



NEUTRALIZING THE GAZA POWDER KEG



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SINCE THE END OF MARCH 2018, the Gaza-Israel border has witnessed repeated violent eruptions on a significant scale. Under the banner of a “Great March of Return”—invoking the core Palestinian demand for repatriation of refugees to Israel—thousands of Gazans have been gathering along the border every Friday. There, they have been demonstrating against Israel, physically challenging the border fence, and threatening to infiltrate Israel’s territory en masse. In addition, hundreds of incendiary kites and helium balloons, some with attached explosives, have been flown into Israel, causing massive fires. While the border clashes have scaled downward in recent weeks, the tensions between Hamas and Israel escalated to a series of duels involving rocketfire from Gaza and Israeli airstrikes, raising the risks that the parties could find themselves in yet another military confrontation.



Violent Clashes along the Border

WHILE THE BORDER demonstrations were initially conceived by civil society activists in Gaza, Hamas, the Islamist movement ruling Gaza, has been the driving force behind them—logistically, financially, politically, and on the media level. It has orchestrated the gatherings along the border; organized groups led by civilian-garbed members of its own military wing aimed at clashing with Israel and assaulting the fence, including with a “fence cutters” unit; funded transportation to the border; cajoled, paid, and pressured people to participate; and allocated compensation to families of Gazans killed and wounded during the clashes. Some of these efforts have received Iranian financial backing.¹ Still, Hamas has fallen far short of its goal of assembling at least 100,000 participants for gatherings. Beginning with some 40,000 on March 30, the figure gradually receded to around 10,000 over several weeks, then surged back to 40,000 on the designated first “peak day,” May 14—marking the anniversary of Israel’s independence/Nakba Day and the relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. Thereafter, the number dropped again to 10,000 or below, including for the next peak day, June 8, al-Quds Day—an Iranian designation observed on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan.

Hamas has cast the demonstrations as “peaceful resistance,” basing this claim on the relatively large number of civilian demonstrators and the fact that most have refrained from violence. In reality, however, Hamas has used these demonstrations to deliberately initiate violent friction with Israel, causing many Palestinian fatalities in the process. Under the cover of masses gathering in prearranged locations, abetted by the smoke screen created by burning tires, groups of hundreds of Hamas-led activists have repeatedly stormed the border fence and attempted to sabotage, breach, or place explosives on it.² These activists have also thrown Molotov cocktails and rocks. On a daily basis, hundreds of incendiary kites and helium balloons have been flown into Israel; the resulting fires have been widespread, affecting thousands of acres of farmland and woods in southern Israel.³ Firearms and grenades have occasionally been used as well, and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) believes it has thwarted plans to kidnap Israeli soldiers. On the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing—Gaza’s humanitarian lifeline

for the delivery of gas, fuel, food, medicine, and other essential supplies coming from Israel—groups of Palestinian youngsters have torched and severely sabotaged infrastructure.⁴

Israel’s Dilemma

THE PLANS laid out by Hamas were indeed much more ambitious than mere border demonstrations and other limited provocations. Once activists breached the fence, the idea was for many thousands to follow them into Israel. Before May 14, the first peak day, Hamas even disseminated maps on social media showing Israeli population centers adjacent to the border, along with plans for victory rallies to be held in them.

For Israel, this type of challenge has long loomed as an extremely troubling scenario. Specifically, Israel views calls by its sworn enemy Hamas for mass civilian infiltration in the name of “return” (to Israelis, code language for their country’s destruction) as a significant national security threat meriting a forceful defense. In addition, Israel is concerned about terrorist attacks—with some Israeli population centers a mere hundreds of meters from the border—alongside kidnappings and targeted sabotage of critical security infrastructure, including the anti-tunnel system now being installed. This anti-tunnel system poses a major threat to Hamas’s cross-border offensive tunnels, which the group considers a potent weapon against Israel. Thus the anti-tunnel system is squarely in the group’s crosshairs. Further, Israel’s political and military decisionmakers alike have reasoned that if Israel fails to stop mass storming on the Palestinian side of the border, they will be compelled to use much greater force on the Israeli side, resulting in many more casualties. According to Israel’s defense establishment, since existing nonlethal capabilities are ineffective from afar, against huge masses, in open areas, or through a border fence, the IDF has been compelled to deploy snipers, closely supervised by senior officers. Strict orders have dictated that they aim at the legs of activists leading the storming efforts as well as those attempting to destroy the border fence, sabotage security infrastructure, and infiltrate Israel. At one point, Israel began carrying out measured retaliatory airstrikes against the terrorist infrastructure inside Gaza as a warning to Hamas that further escalation could have serious costs.

