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THE AXIS OF RESISTANCE AFTER THE LAST BOUT OF FIGHTING

HAMAS AFTER THE LATEST ROUND: A TOTAL
FAILURE OR AN ADVANTAGEOUS OPPORTUNITY?

Middle East Game of Thrones

It is clear that Hamas, like Hezbollah and other similar movements, views the results of the latest round of fighting as a resounding victory. A movement such as Hamas has no need to boast military achievements to paint a picture of victory. Hence, there is no point to try and refute this perception, but rather to examine it, while taking into account the movement's real achievements and failures in an honest manner.

In all likelihood, Hamas did not plan the latest escalation, just as neither states nor terror group would plan long wars in advance. Wars happen due to changes and disruptions in original plans. It seems that Hamas intended to attain a symbolic achievement as a player in the West Bank and Jerusalem after launching symbolic rockets at the city- a symbolic act of its proclaimed entry onto the stage. The very fact that Hamas made demands that go beyond its sphere of control within the Gaza Strip is a novel development that the group can view as an achievement. Nevertheless, at this point, it is not certain if this accomplishment is sustainable. Even if Hamas is dismayed at the Palestinian Authority's (PA) cancellation of the Palestinian elections, it is difficult to assume that the movement's leadership was naive and genuinely believed that Mahmoud Abbas would willingly relinquish his power.

The more accurate assessment is that Hamas reasoned that Abbas did not take the elections seriously. Instead, the group viewed the elections' cancellation as an opportunity to leverage influence both in terms of the resistance to Israel and by pointing the accusatory finger at the corrupt and undemocratic PA. Indeed, this time around, the cancellation of the elections and the PA's demonstrable disregard for democratic norms have garnered attention across the globe.

In the military realm, the mere ability to withstand a strong, modern army for two weeks is already a "victory." Hamas has maintained its ability to launch long-range missiles at Israel, in addition to other capacities, such as anti-tank missiles and attack drones, which have significantly improved their offensive abilities.



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It goes without saying that Hamas is no longer merely a “terrorist organization” or a classic guerrilla organization, but an organized and disciplined army that also operates according to the principles of regular military combat. Nevertheless, none of this came as a surprise to the IDF.

Finally, Hamas’s popularity in the West Bank comes as a surprise to neither Israel nor the PA, and it is difficult to imagine a situation in which the group’s popularity there would wane. The rise of Hamas’s power on the Arab street, as a result of a resurgence of Islamist movements in the Arab world since the Arab Spring. However, the mood of the masses within Arab countries, as well as the term “Arab street” itself are abstract concepts and can be measured neither in quantitative terms, nor researched seriously. Qatar’s return to the usual conduct of transferring funds to Hamas in Gaza is an uncertain issue. Hence, it is not certain at all whether or not Hamas will be able to return to “business as usual” until the initiating the next round of hostilities.

An opinion piece in the Saudi newspaper Ukadh summarizes the treatment of Hamas along those lines: Muhammad al-Saad asserts in an article entitled "[How Hamas Killed Sheikh Jarrah](#),” that Hamas’s “military mentality” drives it to failure time and time again, especially in this latest round when it fell into the IDF’s deceitful trap. According to the writer, Hamas is similar to the Taliban in 2003 when the latter erred in accurately assessing its military capabilities. Finally, al-Saad states that Ismail Haniya and his cohorts only increased Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s popularity with a few rockets.

Western ‘Progressive’ Forces Join the Middle East’s Axis of Resistance

It seems that the achievements of Hamas, if any, should be seen neither in its declarations nor in IDF or Israeli media reports, but rather in a much wider international context, particularly in the West. It can be said that Hamas’s greatest accomplishment is considerable progress towards achieving legitimacy in the eyes of the West at the expense of the PLO, as well as maintaining open cooperation with Iran without losing any political clout. All of this, of course, is directly connected to antisemitic processes of the delegitimization of Israel and antisemitism in general one of its main derivatives. **To put it simply and bluntly - Hamas’s achievement is the fact that it is treated as a normal, or even as a party in a state of a justified confrontation with Israel.**

