

## The Gaza Conundrum and Beyond

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Gaza, this small strip of former Egyptian-administered territory, lost during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, is the centre of yet another ‘seasonal cleansing’ of Palestinian militants by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). Yes, the dogged continuation by HAMAS, Palestinian Jihad and associated paramilitary groups of firing crudely-made rockets into Israel, is a frustrating, ongoing security issue for the Israelis. But as Israel’s other two offensives against Gaza have shown in 2008 and 2012,<sup>1</sup> whatever the Gazan paramilitaries bring to the table in terms of their ‘might’, is largely symbolic and dwarfed by the technological prowess of the Israelis.

### Israeli Advantages and Calculations

The fact that Israel’s new Iron Dome anti-ballistic missile system was successfully deployed, has ensured that very few of the highly inaccurate missiles in the hands of Palestinian paramilitaries reach Israeli soil. This alone gives Tel Aviv the upper hand in any diplomatic negotiations. Iron Dome has in effect neutralized HAMAS, *et.al*, in the skies over Israel. One might then consider the question, “Why did the 2014 Israeli offensive into Gaza have to be so brutal?” Well, the Netanyahu government’s stand is that now is the right time to deliver a

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<sup>1</sup> Israeli Defense Force ‘Operation Cast Lead’ December 2008-January 2009 in which some 1,300 Palestinians and 13 Israelis killed (majority of Palestinian victims were civilian, although this is disputed by Israel); Israeli Defense Force ‘Operation Pillar Defense’ November 2012 in which 158 Palestinians and 5 Israelis were killed (again, the majority of the Palestinians killed were civilian, though Israeli authorities argue that the majority of deaths were Palestinian militants).

decisive blow to HAMAS and cripple its network of tunnels by which contraband, including the parts necessary for missile manufacture, enter Gaza.



Iron Dome ABM system in action

And the timing is auspicious. Egypt, no longer a political stronghold for the Muslim Brotherhood (the ideological-Islamist mother of HAMAS), presents the Gazans with a second hostile front. The new secular authorities in Cairo may see some long-term advantage in using Palestine as a rallying cry for ‘Pan Arabism’ and Egypt’s eventual re-establishment as the leading Arab state. But, they are no friends of HAMAS. They back Israel’s military offensive to destabilise the movement and to bring down it in favor of a more secular Palestinian leadership with which they can cooperate.

Prime Minister Netanyahu, an avowed hawk of the Israeli right, senses an opportunity to secure the state of Israel, as chaos sweeps the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Weak political leadership in Washington, absence of ‘real’ political consensus in Europe and only the moral indignation of the United Nations present the Israeli government with a unique window of opportunity. Playing the game of ‘divide and rule,’ creating havoc by turning group against group, enables Israel to inhabit a new Middle East

where old enemy states are not just vanquished, but wiped off the scene, leaving in their wake a collection of warring statelets, some religiously-based, others secular, but none posing a real existential threat to Israel, and none to challenge Israel's sovereign domain over the Occupied West Bank or its siege of the Gaza Strip.

Such anti-Israeli coalitions as those of 1948, 1967, and 1973 would be consigned to the past, unless something truly unexpected happens in the Arab and Muslim domains. Perhaps the ISIS/ISIL phenomenon in Syria/Iraq will be the 'change agent' that redefines Arab power in the Levant and northern Gulf. However, this phenomenon is unlikely to help the Palestinian cause because it is easy for Israel to place HAMAS and every other militant Palestinian group in the same category as ISIS/ISIL, giving Tel Aviv 'casus belli' to 'go hard' against all Palestinian resistance.

### **No Proportionality or Necessity**

The damage caused to Gaza has been extreme. IDF bombings, which included UN schools and mosques where traumatized Palestinian civilians sought shelter from Israeli bombardment, has done nothing other than brutalize an already brutalized and isolated people. Instead of diplomacy and compromise, Netanyahu again chose the sword. The question was not who fired the first shot but where proportionality went? Surely some people-to-people compassion and political will may have been able to turn the tide from militancy to civility. What is happening now will only strengthen HAMAS as a political force. As the only active broad-based Gazan resistance group on Palestinian land willing to challenge Israel in an epic 'David versus Goliath' struggle,

HAMAS will flourish as the Palestinian people seek to exact revenge for their fallen.



Israeli F-15 in action over Gaza

Furthermore, and objectively, the latest conflict in Gaza was unnecessary. Neither are any future ones. The contemporary Israeli state is as safe as it has been in its relatively brief history. It certainly is the most militarily powerful state in the Middle East, formed and sustained by war. 'Palestine', or those souls who live on land euphemistically called by the UN the 'non-member observer state' of Palestine, has been divided by a network of walls, Jewish settlements, 'Israeli only' roads, Israeli imposed check-points and poverty, all with either the tacit support of the international community or its turning a blind eye to the situation.

Finally, the more political poison Israel pours onto the Palestinian communities, the less the likelihood of a long-term stable situation between Palestine and Israel. War begets war. And if left unchecked, violence feeds off of itself. The question of Palestine is central to the politics of many, if not all, Arab/Muslim states and is the 'cause celeb' for current and aspiring Arab and Muslim leaders. The longer it takes to arrive at a political solution to the Palestinian dilemma, the more likely this rudderless and negative

spiral of war and revenge will maintain  
the conditions for a ceaseless fight.

*Views expressed in this article are not  
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**Images Accessed: 18/08/14**

Iron Dome image:

[http://vipmedia.globalnews.ca/2014/07/28-  
e4ecf4ce586f6032b86129323dc7e920.jpg?w=  
672&h=448&crop=1](http://vipmedia.globalnews.ca/2014/07/28-e4ecf4ce586f6032b86129323dc7e920.jpg?w=672&h=448&crop=1)

Israeli Air Force F-15 image:

<http://i1.ytimg.com/vi/qdpIlzbSzvc/0.jpg>