Despite all precautions, this rolling confrontation has predictably proven a lose-lose scenario for Israel. While it succeeded in preventing Hamas's concentrated efforts at tearing down the border fence and bringing about mass infiltration of its territory, border clashes since spring 2018 have resulted in more than 130 Palestinian fatalities—62 on May 14 alone—triggering international charges of “disproportionate force.”⁵ Following these events, Israel's defense establishment is likely to look harder at developing long-overdue nonlethal capabilities suitable for such scenarios.⁶

Seeds of the Eruption

THE ORIGINS of the current crisis date to months earlier, when civil society elements in Gaza began planning the “Great March of Return.” They wanted to create a Palestinian version of historical popular protest models such as those pioneered by Mahatma Gandhi, while understanding that a massive push into Israel would inevitably draw a forceful response. The overarching concept was to unite Gazans' deep sense of distress over their dire humanitarian and economic situation with the long-cultivated Palestinian animosity toward Israel and popular support for the refugees' “right of return,” a core demand of the Palestinian national movement that Israel totally rejects.

The permanent crisis state in Gaza cannot be denied. Over eleven years of rule, alongside triggering three wars with Israel, Hamas has presided over collapsing infrastructure and nonexistent services to constituents. Gazans experience just four hours of electricity a day followed by lengthy outages, along with acute drinking water shortages,⁷ a failing sewage system, sorely inadequate medical care, unemployment over 40 percent in the general population and over 50 percent among youth, and corresponding deep poverty.⁸ Additional causes of discontent include the slow pace of reconstruction following the 2014 Hamas war with Israel; typical closure of borders with Egypt and Israel, severely curtailing the movement of people and goods;⁹ and dim prospects for reconciliation between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) or an Israeli-Palestinian political breakthrough.

Hamas, meanwhile, was quick to recognize the potential of the mass protest and hijacked it early on. The group had reached a dead end in governing Gaza, especially following the past year's failed reconciliation

with the PA, and sought to channel negative popular energies away from itself and toward Israel, hoping to cash in along the way. Given that Hamas's main military assets have increasingly been neutralized by Israel's effective anti-rocket and anti-tunnel systems, it has come to appreciate the so-called popular resistance as a potent weapon for pushing Gaza's plight atop the international agenda while delivering the perception of peaceful demonstrations being suppressed by firearms. This approach seeks to reenergize external investments in humanitarian solutions, force the easing of the Israeli and Egyptian blockade on Gaza,¹⁰ marginalize the PA and its leader, Mahmoud Abbas, and hinder the PA from pursuing further punitive sanctions against Hamas and Gaza.

The necessary ingredient for achieving these goals is violent friction with Israel. This is why Hamas organized activists and goaded them toward the border, ignoring Israeli warnings and the accumulating casualties. This, in turn, triggered internal criticism by originators of the campaign, who felt Hamas had twisted it for the group's own purposes, along with PA leaders such as Sheikh Mahmoud Habbash, Abbas's religious affairs advisor, who blamed Hamas for “sacrificing” women and children.¹¹ In response to domestic contentions that Hamas was reaping political benefits in exchange for civilian Gazan lives, Salah al-Bardawil, a member of Hamas's political bureau, emphasized on May 16 on Gaza TV that indeed the group had paid the heavier price, suffering fifty of the sixty-two casualties on May 14 and about half in the previous rounds of border clashes.¹² Israeli data largely confirms such claims, indicating that around 80 percent of all Palestinian fatalities in these clashes were recognized members of Hamas and other Gaza armed groups, most of whom were hit close to or on the fence.¹³

Hamas's Balancing Act

HAMAS PLANNED for the demonstrations to crest on May 14–15, marking both Nakba Day and the U.S. embassy move to Jerusalem. The first of these days did feature the most violent eruption of all. By that day's end, however, Hamas was persuaded to lower the temperature after absorbing heavy casualties, stern warnings from Israel, domestic pressure to either restrain or significantly escalate, and, most of all, emphatic incentives from Egypt, such as the opening of the Rafah cross-

ing during the month of Ramadan, paired with emphatic disincentives. Thus, on May 15, just a thousand people showed up, demonstrating that, by and large, Hamas can step on the brakes in Gaza if it so desires. Still, the danger of future escalation very much persists.

