

**The Fighting Ends for Now, but the Threat from Gaza Remains**

By David Horovitz

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**Israel has no quarrel with Hamas, but that makes no difference to Hamas.**

With hundreds upon hundreds of rockets and mortar shells fired into Israel, and Israeli reprisal strikes on Gaza targeting the Strip's terrorist leadership with considerable ferocity, these past two days of fighting already constitute the heaviest escalation of conflict in five years. Fearful that it is going to get worse, an estimated 35% of residents of Israel's Gaza "envelope" towns and villages were reported late Sunday to have temporarily evacuated to safer pastures further north.

To listen to the threats of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, vowing to extend the range of their rockets and missiles to Tel Aviv and the rest of central Israel, and publishing videos highlighting specific potential targets, it might seem inevitable that the violence will escalate further.

To listen to Israel's IDF Southern Command chief, Herzl Halevi, it would appear that the army is poised for a far more intensive assault on the Hamas infrastructure. "We are seeking an achievement that will bring a safer, quieter future," Halevi said late Sunday, noting that the Israel Defense Forces had been "preparing for several months," including with multiple drills involving ground forces.

And so it might prove. Hamas, the Islamist terror group that makes no secret of its strategic goal of wiping out Israel, and Islamic Jihad, its smaller but no less nasty Iranian-controlled sibling, may indeed yet drag Israel into another full-scale conflict.

As of this writing, however, both sides were indicating that this is something they seek to avoid.

The Sunday night TV news was a surreal mixture of reports compiled earlier on the day's rocket attacks interspersed with live coverage of yet more alarms and rocket fire

With Israel's Independence Day celebrations just a few days away, and the Eurovision Song Contest festivities following a week later, the Gaza terror groups are betting that Israel would rather make concessions than plunge into extensive conflict. Hence the calibrated targeting of Israel, rather than an all-out assault.

Israel has already sustained significant blows. The death toll is four at time of writing, including a civilian very deliberately targeted in his car close to the border by a highly accurate anti-tank missile fired from northern Gaza. On Sunday evening, the southern city of Ashdod was hit by a barrage of some 30 rockets — the worst such attack it has ever sustained — with another fatality and considerable devastation. The number of rockets and

mortars fired from the Strip has mounted inexorably these past two days — to above 600 at this time of writing. The Sunday night TV news was a surreal mixture of reports compiled earlier on the day's rocket attacks interspersed with live coverage of yet more alarms and rocket fire. Iron Dome has a reported success rate of some 90%, but that still leaves numerous rockets aimed at residential areas that are getting through the Israeli defenses.

Yet Hamas and Islamic Jihad have further weaponry at their disposal. It was only a few weeks ago that the Gaza terrorists "accidentally" fired rockets at Tel Aviv. Nobody in the Israeli security establishment doubts their ability to do so again, to significant effect. Those precision anti-tank missiles can wreak a great deal more death and destruction. Anonymous sources in the Israeli security establishment were also being quoted on Sunday afternoon, warning of the possibility that violence might engulf northern Israel — as in, Iran might contemplate activating Hezbollah.

For its part, while General Halevi noted that Israel's military strikes have targeted Hamas ammunition stores, missile launch crews, organizational infrastructure and more, and while Israel on Sunday directly targeted a Hamas operative responsible for channeling Iranian funds to the group, other, still more sensitive Hamas targets have not yet been struck. Many key members of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad leadership are in Cairo, where Egypt is trying to mediate some kind of ceasefire process. Many, but not all. Likewise, there has been no serious talk to date about an IDF ground offensive.

At a lengthy meeting of the security cabinet on Sunday, Israel's key ministers reportedly discussed the proximity of Independence Day, but nonetheless told the IDF to continue its operations with the only imperative being to ensure "the security of the state and its citizens." Yet the upcoming anniversaries — IDF Memorial Day and Independence Day — are significant; the government would prefer not to mark them in mid-conflict.

