

# Gaza Violence: Hamas's Tragic Mistake

Nov 20, 2012



Articles & Testimony

## Hamas and its new Egyptian supporters have to learn once and for all that firing rockets on Israel's civilian population is unacceptable.

**T**he latest actions against Hamas in Gaza -- that began with the killing of its military leader Ahmed Jabari -- should come as a surprise to no one.

Even though it was not reported in great detail in the international media, since the beginning of 2012, 450 rockets have been launched from Gaza into the adjoining Israeli communities, with the town of Sderot the most vulnerable of all. It should also be recalled that since Operation Cast Lead in 2008 -- whose objective was also to halt Hamas rocket attacks on Israel -- Hamas has launched more than 1,500 missiles at Israel, or an average of about 500 per year.

The current bloody encounter did not have to happen and comes as a deep disappointment to people of goodwill on both sides of the Israeli and Palestinian divide. To understand the true tragedy of the moment we need to look back to the summer of 2005 when Israel evacuated all of its settlements and military installations from the Gaza Strip and turned the territory over to the Palestinian Authority as part of the policy of "Disengagement." At the time, polls showed that a majority of Israelis supported disengagement, despite the anguish of dislocating citizens from their homes as well as the deep political struggle that this engendered. It was assumed that the transfer of the territory to the Palestinians, even if unilateral, would finally bring about a period of quiet to the south of Israel and the transformation of the Gaza Strip into a productive economy.

How may we account for the gap between the hope and the goodwill between Israelis and Palestinians immediately after the disengagement, and the current hostilities? The source can be traced to June 2007 and the brutal military operation that enabled Hamas to wrest control of the Gaza Strip from the Palestinian Authority. In the Arab world, this turnabout was seen as a new stage in the struggle between the camp of the moderates -- with the support of Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia -- and the radicals, with the support of Iran, Syria and other terrorist factions. Hamas, which is seen in the West as a terrorist organization, does not recognize Israel's right to exist, calls for Israel's destruction and supports terrorist activities. The radical Arab and Islamic camps view Hamas as the tip of the spear in their struggle against Israel and support the terrorist organization militarily, economically and politically.

But Hamas would not have stepped up its campaign of terrorism against southern Israel were it not for the change of leadership in neighboring Egypt. Unlike the Mubarak government, which saw Hamas as problematic -- even a threat to Egypt and to regional stability -- the newly elected regime of Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Morsi considers Hamas an offshoot of the Brotherhood and worthy of friendship and support. In addition, Morsi has also shown a willingness to distance Egypt from the policies of his predecessor vis-a-vis Israel. Hamas saw Cairo's new

approach as a green light to attack Israel and an insurance policy against a harsh Israeli response. The killing of the Hamas commander in chief by Israel therefore took the terrorist leadership by complete surprise.

At this point it seems that the major parties to the conflict are pursuing the same familiar policies of the past. Aware of strong Western condemnation of Hamas rocket attacks and support for Israel's self-defense, even the new Egypt of the Muslim Brotherhood has not dramatically changed its approach. By immediately withdrawing its ambassador from Tel Aviv and by sending Prime Minister Hisham Kandil to Gaza, President Morsi took moderate steps that sent a message to the Egyptian street without having to radically revise relations with Israel. For its part, Israel once again showed regional players that it would put security above political considerations and defend itself at any cost.

While the Gaza story is old and familiar, one can only hope that this latest round of fighting will end quickly and without severe casualties. Hamas and its new Egyptian supporters have to learn once and for all that firing rockets on Israel's civilian population is now, and has always been, unacceptable.

*Ambassador Shalom Cohen, a distinguished member of Israel's Foreign Ministry, is the Baye diplomat-in-residence at The Washington Institute.* ❖

*Washington Jewish Week*

---

## RECOMMENDED

---

### BRIEF ANALYSIS

#### [Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022



Grant Rumley

[\(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations\)](#)



### ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

#### [How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022



Anna Borshchevskaya

[\(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## [Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022



Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy\)](#)

### TOPICS

[Arab-Israeli Relations \(/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-relations\)](#)

[Peace Process \(/policy-analysis/peace-process\)](#)

### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Egypt \(/policy-analysis/egypt\)](#)

[Israel \(/policy-analysis/israel\)](#)

[Palestinians \(/policy-analysis/palestinians\)](#)