The border effort has yielded mixed results for Hamas. On the negative side, it has failed to mobilize Gazans in the volumes it desired, breach the fence with the resultant infiltration of Israel, or stir significant protests in the West Bank and the larger Arab world. In addition, Hamas faces domestic questions over whether the huge costs were incurred in vain. On the positive side, the campaign did succeed in raising regional and international awareness of Gaza's problems, revealed the advantage of deploying civilians rather than rockets against Israel, and afflicted Israel with serious fires. It also exposed Israel to international criticism¹⁴ and sparked rising tensions between Israel and Turkey, elicited more-proactive engagement from Egypt, and positioned Hamas as the leading Palestinian "resistance" bloc to Israel, thereby highlighting Abbas's failure to advance the Palestinian cause and complicating his path to applying further sanctions on Gaza.

Evidently, Hamas seeks to translate the border clashes into concrete achievements, with an emphasis on easing Gaza's isolation and improving its humanitarian and economic prospects. For this to happen, though, it needs the friction with Israel to continue, but in a relatively contained fashion. While engaging Egypt as well as Qatar in a dialogue about a possible ceasefire with Israel, Hamas has continually brandished the threat of further border clashes—highlighting additional peak days such as June 5 and 8, although failing to draw major participation in them.¹⁵ It has also increasingly challenged Israel with the earlier-noted incendiary kites and balloons, and more recently resorted to firing rockets in the face of mounting Israeli counterpressure.

High Potential for Escalation

THE DANGEROUS potential of the situation became apparent on May 29, when Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and then Hamas fired about 150 rockets and mortar shells at Israel, reflecting a scale unprecedented since the 2014 Gaza war.¹⁶ This barrage followed Israel's killing of three armed PIJ activists who had attempted to place explosives on the border fence. It is not clear if or to what extent PIJ coordinated its rocket firing with

Hamas. What is clear is that for weeks Hamas had refrained from firing rockets in retaliation for Palestinian casualties, while imposing the same policy on other radical groups, but that now domestic considerations had compelled the group to effectively lift the ban and join in with PIJ.

In June, as border demonstrations receded, Hamas orchestrated an increase in the flying of incendiary kites and helium balloons. The widespread fires caused by these projectiles drew ever sharper calls by Israeli citizens for a heightened government response. As Israel correspondingly increased its airstrikes against Hamas targets in Gaza, Hamas along with PIJ and other armed groups in the territory began responding with rocketfire, based on a new declared formula of deterrence called "bombing for bombing." As a result, beginning in mid-June such exchanges picked up, with many dozens of rockets fired at Israel.

Hamas thus appears to have switched from basic adherence to its three-and-a-half-year ceasefire with Israel to a policy of "controlled violence." This marks a perilous turn. While both Hamas and Israel have no interest in engaging in another major military confrontation—Israel definitely prefers not to be dragged into such a confrontation before it completes the anti-tunnel system sometime next year—they have an inherently limited ability to control the dynamics, and a rapid deterioration leading to another war could happen at any moment. Relatedly, each side, knowing that the other wants to avoid an outright war, has been pushing the envelope, creating risks for miscalculation.

Obscured in the back-and-forth is another ominous dimension to this conflict: the Iran dimension. Israeli officials believe that PIJ, which is funded by Tehran, was effectively acting on Iranian interests by firing rockets, thereby sending a message that Iran possesses military tools against Israel beyond the Syrian theater. And Hamas's military wing is also under some Iranian influence. For Israel, the strategic focus on blocking Iran in Syria as well as Lebanon further reinforces its desire to avoid another major military confrontation in Gaza.

The Case for a Paradigm Shift

GAZA IS A POWDER KEG that could be ignited any minute. Addressing the challenge requires policy prioritization, a sense of urgency, concrete, realistic action plans, and U.S. leadership.

The immediate priority is to defuse the extremely tense situation along the Israel-Gaza border. In so doing, Egypt is uniquely positioned given its proximity to Gaza, close relationship with Israel and the United States, and overall regional standing. But sustained de-escalation cannot succeed without effectively dealing with Gaza's humanitarian and economic crises.

Resolving the Gaza crisis also requires close analysis of why the territory has suffered for so long, and why previous attempts at a remedy have failed. A number of reasons can be identified, but all of them lead back to Gaza's governance by Hamas, an Islamist movement that is designated internationally as a terrorist group, rejects recognition of or peace with Israel, espouses violence, prioritizes arming itself over its population's welfare, and flirts with Iran and Hezbollah.^{17, 18} The group does all this while aspiring to assume leadership of the Palestinian national movement.