Similarly, the notion that an imminent televised song competition would impact on Israel's military strategizing may seem absurd, but mid-May's Eurovision Song Contest is widely described as the world's biggest annual music festival. Hundreds of millions of people are expected to watch it, and by extension to watch Israel. A forced cancellation — for the first time in the contest's 63-year history — would not merely be embarrassing for Israel. It would impact Israel's international reputation and status, with significant economic implications long into the future, including but not limited to tourism.

This round of violence ostensibly began with an

Islamic Jihad sniper injuring two Israeli soldiers at the Gaza border on Friday, and the deaths of two Islamic Jihad terrorists in Israel's retaliation. From there, overnight Friday, we entered the bitterly familiar routine of rocket and mortar attacks on southern Israel, IDF responses, wider rocket fire, heavier IDF responses, and so on.

But to view this conflict from that narrow perspective is erroneous. The root of this round of violence, as of those that have preceded it in the 12 years since Hamas violently seized control of Gaza from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah faction, is that Hamas, Islamic Jihad and their sponsors have no tolerance for the presence of the Jewish state.

Israel left Gaza in 2005, forcibly evicting 7,000-8,000 Israeli Jews from some 20 settlements, moving out the entire military, and withdrawing to the pre-1967 lines. In other words, Israel has no presence in Gaza, no quarrel with Gaza, and would like nothing more than to see Gaza thrive.

But Hamas has other ideas. Thus while Gaza's citizens suffer in poverty, it subverts any and all potential resources to its terror machine. It sends Gazans to the border in

endless riots under the banner of a "return" to today's Israel. And the "concessions" that it seeks to leverage from Israel, in this and all previous rounds of violence and full-scale conflict, are the same: to loosen Israel's security grip on Gaza in order to bring in the money and the weaponry to cause greater and greater harm to Israel down the line.

Does this mean that Israel will inevitably have to reconquer the Gaza Strip (with the danger of considerable loss of life), oust Hamas's military forces, and try to marginalize its extremist ideology? Well, for there to be an end to these relentless rounds of conflict, somebody is going to have to supplant the Islamic extremists. The problem Israel faces is that it does not wish to retake control and responsibility for Gaza, and its 2 million or so Palestinians, but sees nobody else prepared to do so.

And that will remain the reality however this current round of violence plays out, however high the toll of death and widespread the trauma and devastation. Hence Israel's talk of reasserting its deterrent capability, and restoring calm, rather than strategic change.

## The Logic of Palestinian Blackmail

By Efraim Inbar

Whether from Hamas or from the Palestinian Authority.

The Palestinian Authority is refusing to accept any funds transferred from Israel because Israel has begun deducting the value of stipends the PA pays to terrorists and their families, commonly known as "pay for slay."

The PA's refusal has added to its chronic budget crisis. International financial support to the PA has declined in recent years, and the Palestinian economy has deteriorated accordingly. As a result, the PA is now telling the world it faces economic collapse.

The Palestinian strategy is clear. PA President Mahmoud Abbas is trying to scare Israel and the world community into believing the relative stability in the West Bank will come to an end, leading to chaos and terror. The PA leadership is emulating Hamas's behavior by threatening that a humanitarian disaster will ensue unless more financial aid is rendered. Hamas has been playing this same game for years in Gaza. Israel and other international actors (the United States is a sober exception) seem to fall repeatedly for these Palestinians schemes.

It is true that a certain level of economic prosperity in the PA is conducive to stability. Hungry neighbors always pose trouble. Unfortunately, poverty is often cynically employed by authoritarian regimes such as Hamas and the PA as a foreign policy tool to gain attention and financial aid. In fact, the Palestinian leadership needs a certain number of hungry subjects as a precondition for continuous international support. And Palestinian leaders are far less susceptible to economic difficulty than

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responsible leaders are. Palestinian elites eat well in any case.

