



PERSPECTIVES

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The Strategic Genius Behind Allowing Qatari Suitcases of Cash into Gaza

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Qatar and Hamas were duped when, on the fourth day of the Guardian of the Walls offensive, Israel destroyed the Qataris' billion-dollar investment in the terrorist organization in 40 minutes. The question is, can Israel leverage this success into disarming Hamas? It all depends on the resolve of Israel's leadership.

Qatar's head of state and his cronies no doubt felt duped as nearly a billion dollars of investment in Hamas went up in smoke—or, more precisely, caved in and was pulverized into dust.

Political analysts were likely no less surprised. I'm certainly one of them, having looked on in amazement ever since the reemergence of Hamas violence in early 2018 after three and a half years of quiet. Why did the Israeli government, with Benjamin Netanyahu firmly at its helm, tolerate renewed Hamas missile strikes, then missiles *and* incendiary balloons, then missiles *and* incendiary balloons *and* rioting along the fence dividing Hamas-controlled Gaza and Israel?

This is to say nothing of the high-profile visits of the Qatari special envoy, who brought suitcases full of millions of dollar bills to be placed in Hamas coffers—either directly or indirectly with Israel's permission.

I couldn't figure out why Israel, which had succeeded in each of the three rounds between 2000-9 and 2014 in achieving greater and greater deterrence against Hamas (i.e., increasing quiet between rounds with fewer missiles leveled at Israel), should change course so radically.

After all, it was clear from the smaller rounds of late 2018 and 2019 that Hamas and the other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip were increasing their firepower and their ability to conduct multiple simultaneous launchings, a prospect that threatened to overwhelm the Iron Dome system. And it was common knowledge that the Qatari suitcases of cash facilitated those advances.

So why, in heaven's name, did Netanyahu, his government, and his generals allow all this to happen?

The mystery was solved on the fourth night of the offensive, when the Israeli Air Force made aviation history by amassing, over the small space of Gaza, 160 fighter jets and other air vehicles to pound and destroy—over a mere 40 minutes—the “Hamas Metro”: a vast array of interlocking tunnels Hamas had dug to protect its command posts, ease the movement of its terrorists, and enable the transport of its missiles and other ordnance.

What Netanyahu and the IDF did unto Hezbollah on a much smaller scale two years ago they repeated successfully on a far larger scale against Hamas. Israel, having discovered and then meticulously monitored Hezbollah tunneling activities across the northern border, waited for the expensive tunnels to be dug and then destroyed them just as they were about to be completed. It was Hamas’s turn to be similarly duped.

The difference is that the ramifications for Hamas are much more serious. For the far richer Hezbollah, the loss was primarily financial (though no doubt it affected internal solidarity, as the organization had to wonder how Israeli intelligence had found out about the tunnels and whether informers within the organization had divulged information). For Hamas, the destruction of the Metro involved the loss of operational centers as well as lives.

Four days after the end of the offensive and 11 days after the attack, Hamas acknowledged that it had located and extricated the remains of four of its terrorists. The acknowledgement was accompanied by a photo of a crater dozens of meters in diameter and at least five meters deep in the middle of which a large earth-moving tractor was operating. One can safely assume that the final toll will be higher than the 80 or so terrorists Hamas has acknowledged were killed in the offensive as extrication efforts are still ongoing along the many kilometers of tunnels that were attacked and destroyed.

Then there is the impact on Gaza’s inhabitants. Unlike the Hezbollah tunnels, which were located in a sparsely populated rural area, the Hamas Metro was constructed underneath population centers. If the people of Gaza had any

doubts about Hamas's concern for their welfare, they can now see very clearly where so much of the Qatari aid went. Not only do Gaza's residents have to suffer the consequences of the Metro's destruction, but they are still without a civilian metro—something that would be highly advantageous to densely populated, urban, compact Gaza, but that Hamas refuses to deliver.

The destroyed tunnels were placed under major traffic arteries and, one can assume, buildings and dwellings. Reconstruction will not be easy. The hollow spaces must be laboriously and expensively filled in, lest roads collapse and buildings suffer cracks that will make them uninhabitable. The costs will be exorbitant, and it will take a considerable amount of time to accomplish.

But the Israeli government can hardly rest on its laurels.

Will it have the resolve to ask the Biden administration to make aid to the Palestinians contingent on the proven disarmament of Hamas, based on the *a priori* knowledge that Hamas will tax all aid coming into Gaza no matter where it comes from and who is monitoring it?

Will Netanyahu or any other leader have the resolve to attack massively at the first launching of a missile, and, more importantly, to strike against any Hamas build-up, regardless of international and internal pressure?

Leading Israel is a perennial test of resolve. As every security agency in the world knows, the resolve of leaders is highly unpredictable.

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