It is in this context that the specific reasons for Gaza's ongoing crisis should be understood. First, Israel, the PA, and Egypt regard Hamas as a threat to their national security. For Egypt specifically, Hamas's origins as a Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood and the continued links between the two movements create concern, in light of the hostile relationship between the Sisi government (and past governments) and the Islamist group. Second, most international and regional actors, with the notable exceptions of Turkey and Qatar, cast principal blame on Hamas for Gaza's deterioration and have been highly reluctant to invest in Gaza if the Islamist leadership may benefit. The third reason is that the international donor community has little enthusiasm for pouring its money into a Hamas-controlled "war zone" episodically targeted by Israel, especially given pressing funding priorities elsewhere. Fourth, most relevant actors, including the United States and Israel, have prioritized working in Gaza through the PA so as not to undercut Abbas, deepen Palestinian divisions, and confer legitimacy on Hamas. Yet Abbas has refused to shoulder responsibility for and in the Strip, adopted inflexible positions that helped prompt the collapse of the 2017 PA-Hamas reconciliation initiative, and exacerbated the crisis by cutting essential funds to the territory. Abbas used this last tactic in a failed bid to force Hamas to meet his conditions for reconciliation, or else to encourage Gazans to rise up and topple the leadership. Fifth, notwithstanding Israeli measures to enhance the capacity of the border crossings, relax restrictions

on goods allowed to enter Gaza, and advance humanitarian solutions for the Strip, many restrictions remain in place for security-related reasons.¹⁹ Additionally, Israel's government seeks the return of two Israeli hostages and the remains of two Israeli soldiers held by Hamas as bargaining chips, and domestic pressures make it harder for the government to further ease the pressure on Gaza before Hamas does so.²⁰

Over the years, numerous attempts have been made to overcome these challenges and enable the rehabilitation of Gaza, by establishing a long-term Israel-Hamas ceasefire or armistice (*hudna*) or else facilitating a PA takeover of the Strip through Palestinian reconciliation. However, these attempts fell short because they were either too burdensome or unrealistic, based on unfeasible ideas such as disarming Hamas. Meanwhile, instead of improving, the overall situation in Gaza has considerably worsened over time, further straining the lives of the territory's nearly two million inhabitants and causing negative ripple effects in neighboring Israel and Egypt and beyond.²¹

Against the evident challenges, three leading initiatives are currently under way for Gaza: (1) Egypt is trying to secure an Israel-Hamas ceasefire. (2) Nikolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, has been quietly working on securing sufficient initial funds for quickly launching certain fast-track rehabilitation projects in Gaza, as well as an international-trust-fund-type mechanism to absorb these contributions and direct them to Gaza, bypassing Hamas and potentially the PA. (3) The United States is working to secure significant regional funds for Gaza projects, so far with limited success. In the meanwhile, the United States, Jordan, and Israel are examining a modest plan to improve liquidity in Gaza by injecting into it "small change" bills and coins. As of this writing, however, none of these plans has come to fruition, and it is not clear how well synchronized they are.

To improve the prospects for such initiatives, the overarching analysis here makes plain the need for a paradigm shift. Any outline for the territory should therefore be premised on the following assumptions and principles:

- Hamas, unfortunately, will likely remain the ruling party in Gaza for the foreseeable future. No realistic policy toward Gaza should be based on the assumption or hope that Hamas will be toppled or

replaced any time soon—by a Gazan uprising, by the PA (through reconciliation or elections), by Israel (through military action), or by another means. In any case, the alternatives to Hamas inside Gaza are not assured to be better. While all efforts should be made to maintain Hamas’s diplomatic isolation and to minimize its empowerment in a future international approach to the territory, the group should be regarded as the responsible address in Gaza, for better or worse.