Abbas will soon be facing the "deal of the century" proposed by an American administration that is very critical of Palestinian policies. Washington has reduced its financial support for the PA and eliminated all aid to UNWRA. In response, the Palestinians have announced their rejection of any plan coming from the Trump administration. One way to reject the American peace proposal and yet not be blamed for its failure is to engineer an economic crisis that diverts attention from continuous Palestinian intransigence regarding any and every attempt at peacemaking.

Fears of an imminent collapse of the PA – long a darling of the international community – also serves to force the Palestinian issue back to the top of the world's agenda. For a while the world has been busy with other more burning issues, such as Iran. Indeed, the Iranian threat has lowered the interest of most Arab states in the Palestinian issue, as well, and brought them closer to the Israeli position – which basically considers the Palestinians a strategic nuisance. The conclusion reached by many Arab and other actors is that in the absence of a Palestinian leadership ready to make difficult decisions, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can, at best, be managed for the medium term.

It should be noted that Israel is doing more than its share to bolster the Palestinian economy – providing jobs to Palestinians in the Israeli work market; supplying water, electricity and health services to Palestinians; and keeping

Hamas from overthrowing Abbas's PA. Moreover, it is active in raising funds internationally for the PA.

And thus, nobody should cave to Palestinian blackmail. While it is best for all concerned to ensure a decent standard of living for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, it is highly unlikely that the PA will economically collapse. After all, the PA is a very good business for the kleptocratic leaders of the regime in

Ramallah. Marked by corruption and nepotism, the PA is source of significant income for Abbas and his coterie. This gang will not kill the goose that lays golden eggs. As dysfunctional as the Palestinian national movement has become, it has excelled in perpetuating the pork barrel born in Oslo.

*Mr. Inbar is president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (jiss.org.il) and a fellow at the Middle East Forum.*

## Responding to Gaza events, Saudis tweet in support of Israel and against Hamas

By MEMRI

jns.org

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**Saudi journalists and intellectuals accuse Hamas of acting on behalf of Iran in retaliation for tightened U.S. sanctions on the Islamic Republic.**

The latest round of fighting between Israel and Gaza sparked many reactions from Saudis on Twitter.

Noteworthy among these responses were tweets, some by prominent intellectuals and journalists, siding with Israel and expressing hope for its safety and victory, while attacking Hamas and its policy, in particular its firing of rockets. Some wrote that Hamas was acting on orders from Iran, in retaliation for the United States tightening sanctions on the Islamic Republic on May 3. It should be noted that this is not the first time Saudi intellectuals and academics have openly expressed support for Israel and criticized Hamas.

The following are some of the tweets:

Liberal Saudi author and intellectual Dr. Turki Al-Hamad described the latest flare-up in Gaza as a predictable and ever-repeating scenario, while blaming it on the troubles plaguing Iran and Turkey. He tweeted: "It's a repeating loop: rockets [are fired] from Gaza into Israel, Israel bombs [Gaza], someone or other mediates, the fighting stops—and the common Palestinian folks pay the price. This is 'resistance,' my friend. Iran and Turkey are in trouble, and the Palestinians are paying the price."

Senior Saudi journalist Muhammad Aal Al-Sheikh, who writes for the Saudi daily Al-Jazirah, tweeted that the firing of rockets from Gaza is carried out on orders from Iran, in retaliation for the tightening of American sanctions: "The Persian ayatollahs have instructed their servants, Hamas, to escalate [the conflict] with Israel, and they obeyed. [...] The Persians are tightening the pressure on the U.S. and Israel in retaliation for [U.S. President Donald] Trump's decision, and the victims are the people of Gaza."

Saudi intellectual and researcher 'Abd Al-Hamid Al-Hakim, the former director of the Middle East Center for Strategic and Legal Studies in Jeddah, who frequently writes in support of Israel, expressed hope for peace with this country and its people, and called on the region and the world to take responsibility and confront Hamas.

