure on him to resign. And I think he will be forced to resign at some point. And he probably knows that. If there is a lasting ceasefire, he will be forced out quite fast. Perhaps one of the things that he is still seeking is more escalation not just in Gaza, or not necessarily in Gaza right now, but also in Lebanon, and versus Iran, sort of trying to drag to also drag Biden into a war with Iran. I think Biden, or genocide Joe, he's despicable, but I think he's smart enough, or the people around him are smart enough, to try and stop that from happening. But that could be another option for Netanyahu to escalate across the entire region. However, overall, I will still say that he seems to be stuck. His options are limited.

John Reimann : I think that neither Iran, nor their proxy Hezbollah, want an outright war, you know, with with... well, it would amount to with with the United States. And so they've done a few token things and made a few token statements. So, the other question is how much pressure there will be from the masses in the Arab states, to pressure Hezbollah, to more decisively attack the United States? But I think you can, you can never rule it out. But if I had to place a bet 50/50 odds, I would say, it's more unlikely than likely.

Ofer Neiman : I think it also has something to do with the fact that perhaps Hezbollah is not as

popular as they once were in the Arab world, because of their involvement in the Syrian war. On the side of Bashar Assad, who is committing a genocide against his own people in Syria. But also another reason, perhaps, is that they have no strong interest to intervene, or to escalate along the northern border with Israel, as long as Hamas seems to be on its feet. And Hamas seems to be on its feet. I mean, it seems to be functioning, it's communication systems, basic logistics, its capable of organizing the transfer of captives. So it seems that Hamas is far from collapsing. That's another thing to consider.

John Reimann : Right. Both Netanyahu and Genocide Joe have committed themselves to completely eliminating Hamas. But unless they are willing to completely eliminate the Palestinian people in Gaza, I don't think that's going to be possible.

Ofer Neiman : First of all, they have to eliminate all the senior commanders and 1000s of combatants, which is yet to happen, apparently. But even beyond that, Hamas is an idea of resistance and especially after this genocide in Gaza, this is not something that Israel can uproot. Just by going into Gaza and taking over the Gaza Strip. So this whole thing about, you know, destroying Hamas, it's impossible, but so many Israelis believe that. You know, I was out yesterday, I was hearing a conversation between a few people, one of them was a young soldier in uniform. And he was saying, "Oh, we're going all the way. There's no other option. There's no halfway solution here, halfway solution here is pretty much like doing nothing." And I think a lot of Israelis are gonna be upset, the huge gap between the promises made to Israelis to destroy Hamas and reality.

John Reimann : So can you talk a little bit now about what other conversations you're hearing? And what what are the different maybe there's crosscurrents in the mood within Israel itself?

Ofer Neiman : The number of those who are strongly against this war and against bombing Gaza, that's a small minority, probably less than 5%. of Jewish Israeli society. There's an overwhelming majority in support of an operation in Gaza within that majority. Perhaps there is a larger minority, my assessment would be, I don't know, perhaps 20% of those polled that would say perhaps that they're against some of the bombings, that they would like to see a different approach. But most Israelis are supportive, not just of the general idea of war in Gaza, but also of everything that Israel is doing. And I'm seeing that lots of Facebook postings from the so called Israeli leftists are saying, "I do care about the children in Gaza, but we have no choice." So those who are sort of the nice people, who are saying, "No, I'm not happy about children in Gaza dying, but we have no choice." So there's a significant majority within Jewish Israeli society in favor of whatever the Israeli government and the Israeli military decide to do in Gaza. However, there's also this narrative around the captives, you know, calling for their release. And here, there's a certain contradiction because, I mean, at some point, or I think that by now, more and more people are realizing that military force is not the way to release the captives. So perhaps here, those people who don't care about Palestinian lives, unfortunately, or about the ongoing genocide, they will understand that there's a problem here, that there is no military solution for when it comes to releasing the captives. And this may change public opinion.

John Reimann : Well, there's that plus seems to me, what you're saying is that the Israeli military is reaching kind of a stalemate in Gaza, where it either moves forward with its plans, in which case it's going to take pretty substantial losses, or is just kind of stuck in the situation that it's in right now for somewhat extended period. So seems to me that would that would create the conditions for a shift in the attitudes of a substantial portion of Israelis?

