



## PERSPECTIVES

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# The Gaza Rocket Attack on Israel: The Neighbors Smell Weakness

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** In the last decade and a half, Israel has enjoyed unprecedented security stability that has, in turn, enabled economic and technological prosperity that made it a world-class power. There are increasing signs of a change to this reality, and the recent rocket attack from the Gaza Strip is one of them.

On the night of April 23-24, terrorists fired 36 rockets at Israel from the Gaza Strip. This attack was not a single incident that can be defined as an accidental launch error and certainly not a malfunction following a passing lightning storm, to which a number of past missile attacks have been attributed. It was a calculated move by the “resistance forces,” and it took place in the surrealistic reality in which an undeclared *hudna* (truce) exists between Israel and Hamas under conditions that allow Qatari money to flow into the Gaza Strip. This funding gives Hamas the ability to sustain its rule in the Strip without difficulty, despite the coronavirus crisis.

But it has now become clear just how relevant is the classic parable about the turtle carrying a scorpion on its back from one bank of a river to another. The scorpion stings the turtle even though it knows that doing so will get them both killed—it just couldn’t help it, as that is its nature. Hamas, like the rest of the “resistance forces” in the Middle East, feels the perceived weakening of its Israeli nemesis. That perception caused the group to shed the restraints imposed on its activities in recent years and behave, once again, like the neighborhood scorpion.

The rocket attack is the next in a string of violent manifestations Israel has been seeing in recent weeks, notably the widespread violence in Jerusalem given the harmless nickname “the TikTok Intifada.” Another catalyst to

violence has been the Palestinian Authority's announcement of its intention to hold general elections in May despite the ostensible absence of any sociopolitical reason for this "democratic spurt" at this particular moment.

In the merciless Middle Eastern neighborhood, the "resistance forces" are keenly aware of the political instability in Israel and smell blood in the water. They also interpret the possible departure of PM Benjamin Netanyahu, who largely shaped the existing geostrategic order, as a sign of weakness. From their vantage point, this is an opportunity to challenge Israel. Nor are the neighbors from Ramallah the only ones reading the signs. The message was also received by the Islamist regime in Tehran, which is safely embarked on the road to the nuclear threshold with the tacit support of the Biden administration and the EU.

The connection between the progressive liberalism of Democrats in Washington and Europe and the opportunity presented to the "resistance forces" is well understood not only in the Middle East but also in China, North Korea, Russia, and of course the corridors of the International Criminal Court in The Hague. The changing political map in the US is bringing with it strategic instability for Israel and the wider Middle East.

The coronavirus crisis has also had a huge impact. The crisis taught the "resistance forces"—not for the first time—a key lesson regarding the fragility of Western societies, which struggled, unlike the centralized and collective societies of Asia, to cope with the pandemic and its repercussions. The crisis exposed the weakness of the Western democracies and their inability to rally their spoiled and hedonistic societies behind a national cause, even at the time of a dire crisis.

Ironically, Israel is rapidly sliding into a deep crisis at a time when it enters a post-pandemic reality where there is an expectation of a return to normalcy. This is reminiscent of Israel's painful disillusionment following the September 2000 outbreak of the Palestinian war of terror (euphemized as the "al-Aqsa Intifada"), the attendant riots among Israel's Arab citizens the following month, and the 2006 Second Lebanon War, when the affluent and softened Israeli society, riven by political differences and headed by a weak and inexperienced leadership, ran up against the violent Middle Eastern political reality. Today's Israel is not headed toward normalcy but toward its opposite: a much less stable agenda, much less economic progress, and a much more volatile security environment.

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