- For as long as Hamas remains the responsible address, international actors can and should seek to tame its malign, destabilizing activities, but they must recognize that such moves are unlikely to change the group’s fundamental character or force its disarmament. Israel’s traditional formula for Gaza, which called for “rehabilitation in exchange for demilitarization,” sets the latter as the ultimate objective, yet cannot serve as a practical platform for a rehabilitation process. Even if lifting full disarmament as a practical goal (rather than part of a long-term vision) in the foreseeable future, Israel and Egypt will continue to assiduously thwart Hamas’s acquisition of arms. As noted, Israel is already neutralizing Hamas’s strategic military assets—its rockets and tunnels—and soon will likely do the same to its incendiary kites and balloons.
- From a practical standpoint, the international community should focus first on bringing Gaza’s ailing infrastructure and economy to basic functionality, while striving to minimize direct economic and political benefits to Hamas. External actors should here opt for solutions that are relatively cheap and fast to implement, avoiding those that create new sets of recurring costs. These could include improvements to water and electricity grid infrastructure, relatively simple solutions for enhancing water and electricity supplies (e.g., enhanced water supplies from Israel rather than awaiting construction of the planned expensive and long-to-implement offshore desalination plant), or the creation of cheap solar plants to power wastewater systems. For this phase to stand a chance, it should be relatively modest rather than an attempted “catchall.” It should be based on Hamas’s commitment to an enduring, stable ceasefire, including a buffer zone along the border and a halt to firing rockets and digging cross-border tunnels (Israel would naturally seek to factor into this process the return of Israeli hostages and bodies held by Hamas).²² Such steps will not be easy for the group to accept or enforce, but Hamas should be convinced that projects can only be implemented once hostilities have quieted. Relatedly, Hamas may be receptive to the idea that a ceasefire will enable eased restrictions at Gaza’s border crossings with Israel and Egypt, as well as the expediting of urgent infrastructure and economic projects. Success on these fronts will require close coordination by the main actors—namely, the United States, the United Nations, Egypt, and Israel.
- Working through the PA is preferable, but a simmering Gaza cannot wait. Abbas’s policy of punishing Hamas through financial sanctions—cutting and freezing funding for public salaries, electricity, healthcare, education, and more, as well as raising taxes on goods entering Gaza and refusing to spend them in the impoverished Strip—has poured fuel on the fire. If an Israel-Hamas war erupts as a result, Abbas will have no qualms about condemning Israel publicly while privately hoping for Hamas to be crushed. Accordingly, the international community should present the PA with a clear ultimatum to fulfill its responsibilities for Gaza, including ending punitive measures against the territory and actively helping advance solutions. Absent such a gesture, the other parties will be compelled to bypass the PA in applying basic fixes to the Strip. One potential means of directly investing in Gaza, rather than subjecting projects to an effective PA veto, could be the earlier-mentioned mechanism secured by the UN envoy.²³
- To more effectively raise funds for Gaza, donor countries, in consultation with regional actors, should consider allocating a portion of their PA assistance directly to Gaza through the proposed international mechanism. Such a plan must include strong auditing measures to ensure the funds don’t find their way into Hamas’s hands. Likewise, Hamas must be deterred from using its power on the ground to draw funds from external assistance to the Strip, such as through the diversion of construction materials or the extraction of taxes or protection money. If Hamas does engage in these activities, as it has in the past, the cost should be reimposed border

restrictions and stoppage of the flow of funds. In any case, the funds for Gaza could also include an agreed percentage of the taxes Israel collects on behalf of the PA, particularly those levied on goods and services entering the Strip. Since Hamas forcibly took over Gaza from the PA in 2007, the PA has continued to allocate a fluctuating amount of its budget, ranging from 20 to 40 percent, for Gaza's needs.²⁴ Yet, as noted, Abbas has increasingly subjected this funding to political considerations relating to the PA rivalry with Hamas.²⁵

- Based on the above, the United States and Norway, the countries currently leading donor efforts, will be able to make a stronger pitch to collect previously pledged regional and international funds for Gaza.²⁶ Such fundraising should be linked with achievement of a ceasefire and corresponding eased restrictions on Gaza's borders aimed at allowing more substantial movement of goods and labor. In raising such funds, the international community can counterbalance Qatar, a problematic, pro-Hamas actor that so far has been the strongest donor in the absence of other international support.
- Israel can consider implementing certain projects on its own side of the border. These could include industrial zones and a solar energy power plant to provide electricity for Gaza. Indeed, Israel has already authorized the establishment of a solar plant for Gaza near the Erez border crossing. Such moves could alleviate donors' concerns about Hamas exploiting or Israel targeting their investments.
- Subject to Egypt's sovereign discretion and in full coordination with its authorities, the relevant actors should examine options for also supporting Gaza from the Egyptian side of the border. Early steps could include helping upgrade facilities in Egypt that already service Gaza, especially those involving electricity provision, and later evolve to examining prospects for locating additional Gaza-servicing projects in northern Sinai. Egypt appears more ready for the earlier stage, especially increasing electricity provision to Gaza as well as the volume of goods, such as cement, entering from Sinai.²⁷ It is reluctant regarding the more advanced stage—although these sorts of steps appear, on their face, to offer a win-win: alleviate Israeli security concerns regarding