Ofer Neiman on post war Israeli plans : Yeah, another aspect of Netanyahu painting himself into a corner is that he said that the Israeli military will maintain overall security control of the Gaza Strip. He said that to American journalists as well, in any case, after the war. And the question is,

how is that possible? If you have millions of Palestinians in Gaza, first of all, first question, who's going to run Gaza? One answer, one possibility is the Palestinian Authority. But the PA may not be so keen on running an almost uninhabitable Gaza Strip. And Israel doesn't want the PA to regain control of Gaza. I mean, that was basically Netanyahu's idiotic strategy, a bloodstained strategy - weakening the Palestinian Authority and sort of at least indirectly, if not directly, boosting Hamas. So Netanyahu doesn't want the PA inside. So what are the options? Another option is local people in Gaza, running the administration there, which is still very, very difficult. And if the Israeli military remains there, there will be resistance, so I really don't know how this ends. Even if we reach a ceasefire, what is Israel going to do? It's also very costly. I mean, I think we're facing a sort of a recession here. So many people are now mobilized reserve soldiers. Lots of businesses are hurting. So I'm not sure this can go on that long.

John Reimann : And, you know, you were mentioning like the, the those who are just opposed in principle to Israelis assault on Gaza, maybe being under 5%. How, what are the perspectives? For? Well, number one, I would imagine that they're even within that small minority. There's not complete unanimity of agreement. And number two, what are the perspectives for those views? To start to gain further support?

Ofer Neiman on perspectives for real oppositionists inside Israel : What are the prospects for people like us here to become more popular within Israeli society? Not that great, not that great. I think that by now, those who are opposed to the genocide, the crimes against humanity in Gaza, are people who have a broad anti colonial and anti apartheid agenda. And I think the main thing right now, in terms of convincing Israelis, Israelis need to see more international pressure, especially from the west, more BDS, especially sanctions from Western governments. But that's always a problem, because Western governments are typically quite supportive of Israel. But for example, if we were seeing right now discussions in Ireland about expelling the Israeli ambassador, that's a major step forward. So I think that we need to see more BDS and more sanctions from Western governments. And this is something that can trigger a conversation in Jewish Israeli society, because without that, Israeli society is full of extreme right wingers, and now also the center, people who are also - even if they're just traumatized, trying to describe it in a compassionate way - these traumatized Israelis, mainstream Israelis, they will not lift a finger to stand in solidarity with Palestinians, they don't have the energy, they don't have the mindset. So we need the pressure from the outside in order to change things here.

John Reimann : Are people in Israel aware that a very substantial portion, I think it's possibly the majority of Jewish youth here in the United States are extremely critical of Israel.

Ofer Neiman : Not enough. This is something that we're trying to explain to Israeli society. And we have to do more of that. There is an emerging rift between at least young Jewish Americans and Israel, and the love affair is over, which began probably in 1967, more than then in 1948, after the Six Day War, it's coming to an end, young American Jews are learning about Israel, and the more they learn, the more disgusted they become, for good reason. And I think that this is something that Israelis will not be able to ignore for long for, though nowadays, the main Jewish community institutions, the donors, influencers, most of them still stand with Israel. So Israel, the Israeli government can create this facade of you know, US Jews standing with Israel. I don't know how long this can go on.

John Reimann : So from what you're saying, the more we can, for instance, you know, this this group Jewish voices for peace, here in the United States?

Ofer Neiman : Jewish Voice for Peace? JVP? Yeah.

John Reimann : that we can, like, publicize the existence and the activities of groups like that. I mean, I would have some criticisms on in some ways, but But anyway, the more that groups like that and and members of groups like that, that their voices can be publicized within Israel, that would be very helpful.

Ofer Neiman : Israeli decision makers are know very well about JVP and the growing BDS and Palestine Solidarity movement in the US, and they are alarmed by this. For at least 10 years now, Israel has been working hard behind the scenes to counter the growing Palestine Solidarity movement in the US and in other places, for example, this push for anti BDS legislation. I think that by now, you have it in almost 30 of the 50 states, something like that. But the Israeli public in general? I'm not sure they are aware of all this. And the government certainly doesn't want them to know. Because that will be a problem. I mean, the government wants Israelis to think that Israel's standing in the US is secure. And we have to change that. I think that appealing to Israeli Israeli institutions, Israeli society in general, showing them the hard facts about growing support for Palestine in the US, and what this will mean, even in terms of US military support for Israel, I think that's very important, convincing Israelis that, that those who are just counting on blanket support, military support. billions upon billions, and weapons for Israel are living on borrowed time.