This link should not come as a surprise, as there is a certain ideological affinity between Western radicals and political Islamist movements. The ideology of political Islam (whether in the Sunni version of the Muslim Brotherhood or in the Shia version of the Iranian regime) has been influenced by radical Marxist ideas of Western origin. **This ideology has adopted Marxist symbols and concepts, while [contemporary Western left-wing radicalism has distinct Marxist roots](#). Hatred of Zionism above all, regardless of specific Israeli policy, is the meeting point of these two ideological forces.**

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1. As in previous rounds of fighting, this latest escalation sparked waves of already strong anti-Semitism and hatred of Israel in the West. However, this time, what stood out was the cooperation between 'progressive' forces that joined the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist organizations openly supporting Hamas. Hezbollah supporters were observed throughout Europe on al-Quds Day, May 7. Following the rise of anti-Semitic incidents in anti-Israel demonstrations during the latest conflagration, [Germany's Federal Ministry of the Interior](#) decided to outlaw several Islamist organizations with ties to Hezbollah. Al-Quds Day is an Iranian initiative that was adopted by Ayatollah Khomeini immediately after the establishment of the Islamic regime in Iran in 1979. In several U.S. and Canadian cities, organizations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas (a sister movement of the Muslim Brotherhood), such as [AMP and CAIR, have joined efforts with civil society organizations](#) to express support for Hamas.
2. The Iranian regime, including its "extremist" and "moderate" wings, be it the Revolutionary Guards or the savvy English-speaking Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif, has expressed unreserved support not only for Islamic Jihad (a pro-Iranian organization), but also for Hamas. Hamas is not an Iranian proxy like Hezbollah, and it is highly doubtful if Hamas received instructions from Tehran; it is only Tehran's client. Nevertheless, it is well known that upgrading Hamas's missile and drone capabilities would have been impossible without [Iranian technological assistance](#). Hamas may need additional Iranian assistance in light of lacking funds from other sources and entities, following the latest escalation. At the same time, Iran is in no hurry to provide funds, but does demand concrete actions. **In any case, it is clear that Iran's active and public stance in favor of Hamas has not received critical attention from the United States, which is engaged in efforts to reach a renewed nuclear deal with the Iranian regime.**
3. In mainstream media outlets throughout the United States and Europe, the conflict was not framed as Israel versus Gaza or Israel versus Hamas, but rather Israel versus Palestine. The Associated Press even referred to Gaza as "occupied." Moreover, some major and not even necessarily radical media outlets have adopted Hamas's narrative following the PA's cancellation of the elections, with Israel naturally presented as the main culprit. In majority of cases Western Media express concern about the economic and humanitarian state of Gaza and the Palestinians in general, whereas it is unclear from where aid would arrive. This reality invites the following question: Why exactly does the situation in Gaza or that of the Palestinians in general require more foreign aid than other cases of refugees anywhere else in the world? **Israel must stand firm on this point and demand explicit explanations, since this unique treatment of the Palestinians lacks any self-interested**

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geo-political rationale and borders on irrationality, which itself is caused by the involvement of Jewish players in this issue.

4. As previously mentioned, it is unlikely that Hamas planned the recent escalation in the first place. However, it is likely that both Hamas and Iran recognized the changes in the overall approach of the Biden administration. The commander of the IRGC, Hussein Salami, who addressed a rally in support of Hamas and Islamic Jihad said, among other things, that “the United States was the first to abandon the Zionist regime.” A thorough examination of the State Department’s declarations further reveals that the United States was far from expressing “support” for Israeli measures. Rather, declarations only stated that Israel has the right to defend itself. **This wording makes room for an interpretation that restricts Israel’s right to solely deploying defensive measures, such as the use of the Iron Dome system.** In the rest of its references, it seems that the State Department treats Hamas and Israel as two equal parties (morally equating them well), as both are required to abide by rules unknown to anyone in the world given that international law and other positively sounding terms are constantly and selectively evoked regarding Israel. By contrast, these concepts are vague, obscure and as a result prone to various contradictory interpretations, use, and abuse.

Has the Palestinian Issue Returned to the Forefront of the Global Agenda?

