

ANALYSIS

Gaza, a war Israel is losing

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While waiting, on edge, for a definitive answer to a ceasefire in Gaza, we pass quickly between the conviction that the goal is just one step away to the disillusionment of the fear of the disaster if Israeli ground forces attack Rafah.

Obviously everyone hopes that the guns will fall silent, at least for the period required to take stock and permit a political solution to be found; but realistically this is a tall order

and in any case, however desirable the ceasefire may be, there would be little to celebrate because future prospects are far from rosy.

The difficulties for a ceasefire come from both camps. In the meantime, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is stuck in a corner: on one hand, there are all the Western countries that have so lobbied hard to prevent the attack on Rafah that the United States has even suspended sending weapons. On the same side, there are also the relatives of the hostages and many Israelis who have taken to the streets in recent days, demanding first of all the return of the hostages and a peace agreement. On the other side Netanyahu must reckon with the extreme right - represented by the two ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir - who without an attack on Rafah would bring down the government. Moreover, if he accepted the prospect of a definitive truce, for Netanyahu it would be the admission of a defeat, given that the declared objective of this war is the elimination of Hamas from Gaza: a political and military disaster after seven months of a bloody war that has gradually and increasingly isolated Israel internationally.

On the other front, it is clear that Hamas is playing on Netanyahu's difficulties and has upped the ante by announcing its acceptance of a plan that envisages a definitive truce and the total withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, conditions that - as is easy to understand - are impossible for the Israeli government. Besides, having backed Netanyahu into a corner, even politically, Hamas has no interest in finding a compromise with Israel.

Realistically, therefore, there are two options today: the first is a ceasefire that resounds like a defeat for the Israeli government, with the legitimisation of Hamas' presence in Gaza. That is to say, with a party-militia that has as its objective the annihilation of Israel and that, despite having lost some of its military structures in recent months, has gained in political strength with the anti-Israeli hatred that Netanyahu's military action has helped to multiply: not only among the Palestinians but also in other Islamic countries and in the world, as the demonstrations in the West demonstrate.

The alternative to the cease-fire, however, is the Israeli attack on Rafah, with all the disastrous consequences it entails, first of all from a humanitarian point of view, but also from a politico-military one. The defeat and elimination of Hamas remains highly improbable, as the experience of the past few months suggests, but casualties and destruction will increase, and Israel's plan once the offensive is over remains unclear. At the same time, the destruction of Rafah will only further alienate the allies from Israel.

In short, the worrying sign of vulnerability represented by the Hamas massacre on 7 October 2023 is adding up to another sign of weakness on Israel's part, which is incapable of eliminating its enemy, divided internally and with frayed relations with its Western allies. The responsibility for this situation weighs heavily on the current Netanyahu government. Paradoxically, help for Israel could come from the governments of other Islamic countries, Saudi Arabia and Egypt primarily, for whom the growth of Hamas fundamentalists and the strengthening of their sponsors, Iran and Qatar, is becoming a danger for internal and regional security. Needless to say, a Hamas victory, far from representing the good of the Palestinian people, would also be worrying for Europe, starting with the boost it would give (and is in fact already giving) to Islamic fundamentalism in our countries.

In the face of this scenario, international political-diplomatic action that is not limited to lobbying for an immediate ceasefire becomes even more important. Complicated though as it is, one must go to the root of this conflict to find a stable and lasting political solution, the basic premise of which is that the annihilation of one or the other must be strictly ruled out.

It has been said many times that a solution must be found to the Palestinian question, and this is absolutely true. We have a people not only without a State and with a territory thinned out, but also deprived of certain elementary rights. But it must also be clear that the Palestinian issue cannot be resolved without simultaneously resolving the Israeli issue as well. Because we must not forget that the claim of Hamas and the countries that support it is that Israel does not exist. And it is precisely the existence of Israel that is the reason why there has been war in the Middle East since 1948.

Therefore, one cannot pretend that creating a Palestinian State (which was rejected by the Arab countries themselves) will solve all problems. It will be even more important to establish who can lead this state, just as it will be fundamental in Israel to marginalise the forces according to which the salvation of the Jewish state passes

through the elimination of the Palestinians.

Photo: Israeli demonstrators call for release of hostages (LaPresse)