He tweeted: "Our hearts are with you. May Allah protect Israel and its people. We will not let the treacherous hand of Iran and its agents in Gaza reach the Israeli people. It's time to say this out loud: confronting the terror of Hamas is the responsibility of all the countries in the region and of the international community [as a whole], not only of Israel. I say to the Arabs: Do you want these murderers and agents of Iran to rule Jerusalem?!"

## Is Erdogan Losing His Grip on Turkey?

By Medeni Sungur

wsj.com

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**Local elections in Istanbul and five other cities were the most serious losses for his party since 2002.**

Turkey's Supreme Electoral Council ordered a new election for mayor of Istanbul Monday, handing a victory to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Development Party, known by the Turkish acronym AKP. Mr. Erdogan's candidates were defeated in five of six major cities on March 31. Despite this week's ruling in Istanbul—where the new vote is set for June 23—the results should serve as a lesson to Mr. Erdogan and populist politicians everywhere.

The opposition is now set to govern major Turkish cities for the first time in the 17 years since Mr. Erdogan became prime minister. It happened despite heavy propaganda, use of public resources to promote the AKP, and the demonization of opposition parties as terrorist

collaborators. What happened? The answer lies in the faltering economy.

AKP was first elected in 2002 in the midst of a deep financial crisis that caused Turkey's old political order to crumble. The party inherited a successful standby deal with the International Monetary Fund, which came with the most extensive package of institutional reforms in the history of the Turkish republic. In its first 10 years in power, the Erdogan government stuck to the program, expanded civil liberties and pursued European Union membership. It was a success story. Foreign investment flowed in. Consumption skyrocketed. New hospitals, highways, cars, apartments and public schools improved life for ordinary Turkish citizens.

But the quality of Turkish government started to decline in the early 2010s. Turkey's ranking dropped in international indices measuring aspects of institutional

quality—the rule of law, human rights, democracy, transparency. In a country without natural resources, this would normally mean a loss of confidence and diminution of economic growth. But an external factor enabled Turkey to get away with some bad economic policies: cheap credit.

Easy credit was available to developing countries after the global financial crisis. Rock-bottom interest rates in the U.S. and Europe prompted international investors to look to riskier countries in their hunt for profits. Even as the rule of law—one of the most important signals of long-term stability—was declining, foreign direct investment and portfolio investment kept flowing in, thanks to the positive story of the 2000s and the lax credit environment.

But as economic conditions improved in the U.S., the Federal Reserve started to raise interest rates, slowly sucking back the wave of money that had washed into Turkey and other emerging markets. The highly indebted Turkish real-estate sector suddenly found it difficult to meet its international obligations. This trend was exacerbated last summer when President Trump imposed sanctions over Turkey's imprisonment of American Pastor Andrew Brunson, which spooked international investors and sent the lira plummeting more than 30% against the dollar in less than three weeks.

This was all bad news for the highly indebted Turkish private economy. Corporate debt as a share of gross domestic product was 35% at the end of 2009, according to the Institute for International Finance. By September 2018 that figure had reached 75%. Turkey needs to refinance or repay \$150 billion in the next 12 months, and

the Central Bank of Turkey's net reserves stand at \$16.1 billion, excluding short-term swap borrowing to top up reserves at the end of March.

Turkey slid into recession at the end of 2018, and inflation roared back. In January food prices rose at an annual rate of 31%, causing a countrywide controversy over the price of eggplant. The government set up mobile grocery stalls in large cities, with a purchase limit of 6½ pounds per person. Thousands of Turkish citizens lined up to get subsidized food.

Studies of long-term electoral behavior suggest that Turkish voters are highly sensitive to economic growth. When the economy is booming, Turks have tended to support incumbents, notwithstanding negative developments in other fields such as rule of law or freedom of the press. By contrast, no matter how much Turks appreciate a leader, they cut support when the economy is turbulent. That's what seems to have happened in March.

The election result should be a wake-up call to Mr. Erdogan. Turkey has to go back to the basics and re-evaluate the path it has taken for the past decade. Turkey's bright future lies with stronger democratic institutions, the rule of law and respect for individual liberties. If Mr. Erdogan resorts to further authoritarian measures and keeps pushing the system, he will further impoverish his own voters. He will risk losing their support, and ultimately his power.

