



PERSPECTIVES

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As Gaza Truce Holds, Preventing Hamas from Re-Arming Takes Center Stage

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Now that the truce has taken hold in Gaza, efforts must be made by the international community as well as by Israel to ensure that Hamas does not once again exploit the flow of humanitarian aid and reconstruction supplies into Gaza to rebuild its terror infrastructure.

One of the reasons why Hamas felt sufficiently emboldened to launch a rocket assault on Jerusalem last month—an action that provoked an 11-day intensive armed conflict with Israel—was its progress in building up its military-terrorist force.

With Iran's help, Hamas entered the conflict with better rocket-building know-how and some 15,000 rockets of varying ranges. Most were made in Gaza, as were Palestinian Islamic Jihad's 10,000 rockets. The conflict also came with a new battle doctrine designed to try to saturate Israeli air defenses with unprecedented large barrages.

Hamas felt it could push its weight around, and Israeli deterrence experienced an erosion in the days leading up to the conflict.

After identifying violence in Jerusalem as an opportunity to overtake its rival, the Fatah-run Palestinian Authority, and position itself as the authentic "guardian of Jerusalem" and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Hamas recklessly [marched Gaza](#) into a new destructive war, largely because of the improved rocket arsenal it had spent years building.

Israel had carefully monitored Hamas's efforts to dramatically increase the number of rockets it could fire at once. It also kept an eye on the group's attempts to fire at lower trajectories to try and confuse the Iron Dome air

defense system, which underwent upgrades and was able to cope with the challenge.

While Israel attempted to disrupt Hamas's force build-up process, most of the group's work on building new rocket warheads in Gaza filled with explosives such as C4, TNT, and RDX went unhindered.

In the past, Hamas routinely **tore sewer pipes** out of the ground to create rocket engine bodies. It even used fiberglass that had been sent to Gaza to repair and improve fishing boats in its rocket industry.

This is why Israel asked international aid organizations last year to send plastic rather than metal pipes to Gaza.

Hamas also imported chemicals to make rocket propellant, including castor oil, and used additives such as aluminum dust for that purpose. Its weapons engineers even took regular salt and, using Iranian techniques, converted it into a substance called AP, which is another rocket propellant.

As the Israel-Hamas ceasefire enters its third week, the key question of how it might be possible to prevent Hamas from once again rebuilding its terrorist army arises. As recent developments have shown, the truce's staying power largely depends on how effectively Hamas can be prevented from quickly rearming.

In keeping with its standard pattern, Hamas is seeking to exploit the legitimate humanitarian and economic needs of the two million Gazan civilians whom it holds hostage to its agenda of running an Islamist terror state.

Hamas would like once again to see Gaza flooded with construction materials and cash, which it can then divert to building new rocket factories and new combat tunnels and use to produce other weapons designed to terrorize Israeli civilians. This means the ability to keep the Gaza arena stable largely depends on Israel's ability to keep Hamas from re-arming.

Even during Operation Guardian of the Walls, Hamas's boundless cynicism and willingness to exploit assistance to Gazan civilians was on display.

A senior Israeli security source described how, following a Hamas request for humanitarian aid to enter Gaza during the fighting, Israel opened the Erez border crossing terminal and began sending trucks with aid into the Strip. "[Hamas] attacked the terminal with mortar shells," the official said.

Prior to the eruption of the conflict, Gaza was bristling with weapons production centers, and this domestic arms industry formed a central target for the Israeli Air Force.

According to IDF sources, a major part of Hamas's weapons research and development and production capabilities was degraded by an extensive Israeli campaign that targeted research and development operatives and bombed many weapons workshops where rockets are made, and where their warheads, ranges, and accuracy levels were continuously improved.

After the ceasefire took root, President Joe Biden [expressed his desire](#) to "provide rapid humanitarian assistance and to marshal international support for the people of Gaza and the reconstruction efforts ... in a manner that does not permit Hamas to simply restock its military arsenal."

History shows that this is far easier said than done. Looking ahead, Israeli defense officials are signaling that the reality that existed prior to the conflict cannot be allowed to repeat itself.

After 2014's Operation Protective Edge, the Israeli public was told that a new mechanism to control and monitor the use of cement entering Gaza would prevent its diversion to Hamas's "metro" network of combat tunnels. But that didn't happen. Those tunnels allowed Hamas personnel and weapons to move around out of the sight of the Israel Air Force (the Air Force destroyed some 100 kilometers of such tunnels in Gaza during Operation Guardian of the Walls, according to Israeli assessments).

Since 2014, according to the security source, enough cement and metal has entered Gaza to build roughly 20 [Burj Khalifa-sized skyscrapers](#)—the Dubai-based tallest building in the world. Most of those materials went underground, to Hamas's tunnel project.

Israel now faces a serious dilemma. If it is unable to produce a new and improved inspections mechanism, will it allow cement and metal back into Gaza? Or will residents of destroyed buildings end up living in tents?

"A mechanism can be built to supervise reconstruction materials—but not by Israel by itself," said the source.

This sentiment was [echoed](#) on Monday by Defense Minister Benny Gantz.

"I spoke with the Americans, the Egyptians, and the representatives of many others in the world, and I made it clear to them that alongside the entry of goods like food and medicines, which are necessary for basic humanitarian sustenance, we will demand that the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip will be

accompanied by long-term quiet, and the return of the soldiers,” he said. Hamas holds the remains of two IDF soldiers as bargaining chips for the release of Hamas prisoners. Two Israeli citizens are also being [held hostage](#) by Hamas.

Gantz also called for the Palestinian Authority to start playing a role in the Gazan reconstruction effort, and has indicated that the era of seeing \$30 million in Qatari funds diverted to Hamas’s military wing each month must end.

According to Maj. Gen. (res.) Eitan Dangoth, the former Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, [Egypt is playing an important](#) role in mediating attempts to create a new way to supervise goods entering Gaza, and attempting to create a new foothold for the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip.

During a subsequent meeting with the current Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, Maj. Gen. Ghassan Elian, and the UN Special Envoy to the region, Tor Wennesland, Gantz [unveiled a plan](#) by the Israeli defense establishment designed to both enable a rebuilding of Gaza and strengthen the role of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza’s future, as well as that of moderate Sunni states in the region.

The formula of blindly throwing money and materials into Gaza and hoping for calm has been discredited. Whether the world will help Gaza rebuild without arming terrorists remains to be seen.

This is an edited version of an [article](#) published by the Investigative Project on Terrorism on June 3, 2021.

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