John Reimann : Is there any specific steps that we can take here in the United States, aside from building a movement here, but as far as publicizing the existence of the opposition here, including amongst many American Jews, myself included, I guess, he would say, is there anything specifically we can do to help publicize that existence in Israel?

Ofer Neiman : Maintaining channels of communication, thinking about messages that Israeli activists can convey to Americans in general, and thinking about messages that US activists can convey to Israelis in general, working together, coordinating campaigns, lobbying politicians together, perhaps even issuing joint statements. But it comes down to keeping our communication channels open, and seeing how we can all work together. Also, of course, with Palestinians if they wish to work with us. That's great. I mean, we, for example, Israeli supporters of the BDS campaign. We work with our Palestinian partners. And I think this is good for the general BDS campaign. So working along these lines, trying to build more bridges and joint projects.

John Reimann : Are there any things that we have not covered or any final message you'd like to give?

Ofer Neiman : I just hope that we're going to see a growing so called Squad in Congress. I mean, they started out as four I think, by now you can safely say that it's more than four and more like 10. I hope that we're gonna see more and more squad people within the Democratic Party. So I mean, I for one, I do think that it's, even though it's a parrrty under Genocide Joe, that it's worth our effort to struggle, to campaign within the Democratic Party. And, and at least when it comes to the downstream ballot, to support candidates for Congress, people, like you know, like Ilhan Omar and AOC and Rashida Tlaib, and have more of these people run for office. I think that can be very, very beneficial.

John Reimann : Well, I have to say in that regard, I mean, even Bernie Sanders and AOC do not oppose in principle USA to Israel. And, yeah, so I do think in that regard, that we have to see the Democratic Party as being firmly in the pro Israel pro Zionist camp. And what we need is a working class alternative to the Democrats, and I wouldn't see any of the squad as being really you know, reliable allies or anything like that.

Ofer Neiman : Okay, it's an interesting discussion. I mean, Sanders, I was disappointed by his refusal to call for a ceasefire, saying that that it's impossible to negotiate with Hamas. That's an

idiotic thing to say. I mean, because they are criminals. And of course, Hamas does commit war crimes, but so does the Israeli government, I mean, both the Israeli government and Hamas are partners for negotiations. On the other hand, I did read a message from him last week saying that aid to Israel must be conditioned. And he had some pretty strong conditions that he stipulated. So I'm not giving up on this idea of democratic representatives being opposed to aid to Israel, we'll see. So perhaps we can agree that there needs to be a third alternative, an alternative that represents the working class in America, but that it's not a bad idea, at least for now to try to expand the squad in Congress, at least right now that we're having an emergency and we will still be in that emergency. Even if we have a ceasefire. It's an ongoing genocide in Palestine. And for now, we need some quick solutions as well, some progress in Congress. So I think we need all options, we need to try all options.

John Reimann : I think Sanders and some others, even AOC have moved a little bit further away from just simply blanket support for Israel, for two reasons. One is the pressure from below here in the United States. And the other is even Biden sees that what Netanyahu and company are trying to accomplish is impossible and in fact to a great extent, conflicts with the interests of US imperialism in the region, as they say. So as far as moving more Democrats, to a more, at least slightly more neutral stance regarding Israel, I think the best way to do that is build the movement independent of them, without any support any Democrats. And if we can actually make a start towards building a working class alternative to the Democrats, including running independent candidates for office that represented the beginnings of a working class party, that would do more, as far as pushing the Democrats than anything we can do, trying to support more left wing Democrats themselves.

Ofer Neiman : I actually agree. So if there's an option to run, someone who's not from the Democrats, and that person stands a chance of winning, yeah, go for it, go for it. But I'm a bit more pessimistic. So that's why I was saying, perhaps let's try to focus first on getting more leftist Democrats elected, but I don't disagree with you.

John Reimann : You know, I ran for mayor of Oakland last year. So my view was run people like that on the local level. And, and then... but anyway, that's a lot further and deeper conversation that needs to be had. So I would say to be continued on that issue. So with that, thanks very much all for for your time, and we will definitely stay in contact with each other

John Reimann
Ofer Neiman

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