Ostensibly, at the end of the latest round of violence, it is possible to talk once again about the return of the Palestinian issue to the global agenda. Even within the ranks of Hamas, there are hopes for a changing American attitude towards the group. [Hamas’s website published an article](#) that seriously discussed the possibility of a shifting American position. The final conclusion is that there is no 180-degree shift in the official American stance since such a volte-face necessitates the removal of Hamas from the list of terrorist organizations. Nevertheless, the writer’s mere reference to this issue and the fact that he mentions voices expressing the tacit hope to see a change in the American position indicates a certain mood or at least some grounds for this hope. Although hitherto there has been no change in the official position of the Biden administration, “on-the-ground” changes have existed for a while. In addition to the declared solidarity of the Western ‘progressives’ with Islamists, there are prominent think-tanks and [research institutions that assign Hamas a significant role](#) in formulating the overall resolution that is supposed to bring about Israeli-Palestinian peace. In research papers of this kind, the most pressing problem is the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, whereas the authors ignore the nature of Hamas’s rule and its campaign of terror against Israel and its oppression of Gaza’s civilians.

In light of the trends observed in the global media following the cancellation of the PA elections, a planned delegitimization attack not only against Israel but also against the PA can be expected.

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Anyone who does not openly identify with Hamas refuses to see the core reason for the PA's unpopularity, namely its security cooperation with Israel. Put simply, the PA prevents Hamas's terrorist attacks, and this fact alone makes it highly unpopular, well before issues such as corruption or other ones. It is likely that in light of Hamas's strengthening, the PA will double down and advance efforts to curb Hamas's power. In this way, the PA is no different from other Arab regimes waging a bitter war against Islamist movements.

The ability of American decision-makers to apply pressure on players in the Middle East can become very dangerous when it turns into a rigid ideological agenda, combined with ignorance of Middle Eastern affairs. In other words, the PA is indeed undemocratic and corrupt. However, there is no Arab regime that either respects human rights or is corruption-free. The patterns of political behavior that are perceived in the West as [authoritarian and corrupt](#) stem mainly from a given socio-cultural reality that no regime can simply change overnight based only on a desire to do so. It would be unthinkable to demand from the PA to take measures towards democratization without considering the danger of a Hamas takeover. Needless to say, the more demands calling to consider Hamas as a legitimate power are made, the less likely negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians will resume, as the PA is primarily interested in surviving vis-à-vis Hamas.

A closer look reveals that one should talk not about the revival of the Palestinian cause, but rather about treating Hamas as a representative of the Palestinian people. The Arab world remains so indifferent to the plight of the Palestinians that [Jibril Rajoub lamented](#) that no Arab leader called Abbas during the latest bout of "Israeli aggression." Irrespective of Israel and the Palestinians, Arab regimes that have not signed peace accords with Israel have always had concerns about the strengthening of Islamist movements.

Russian geopolitical behavior is one of the best indicators of the degree of objective relevance of one global issue or another. During the recent escalation, the Russian stance was that of complete indifference and disinterest, except for a few statements by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Putin himself. Russia maintains contacts with Hamas, but they are merely for concrete diplomatic purposes and do not indicate any Russian support for the Islamist organization.

The Palestinians do not interest the Russian public. Meanwhile, Russia as a whole is focused on Syria in light of that country's dire economic situation and the Western reluctance to assign direct investment to the war-torn country. Taking into account the Soviet experience of the past, it can be said with some certainty that if the Palestinian issue was indeed popular on the "Arab Street," Russia would have seized this opportunity to score points by expressing sympathy for the Palestinian cause. The fact that this did not happen is a clear indication that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not re-excited the world's attention. Interestingly but not accidentally Western media attention is never focused on the Palestinians themselves and their domestic issues, but

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exclusively on the conflict with Israel. By the same token, depicting the outcry of the mainstream Western media as “the shifting attitude of the world toward the Palestinian issue” is consistently framed in Eurocentric or U.S.-centric terms. That, in itself, makes for quite a skewed view of reality by suggesting that CNN or AP represent “the world’s interests or attention.” That said, one should make no mistake and a balance must be maintained: the Palestinians are still here and are not going anywhere. The situation in which Israel behaves as if the Palestinians did not exist is impossible even from the ‘technical’ point of view.

Despite all the problems, there is no viable alternative to the PA rule. Hence, Israel must make every effort to bolster Abbas or his successor. Yet, at the same time, Israel’s current aid of all types to the PA is perceived as buttressing a corrupt and highly unpopular government. Although the Palestinian problem has not disappeared, the “world” is not there to allocate resources for its solution. There are definite solid radical forces making considerable efforts to place the Palestinian issue at the center of their discourse. This is a deliberate effort by specific political actors and by no means a sudden renewed attention of the entire “world.”