

# Why Gazans Are Again Paying for Hamas's Choices

by [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#)

Jul 15, 2014

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#)

Dennis Ross, a former special assistant to President Barack Obama, is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute.



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**E**gypt made a proposal Monday to stop the fighting between Hamas and Israel. The Arab League and Israel accepted it. Even Ismail Haniyeh, a Hamas political leader, said Monday night on a Hamas television broadcast that the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades of Hamas had “lifted the head of our nation” and that he would not oppose “calming the situation down or returning to cease-fire agreements.” Apparently, he was trying to persuade Hamas’s military wing that its rocket fire had made enough symbolic gains that it could stop fighting. But the military wing continued to fire rockets even when Israel paused in carrying out strikes Tuesday morning.

With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatening to intensify attacks if Hamas rejects the cease-fire, the fighting is likely to worsen in the near term. That means that, once again, Gazans would pay the price for Hamas’s choices. Hamas has never put the Palestinian people first; it has always been willing to sacrifice them for its ideological cause—even now telling them not to heed Israeli warnings to evacuate buildings or areas. Whether launching rockets against Israeli cities or denying its own people any protection, Hamas wants to produce civilian casualties among both Israelis and Palestinians.

A European journalist asked me on Monday about the disparity in casualties in the current conflict and the presumed disproportionality of Israel’s attacks in Gaza. I replied by asking two questions: Should Israel not protect its population? And as every Israeli city is targeted by rockets—something no country would tolerate—can Israel not go after the rocket launchers and storage sites that are purposely embedded in populated areas?

Hamas protects its leadership and missiles by putting them underground, but not its public. Its priorities are clear—yet the Israeli Defense Forces estimate that between Hamas’s launching of more than 100 rockets a day and Israel’s strikes against its military infrastructure, Hamas has used more than a third of its rocket arsenal and perhaps a higher share of its long-range rockets.

That leads to another point: While there remains a clear danger of further escalation and a possible Israeli ground incursion into Gaza, it is also possible that Hamas’s military wing will accept a cease-fire in the coming week. Certainly, it would not do so out of concern for the Palestinian public. But it might if it fears its arsenal could be depleted. With Egypt shutting down the smuggling tunnels, it will not be easy for Hamas and Islamic Jihad to replenish their rocket supply. And, for Israel, between the capacity of its Iron Dome antimissile system to protect its

population and its ability to destroy Hamas rocket production and storage sites without a major ground move into Gaza, Egypt's new approach toward Gaza could well mean that a cease-fire would buy much more time before the next round that Hamas triggers.

*Dennis Ross is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute.* ❖

*Wall Street Journal*

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