Gaza and donor concerns regarding possible damage to facilities in a future war, as well as contribute to the development and stability of northern Sinai.²⁸

Like any outline, this one has its flaws. It threatens to deepen the internal Palestinian divide, marginalize Abbas and the PA, and may indirectly benefit Hamas, potentially drawing charges of rewarding the group for its bad behavior. This plan is also likely to encounter strong PA countermeasures, as drastic as cutting off all remaining support to Gaza, including salaries to the area's tens of thousands of civilian public-sector employees. But these downsides should be weighed against realities on the ground and against alternatives—and some of them could be offset. To begin with, the intra-Palestinian divide is a fact, and Abbas—in the twilight of his rule—seems poised to exacerbate it to the point of declaring Gaza a “rebel territory.” Abbas has actually marginalized himself in Gaza and has checked out of the U.S.-led peace process.²⁹ It should be noted that his Gaza policy elicits significant domestic criticism, as expressed in a series of demonstrations in Ramallah and other West Bank cities.³⁰ In light of Abbas's drift, the plan suggested here may offer the only path to persuading him to once again get involved in fixing Gaza. Even if he still refuses, the door should remain open for the PA, under him or any future leader, to reassume its responsibilities in the Strip. The United States can also balance this measure by offering an economic plan for the West Bank. To preempt Abbas's expected countermeasures, the plan for Gaza should include funding mechanisms for civilian public-sector salaries, based on a thorough budget and need-based review.

Of course, a precondition for any Gaza plan must be proper guarantees and monitoring mechanisms to ensure Hamas will not use external aid (funds and materials) to the territory to build the group's military capabilities. So long as these are in place, the upsides to this proposal, as measured in stability and services to a suffering population, will be preeminent. A more advanced phase of Gaza reconstruction (including a port³¹) would necessarily be conditioned on a far stronger bid to significantly curtail Gaza's armaments. Meanwhile, the alternative to this overall approach—continuing the same slow pace of reconstruction while waiting for a perfect plan that does not exist—will only increase the chances of a calamitous backslide into deeper conflict or war.

For this outline to succeed, it requires a “quarter-back,” and only the United States is in a position to play this role. In leading the effort, Washington must coordinate closely with Cairo, Jerusalem, and other regional and international actors. U.S. officials must press forward, synchronize and orchestrate all elements of such a plan, and encourage the relevant parties to overcome their inhibitions. As the U.S. administration mulls putting forth an ambitious Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, it would be better served by first addressing the situation in Gaza and putting it on track toward rehabilitation.

The writing is on the wall for all to see. Failure to heed it will ensure a new round of conflict is only a matter of time.

Notes

1. Iran provided financial compensation for deaths (\$500 per family) and injuries, to support Hamas payments of up to \$3,000 per family for deaths and \$200–300 for injuries, depending on severity, in the border clashes. In a May 21, 2018, interview with the Lebanese television channel *al-Mayadeen*, Hamas leader Yahya al-Sinwar highlighted Iran’s financial support to Hamas and the latter’s relations with Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC’s Qods Force: “Hamas Leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar: We Are Coordinating with Hizbullah, Iran on an Almost Daily Basis,” YouTube video, 1:56, posted by “MEMRI TV Videos,” May 22, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHR53YWIkHQ>.
2. Hamas did not refrain from sending women and children with these groups. A June 2018 UN Population Fund report highlighted the negative impact of the events on Gaza women. See “Impact of ‘Great March of Return’ on Gender-Based Violence,” <http://bit.ly/2KZcmrl>.
3. According to official Israeli sources, nearly a thousand incendiary kites and balloons had been flown from Gaza toward Israel in the last three months. Several hundred were intercepted by Israel, mostly with small drones cutting their wires. According to these sources, Hamas takes helium for the balloons from hospitals in Gaza.
4. This occurred in early May. A widespread belief in Palestinian circles holds that Hamas did not stop the sabotage to Kerem Shalom, and perhaps even encouraged it, out of a desire to deny the Palestinian Authority the taxes it collects there and channel goods to the Salah al-Din Gate near the Rafah crossing, where Hamas collects the taxes.
5. On May 22, the Palestinian Authority formally asked the international Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate Israeli “war crimes.” Then, on June 13, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution condemning Israel for using “excessive, disproportionate, and indiscriminate” force. Although earning a majority, a U.S. attempt to insert condemnation of Hamas into this resolution was ultimately rejected on procedural grounds. In Israel’s Supreme Court, human rights groups challenged IDF rules of engagement along the Gaza border, but the court upheld these rules, accepting IDF claims to use live fire only as a last resort, out of self-defense, and in a careful manner. The IDF tasked a brigadier-general with investigating outstanding lethal cases in which soldiers might have deviated from standard procedures and orders.
6. Existing IDF nonlethal capabilities include water cannons, rubber-coated bullets, teargas, “skunk” bombs, acoustic measures, and others. See Anshel Pfeffer, “IDF Seeks Non-Lethal Measures to Keep Gazans away from Border Fence,” *Haaretz*, Apr. 16, 2018, <https://www.thejc.com/news/israel/idf-seeks-non-lethal-measures-to-keep-gazans-away-from-border-fence-with-israel-1.462346>; Noa Landau, “Netanyahu on Gaza Protesters: Israel Tried Non-Lethal Methods, but Hamas Wants Them to Die,” *Haaretz*, June 7, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/netanyahu-on-gaza-protesters-hamas-wants-them-to-die-1.6156392>.
7. More than 95 percent of Gaza’s aquifer is polluted.
8. Gaza’s per capita GDP is around \$1,000. Although since 2014 Israel has increased the capacity of the Kerem Shalom crossing to allow for more than 1,000 truckloads a day, the actual usage has sunk during the last year to 300–400 owing to a lack of purchasing power in Gaza.
9. Israel’s border with Gaza is normally closed for people (with some exceptions, e.g., medical cases, UN personnel) and open for goods under Israeli security limitations and inspection. Egypt’s border with Gaza is normally closed for both people and goods, although it occasionally opens for people over periods of a few days. It was recently opened for people and selected goods (e.g., cement) for a longer period of time.