*Mr. Sungur is executive director of the Freedom Research Association, an Ankara-based think tank.*

## Israel and the war of Eurovision

By Daniella Greenbaum Davis

Gaza plays a Game of Thrones. (Spoiler alert)

*Game of Thrones* fans watched in horror on Sunday as Cersei Lannister invited the citizens of King's Landing into the Red Keep, ostensibly to shelter from an impending attack. But Cersei's invitation was not benign. It reflected a simple but horrifying strategy: to use her subjects, innocent civilians, as human shields. To get to Cersei, her enemies would first have to maim and kill thousands of innocents.

How should rational, moral actors respond to this kind of terror? How should soldiers fight honorably against opponents who care little about the lives of their subjects? These questions may thrill *GoT* fans, but they are not solely the purview of fiction.

Over the last several days, nearly 700 rockets have been fired into Israel from the Gaza Strip by Iranian-sponsored Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, which is supported both by Iran and Qatar. These rockets have targeted innocent Israeli civilians, women, children and ambulance crews, killing a 58 year-old father of four in his own home and, ironically, an Israeli Arab. The rockets, and the people launching them, have spread fear. They have caused damage, they have maimed, and they have killed. And that is their purpose.

spectator.us

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The trigger for the barrage was not just the ongoing, Hamas-driven confrontation at the internationally recognized Gaza-Israel border. As Hamas have admitted, the barrage was a strategy like to Cersei Lannister's. Pressured by both Israel and Egypt, the Islamist groups opened a novel front in the media war, an attempt to spoil the Eurovision Song Contest, due to be held in Israel next Tuesday.

Israel has responded with tremendous restraint. Its citizens have been targeted by two terrorist organizations. No one doubts that Israel has the resources and the manpower to devastate the entire Strip if it chose to. But it chooses not to.

Israel is a moral nation that is committed to minimizing the number of civilian casualties. When it does launch an offensive attack, it does not quiver behind the skirts of women and children. It does not create command centers beneath hospitals, or launching pads in schools or houses of prayer.

And yet, Israelis — and Jews more broadly — are unceasingly criticized for every action they do take. Rather than praise Israel for its unquestionable restraint in the face of a continuous and prolonged assault on its citizens that no democracy would tolerate, commentators ranging

from professional pundits to members of Congress and even 'objective' reporters all jump to compare Hamas's actions to Israel's — as if there is a shred of moral equivalence between the two.

It's not just the Qatari propagandists of Al Jazeera who abandon professional objectivity. In the New York Times on Monday, Isabel Kershner — a reporter who is paid not to be biased — wrote that before Sunday night's ceasefire, 'at least 22 Palestinians, including militants and children, were killed in Gaza over the weekend, and four Israeli civilians died in the fighting'.

The phrasing says it all. The Palestinians were 'killed' violently, but the Israelis simply 'died'. Does Kershner believe natural causes were to blame? As a reporter, she might tell us whether these Israelis died in their sleep, or from old age, or from the impact of an Islamist's rocket, fired in breach of the Geneva Conventions.

There's more. Kershner, in a commendable but brief fit of accuracy, notes the Palestinians were killed 'in Gaza'. The Israelis, on the other hand, merely 'died in the fighting'. This is, as our president might say, fake news. Twenty-one year-old Pinchas Menachem Pshuzman, 49-year-old Ziad Alhamada, 58-year-old Moshe Agadi and 67-year-old Moshe Feder did not die of battle wounds on a battlefield. None of them died 'in the fighting'. They were murdered by the rockets launched by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. And while we're on the subject of word choices, it's also notable that Kernsher refers to them as 'militant groups'. In fact, both are terrorist organizations, and recognized as such by the United States.

