



PERSPECTIVES

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After Political Partition Between the PA and Hamas's Gaza, Now Economic Boycott

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Israel has been increasingly successful at confronting its foes one on one. The Palestinians have not operated against Israel as a united force since 2007, and the threat of a Hamas boycott of PA goods might be deepening the divide between the two even further.

Since time immemorial, preventing hostile alliances and dividing the ranks of enemies have been the objectives of small states in dangerous environments.

Israel, whether by its own efforts or thanks to Providence, has increasingly achieved these two objectives over the course of its short history.

The fledgling Jewish state was at rock bottom in May 1948, when the armies of four Arab states—Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon—crossed the former Mandate borders to join forces with the Jordanian Arab Legion, which already held most of the West Bank; the pan-Arab irregular Arab Salvation Army, which had been fighting in Mandatory Palestine since early 1948; and Hajj Amin Husseini's *al-Jihad al-Muqaddas* (militarily led by his nephew, Abdel Qader Husseini); and other Arab military formations.

It is little wonder that the 1948 war of independence was the longest war Israel has ever fought, and the costliest in lives and economic losses relative to the Jewish population and the meager resources the state possessed at the time.

Israel fought its next war in 1956 on far better terms, facing only one Arab army, that of Egypt—though it was the most powerful Arab military and had just been abundantly armed following a massive military arms deal with the Soviet Union (formally with Czechoslovakia).

A turn for the worse occurred in 1967, when Israel had to fight the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, which had teamed up with the explicit aim of destroying the Jewish state. Six years later, during the Yom Kippur War, Israel was attacked simultaneously by Egyptian forces in Sinai and by Syrian forces in the Golan, later aided by Iraqi forces.

Little did Israelis realize—and some do not grasp this even today—that perhaps the most dramatic achievement of the Yom Kippur War was that it was the last serious attempt by Arab states to form alliances against Israel.

So much so that when Israel went after the PLO buildup in Lebanon in 1982 and encountered an entrenched Syrian army along the way, the Syrians were forced to fight Israel without any effective Arab state military backing.

Since then, not only have most Arabs desisted from fighting Israel directly, thanks mostly to the peace treaty signed between Israel and Egypt, the most militarily powerful Arab state, but the main non-state terrorist movements, the Palestinians and Hezbollah, have fought Israel alone.

In neither the intifada nor the 2000 Palestinian terrorist assault on Israel did Hezbollah join the fray. Hassan Nasrallah was hot with rhetoric, but his guns were silent, enabling Israel to deal with its Palestinian enemies without interference.

Similarly, when Hezbollah faced off with Israel in a 34-day conflict in 2006, the Palestinian factions and population responded passively. In geostrategic terms, Israel was facing an increasingly weak enemy relative to its own power, particularly when compared to the Arab states in the first 25 years of Israel's statehood. And it faced them one at a time—clearly a boon to Israeli security.

The situation became even more favorable in the summer of 2007 with the internecine strife between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas, which ended with the effective separation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Since then, not only have the Palestinians fought Israel alone, but when the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip flared up, the PA was passive. When the West Bank flared up during the wave of knifings and car attacks in the fall of 2015, Gaza remained silent.

We may be on the threshold of even better days for Israel. The massive political divide between the two entities, the PA and the Hamas government, might be transforming into a mutual economic siege between Palestinians.

An announcement by the Economic Ministry in Gaza let it be known that the importation of milk products from the West Bank was not to be allowed into Gaza. The move was ostensibly intended both to defend the local industry in

Gaza and to strong-arm the PA, the recipient of international aid, into refraining from cuts in subsidies to Gaza and pay cuts to public officials, whose purchasing power is critical to salvaging the economy and preventing rebellion against a Hamas government that spends lavishly on missiles and tunnels but skimps on human welfare.

The announcement, which prompted a flurry of commentary on social media in Gaza and the PA, also exposes the lie about Israel's presumed siege on Gaza.

If Israel has imposed an economic siege on Gaza, how can there be importation of dairy products from the West Bank into Gaza—let alone of over 400 other items, as reported by an economist in an article on the subject that appeared on a Hamas-dominated website? After all, these goods can only arrive at their Gaza destination through Israel and with the cooperation of Israeli officials at the border crossings. (The circuitous route through Jordan and Egypt is far too expensive and hampered by Egypt's frequent closure of its border in Rafah).

If there are Israeli restrictions on imports into Gaza, they are limited to products and materials used by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other terrorist organizations against Israel.

Israel is both a beneficiary of and an agent in the distribution of the benefits of peace and international cooperation in science, industry, and commerce with scores of states. It would be more than willing to include the Palestinians as well.

The choice is theirs between cooperation and commerce or murderous terrorism, the ramifications of which impose a far higher price on them than on Israel.

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