10. Hamas was involved in a January 2008 precedent to forcibly “break the siege” on Gaza. Following the closure of Gaza’s borders as a result of Hamas’s bloody takeover of the Strip in June 2007, Hamas military-wing activists destroyed the border fence with Egypt and allowed tens of thousands of Gazans to enter Sinai, so as to equip themselves with food, fuel, and other basic necessities. This development took Egyptian officials by surprise.
11. MEMRI TV, “PA Friday Sermon by Abbas’ Advisor Mahmoud Habbash: Hamas Leaders Are Reckless Gamblers, Sacrificing Gaza Women and Children,” Clip 6542 (Middle East Media Research Institute, Apr. 27, 2018), <https://www.memri.org/tv/pa-friday-sermon-mahoud-habbash-hamas-officials-reckless-gamblers-sacrificing-children>.
12. MEMRI TV, “Hamas Political Bureau Member Salah al-Bardawil: 50 of the Martyrs Killed in Gaza Were from Hamas, 12 Regular People,” Clip 6575 (Middle East Media Research Institute, May 16, 2018), <https://www.memri.org/tv/hamas-politburo-member-bardawil-fifty-martyrs-were-hamas-members>.
13. Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, “Findings of the ITIC’s Examination of the Identity of Palestinians Killed in the Events of the ‘Great Return March’ (March 30, 2018–May 15, 2018),” May 23, 2018, http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/app/uploads/2018/05/E_129_18.pdf.
14. For example, South Africa called back its ambassador and the French prime minister suspended a planned visit to Israel.
15. On both June 5, Naksa Day (marking the Arab loss of the West Bank to Israel in 1967), and June 8, al-Quds Day (an Iranian designation, observed the last Friday of the month of Ramadan), Palestinians failed to reach the 10,000-person threshold. Immediately before al-Quds Day, Ali Akbar Velayati, an advisor to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, addressed a major Hamas ceremony in Gaza by video, promising Iranian financial support for the families of those fallen in the border clashes.
16. This was the first time Israel’s Iron Dome rocket-defense system managed to intercept mortar shells, based on a technological upgrade.
17. According to data published by Israeli intelligence, even while Hamas was observing the ceasefire on the Gaza-Israel border, it continued to initiate anti-Israel terrorist attacks in the West Bank.
18. Recently, Israeli defense minister Avigdor Liberman accused Hamas of investing \$260 million in armaments and tunnel digging in 2017. See Gil Hoffman, “Avigdor Liberman: Hamas Should Have Spent Tunnel Money on Water, Health,” *Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 16, 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Liberman-Hamas-should-have-spent-tunnel-money-on-water-health-536853>.
19. In January 2018 at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, an international donor conference convened in Brussels, Israel presented a \$1 billion package designed to relieve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, including establishing a desalination plant, adapting Gaza’s energy systems for natural gas, putting in place a new, major electricity line from Israel, implementing solar energy projects (either in northern Sinai or Israel) for electricity and sewage treatment, and building industrial zones. Implementation of the package was premised on two hitherto-unmet conditions—international funding and PA assumption of effective responsibility for civilian affairs in Gaza. See Noa Landau, “Israel Presents \$1 Billion Rehabilitation Plan for Gaza, but Demands Palestinian Authority Take Over,” *Haaretz*, Feb. 1, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-offers-1-billion-rehab-plan-for-gaza-at-emergency-confab-1.5784390>.
20. Hamas primarily demands in return the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails.
21. These consequences are felt beyond the security realm. For example, sewage from Gaza has been flowing into the Mediterranean, creating environmental hazards and occasionally paralyzing Israel’s desalination plants.
22. A debate within the Israeli defense establishment centers on the extent to which strings beyond a ceasefire should be attached to basic humanitarian fixes in Gaza, which could also influence Hamas’s behavior. Part of this debate includes the question of whether any rehabilitation effort in Gaza should be conditioned on wresting back the two Israeli hostages as well as repatriating the remains of the two soldiers.
23. The main existing mechanism for channeling donor funds to Gaza has been the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM), which was established by agreement among Israel, the PA, and the UN following the