A media prepared to face difficult facts might instead

have questioned the wisdom of yet another cease-fire. Benjamin Netanyahu is often criticized as militant and blood thirsty by the international community and experts on the region like Beto O'Rourke. But Netanyahu, unlike most of his predecessors, has avoided all-out war wherever possible. In Israel, he is getting flak from both sides of the political spectrum for what his critics see as another round of appeasement.

Peace is an important goal, but if it always remains a goal, it can never become a reality. Netanyahu's critics charge that, by agreeing to a cease fire under these circumstances, he has only delayed the inevitable conflict to come. And by allowing Islamic Jihad and Hamas to deepen their preparations, expand their arsenals and dig more terror tunnels towards Israeli homes and schools, Netanyahu risks enlarging the scale of the next round of fighting.

Benny Gantz, leader of the center-left Blue and White party, questions the virtue of repeating a strategy that reduces its deterrent quality with each repetition. An ex-general, Gantz isn't wrong. If Palestinians are conditioned to believe that they will only get concessions out of an opposing country by targeting civilians, and that their foreign patrons will protect them from the consequences, why would they ever stop?

*Game of Thrones* won't be back for another series, but last week's flare-up is just another episode in the long and horrifying run of Palestinian terror. No democratic public can tolerate that plot line forever.

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## They Could Not Hold Back

### By Editorial Op-Ed

**The levayos in Israel for victims of the terrorist attacks on Sunday were notably modest** in size. Media reports spoke of the dozens or hundreds rather than the thousands of people who usually come to bury those who fall in war and terror.

This was not because of any lack of feeling for the loss of their families and communities, but because, while the fighting was still going on, air raid sirens still wailing and rockets still in the air, the military authorities advised against public gatherings of more than 300 people.

It was a reasonable precaution, but the many hundreds who came to mourn could not hold back. They had to come.

They could not hold back after hearing of the death of Pinchas Menahem Pshevesman, Hy"d, 21, a Gerrer Chassid in Ashdod who was killed while rushing to a bomb shelter during a volley of Gaza rockets on Sunday night.

"I don't understand why this is happening, but I am sure that you have fulfilled your purpose on this earth," his father, Harav Chaim Dov Pshevesman, said at the levayah.

hamodia.com

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"I had a great blessing to raise you for 21, nearly 22 years," he said.

They could not hold back and stay home during the levayah of Moshe Agadi, Hy"d, a 58-year-old father of four, in Ashkelon.

"Moshe was a modest man. He knew how to respect everyone; loved everyone and was loved by people. He was happy and smiled constantly," his brother Shai Agadi said in a hesped, accompanied by the sound of explosions from the fighting in the background.

Agadi ran a pair of produce stands at the Ashkelon open market. "I worked beside him for almost 30 years at the market. I never heard a bad thing come out of his mouth," said a coworker, Baruch Sa'ada.

Of how many of us could the same be said?

Our hearts go out to the families of these and other victims of the vicious terrorists of Gaza. We continue to daven for the wounded, who suffer both bodily and emotionally from the pain and shock of sudden violence. These are traumas that often take years to heal, and sometimes never do. They and their families will need

strength to deal with the difficult challenges of healing and recovery they now face.

It is well to remember, too, that when the media reports tell of “light injuries,” it is somewhat misleading, for they are light only relative to more serious and life-threatening injuries. But in many cases these too involve serious trauma. The injuries may be light for those reporting them but not for those who suffer them.

In his message on the security situation Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu also said, “I send my condolences to the families of those killed in the battle, and my hopes for the recovery of the injured.”

President Reuven Rivlin paid condolence calls on the Pshevesman and Agadi families, as well as the al-Hamamda family in Segev Shalom, whose father Ziad was killed when a rocket slammed into a factory in Ashkelon. Other Israeli ministers attended levayos and will be visiting the families.

It is one of the grim duties of leadership. No amount of cynicism can minimize the importance of these gestures of humanity and fellow-feeling. It is as much a part of holding elective office as directing the military in a time of war or passing legislation and making speeches. And in recent years when Israeli officials failed to be there at a levayah, they were called to task, and rightfully so.

