



We Have to be Prepared

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The rules of the game between Israel and Hamas will be decided by Israel's response to the first instance of rocket fire. Israel must prepare for the next operation, while simultaneously making every effort to push it as far into the future as possible

Last week, media outlets in Israel quoted a diplomatic official as warning that Hamas has resumed manufacturing rockets and has begun rebuilding the terror tunnels destroyed by Israel's Defense Forces during the recent Gaza operation.

The reports were merely attempts to demonstrate how badly Operation Protective Edge had failed, rather than the product of reliable information. However, at some point in the future, Hamas will in fact resume manufacturing rockets and digging tunnels. After all, that is the nature of the current cease-fire agreement: Both sides preserve the calm while preparing for the next confrontation.

Anyone can see that in order to prevent the need to prepare for a future confrontation, or to entirely prevent the possibility of a future confrontation, the recent operation should have been handled differently. The IDF should have re-conquered the Strip, or at least Gaza City and its immediate surroundings, and paid the price that occupation entails in order to 'clean out' the city. Israel should have been able to sacrifice more Israeli soldiers and kill more Palestinians, including many civilians. The occupation would have been short, but the cleansing process would have gone on for months. The damage incurred by the fighting, the subsequent cleansing and the demolition of tunnels would have been immense, much greater than the devastation actually suffered by the

Palestinians (itself not at all trivial). Finally, Israel would have remained as the only entity required by law to ensure the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Gaza and its residents.

The moment Israel decided not to pay the price these actions entail, it became obvious that there was no way to break Hamas' will to fight or to prevent it from remaining in power after the operation's end. All the proposed alternatives were, and are, completely unrealistic; both militarily (the idea of "cutting off the snakes head") and in regard to the aftermath (transfer authority over to the U.N. or hand Gaza over to the Palestinian Authority's President, Mahmoud Abbas).

Therefore, having no illusions about the future, we must prepare for the next operation, while simultaneously making every effort to push it as far into the future as possible. And it is possible. But in order to do so we must instate a very clear policy under which Israel responds to every cease-fire violation with force and immediacy.

The rules of the game will be decided by our response to the first instances of rocket fire, so it is important to have a clear plan of how to react when it happens. Fortunately for us, on the other side there is a different Egypt – not the Egypt that was completely passive during the Mubarak era, or the Egypt that actively supported Hamas during the reign of Mohammed Morsi. The current Egyptian leadership understands that Hamas poses as much of a threat to Egypt as it does to Israel, and will make much more of an effort to prevent Hamas from regaining its power. But even then, Hamas will inevitably try, and may occasionally succeed, to smuggle weapons and other materials into the Strip, because military power is its *raison d'être*.

In the negotiations that will soon begin in Cairo, Egypt will mediate between Israel and Hamas. Israel will be pressured to allow the reconstruction of Gaza. The destruction there is very obvious in certain areas where the fighting was heavier, and in parts where there were command centers and weapons manufacturing facilities, the destruction is localized, but extensive.

The reconstruction of Gaza will serve Israel's interests because, alongside Israel's power of deterrence, the Gazans will own property that they will be afraid to lose again. But the reconstruction needs to be conducted under a number of limitations. The chief limitations have to do with building materials, and Israel must develop a mechanism that will minimize, as much as possible, the use of materials for building terror tunnels and military command centers. We must not

delude ourselves that Israel can prevent this absolutely – partial prevention of spillover will have to suffice. It cannot be prevented completely.

The true test is not whether Hamas will continue to rebuild its military might – in the absence of Israeli occupation that is the only possible scenario (as we learned after Oslo and after the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza) – the true test is the test of preserved calm. The longer the calm persists, the more of a success the operation will have been. Time will tell, but we have the power to influence how the future will unfold, and we must not forget or neglect that, despite the complexity.

It is important that we readjust our expectations, not just in regard to Gaza. Israel is a strong country, on both a regional and global scale. However, military ability does not necessitate the use of force every time we are faced with a security challenge. It is best to channel our capability, and the little legitimacy we have in the world, toward the really important threats, certainly if they are critical and existential, and those are undoubtedly looming. It is essential that everyone's expectations are in line: the civilian and military leadership's as well as the public. It is always important, but in times of crisis it is 10 times more important.

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