- last round of armed conflict in Gaza, in 2014. This cumbersome mechanism has funneled funds for reconstruction in Gaza through the PA's Ministry of Finance and Palestinian banks, subject to Israeli security considerations and with UN supervision on the ground.
24. On average, the PA's budget has been allocating about \$100 million a month to Gaza. At the same time, the PA has received revenues on goods and services entering Gaza, plus income tax on public salaries paid there, to the tune of several hundred million dollars a year.
 25. In February 2018, the PA finalized two versions of its 2018 budget, one including Gaza—counting on reconciliation with Hamas—and one excluding it.
 26. In the donor conference held in Cairo in October 2014, immediately following that summer's war in Gaza, international donors pledged \$3.5 billion for reconstruction in the territory. According to the World Bank, as of March 2018—nearly three and a half years on—only 54 percent of these pledged sums had been disbursed. See "Reconstructing Gaza—Donor Pledges," Sept. 12, 2017, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/rebuilding-gaza-donor-pledges>.
 27. The issue of goods entering Gaza from Sinai through the Salah al-Din Gate, adjacent to the Rafah crossing and controlled by Hamas on the Palestinian side, raises some concerns in Israel over security inspection and potential economic benefits for Hamas. These concerns should be properly addressed as part of the plan.
 28. According to media reports, Mladenov's rehabilitation plans for Gaza included potential facilities in northern Sinai, yet the Egyptian government appears reluctant to implement them during this phase, especially as long as Hamas, and not the PA, controls Gaza. Egypt is also concerned that responsibility for Gaza may start shifting away from Israel and to itself.
 29. The PA boycotted a March 2018 meeting on Gaza hosted at the White House and rejected an initiative by the United Nations envoy for a UN-PA-Israel gathering to discuss solutions for Gaza.
 30. During the Palestinian National Council meeting spanning late April to early May 2018, Abbas deleted a proposal submitted by about a hundred members calling to ease PA sanctions on the Strip. See "The Democratic Front: Lifting the Gaza Sanctions Was Dropped from the National Council Communiqué" (in Arabic), *al-Arabi al-Jadid*, May 4, 2018, <https://washinst/2N1TZj7>. Since June 10, a series of demonstrations in Ramallah and other West Bank cities have targeted Abbas's Gaza policy, calling on him to lift the sanctions on the territory. See, e.g., Agence France-Presse, "Palestinians Protest in Ramallah Against Abbas Crackdown on Gaza," *Times of Israel*, June 24, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-protest-in-ramallah-against-abbas-crackdown-on-gaza/>. The PA president has also drawn harsh criticism in the Palestinian media. See, e.g., Talal Awkal, "The Leadership Owes the Public an Explanation" (in Arabic), *al-Ayyam*, June 11, 2018, http://www.al-ayyam.ps/ar_page.php?id=12b4b595y313832853Y12b4b595.
 31. In Israel, several ideas regarding a port for Gaza have been suggested, including one for creating an artificial island with a port in the Mediterranean, or else designated wharfs in Ashdod (Israel), al-Arish (Egypt), or Cyprus. Liberman, Israel's defense minister, claims to have reached understandings on such a wharf in Cyprus—requiring Israeli security inspection and subject to the return of Israeli hostages and bodies—during a recent visit with the Cypriot president. Cyprus says it is considering the idea.

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