However, it must be said, too, that there were other politicians who could not hold back either — though there is reason to feel that it would have been better had they done so.

Even while the shooting was still on and no ceasefire

of any kind had been reached, certain individuals who like to think of themselves as leaders could not hold back from criticizing the government.

Blue and White chairman Benny Gantz saw it as an opportunity to find fault with Netanyahu, saying that the ceasefire was “another surrender to the blackmail of Hamas and the terrorist organizations. All that the government did, once again, is to facilitate next flare-up.”

Gantz’s No. 2, Yair Lapid, was characteristically venomous, charging that “Netanyahu used the residents of the south as a bulletproof vest on the way to a complete submission [to] Hamas.”

“Netanyahu will not solve the problem in Gaza. He does not have the operational and political courage to do so,” Lapid tweeted.

Gantz, Lapid and other critics seem still to be living in the election campaign. But the campaign is over. It would seem that the patriotic thing to do when lives are on the line is to give the government full support, at least in public, and any criticism should be given over privately or saved for the next election.

It is always much easier to say what you would have done, but you were not the one called upon by the people to make the fateful decisions of war and peace. Had you been in that position there is no guarantee whatsoever that you would have done better. Perhaps you would have done worse.

May Hashem grant wisdom, humility, and compassion to all those in positions of power, as their actions affect the lives of countless others.

## Why the U.S. Dispatched an Aircraft Carrier to the Persian Gulf

By Behnam Ben Taleblu and Bradley Bowman

thehill.com

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**When confronted with strength, Iran usually backs down.**

In a show of force against the Islamic Republic of Iran, the U.S. is deploying a carrier strike group and bomber squadron to the Middle East. The move comes as a response to what National Security Advisor John Bolton termed “escalatory indications and warnings” by Iran against American interests. It also represents the latest step in Washington’s “maximum pressure” campaign against Tehran, which marks its one-year anniversary on May 8. As the policy enters its second year, Washington will need to reinforce its presence in the region to both underscore deterrence and signal resolve.

The deployment of a carrier strike group to the region offers the U.S. a chance to do exactly that.

While some may see the announcement as a new drift toward war, in actuality, the deployment increases the prospects for genuine diplomacy — the best hope for avoiding conflict.

Currently, America’s military posture in the Persian Gulf supports at least four broad goals: 1) it provides the U.S. with in-theater basing to conduct operations, 2) it ensures the free-flow of energy exports vital to the international economy, 3) it deters Iranian aggression and, 4) it reassures and defends key allies and partners. An

optimal U.S. force presence also supports coercive diplomacy. Borrowing from U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Jon Huntsman Jr., America’s aircraft carriers “represent 100,000 tons of international diplomacy.”

The Nimitz-class carrier tasked with the mission, the USS Abraham Lincoln, is the same carrier the U.S. sent through the Strait of Hormuz in January 2012 on a “routine” deployment that also served to check Iranian threats to close the Strait — through which roughly 30 percent of the world’s seaborne oil trade transits. Reportedly, in addition to the Nimitz-class carrier, the new carrier strike group contains a missile cruiser, several destroyers, and a carrier air wing composed of rotary and fixed wing aircraft such as F/A-18 fighter jets, electronic warfare and tactical early warning aircraft, and navy helicopters.

The U.S. was unable to deploy an aircraft carrier to the Middle East for much of last year. During key junctures in the U.S.-Iran standoff in 2018, such as the withdrawal from the nuclear deal in May or the reimposition of oil sanctions in November, the purported “100,000 tons of international diplomacy” was missing in action. The absence of a carrier was explicitly mentioned by the former CENTCOM Commander in April 2019 testimony before Congress.

The addition of these assets to the U.S. force structure in the region is a welcome development as Washington seeks to counter Iranian influence and thwart operations by Iran and its proxies in the Middle East.

The timing of the announcement, just days before the anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, is also important. Currently, Iran remains engaged in a test of wills with the Trump administration, hoping it can outlast Washington's pressure policy. While the maximum pressure campaign has relied primarily on economic tools to both coerce and punish Tehran, the deployment could signal the beginning of a change in its approach. Iran has publicly derided the carrier deployment perhaps because they understand the increased U.S. military footprint in the region will present the regime with new realities — making Tehran think twice about escalation.

Iran will continue to utilize asymmetric or “gray zone”

tactics as long as it believes it can do so with relative impunity. However, when confronted with strength, Iran has often backed-down. Indeed, under the Trump administration, naval harassment of American vessels by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is reportedly decreasing. To explain its de-escalation to a domestic audience, the regime has twisted itself into rhetorical knots.

Ultimately, Washington's deployment of a carrier strike group offers an opportunity to strengthen its Iran policy and make the case for tough diplomacy. As America re-orders its military priorities to focus on “great power competition,” the move signals that the Persian Gulf remains an utmost national security interest, as does checking Iranian aggression.

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## Slowly but Surely, Israel's Ties with the Gulf States Are Coming Out into the Open

By Yoni Ben Menachem

Next year in Dubai?

The news about Israel's participation in the Expo 2020 international exhibition, to be held in Dubai this October, has spread like wildfire in the Arab world as the unveiling of details of U.S. President Donald Trump's “deal of the century” draws near.

At the exhibition, Israel will present its achievements in the fields of water, medicine, technology and information, highlighting the spirit of Israeli innovation.

Opponents of the new American peace plan—with the Palestinians, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas at the forefront—are tracking every sign of open normalization between Israel and the moderate Arab states. It is now the United Arab Emirates' turn for their opprobrium.

Israel has been openly and proudly publicizing its upcoming participation in the Dubai event. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a statement lauding Israel's participation, noting: “This is another expression of Israel's rising status in the world and in the region.”

In response, Hamas issued a statement calling Israel's participation in Dubai a “dangerous development.” Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zohari demanded that the UAE not allow it because “it encourages the Israeli crimes and constitutes a violation of the resolutions of the recent Arab Summit in Tunisia.”

The P.A. likewise protested against Israel's participation in the exhibition. Nabil Shaath, the international affairs adviser to P.A. leader Mahmoud Abbas, said the P.A. would officially raise the matter with the UAE, and that letting Israel participate entails “violating the resolutions of the Arab League foreign ministers and flouting the Palestinian position.”

Shaath underlined: “Normalization with Israel is a grave mistake for any Arab state.”

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Over the past two months, the covert normalization process between Israel and the Gulf states has begun to emerge in tandem with the process of crafting Trump's “deal of the century.” Open normalization is reported to be an integral part of that deal.

Israel has begun to take part openly in sports and cultural activities in Arab countries including the UAE, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain.

Not to be forgotten in this context is Netanyahu's official visit to Oman in October last year.

One state that has avoided publicly hosting Israeli delegations is Saudi Arabia. The Arab world is certain, however, that behind the scenes there are very close diplomatic and security ties between Israel and the Saudi royal palace, and that these will go public the moment it becomes possible for Saudi Arabia, which shows high sensitivity to the issue.

The attitude of the Emirates

The UAE does not appear overly upset by the Palestinian denunciations and the protest against Israel's participation in Expo 2020.

Last March, Anwar Karakash, the UAE's state minister for foreign affairs, called for “an opening of the Arab world toward Israel” and said that “the relations between the Arab states and Israel must undergo a change to achieve progress toward peace between Israel and the Palestinians.”

Some in the Arab world saw this as acceptance of the Israeli position that normalization between Israel and Arab states need not depend on reaching a permanent Israeli-Palestinian settlement, and that relations ought to develop naturally because Israel has no conflict with any Arab state and has peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt.

The UAE is ignoring the Arab League resolutions that ban open normalization with Israel, as well as the resolutions of the Arab Summit. Other Gulf states are

moving in the same direction. They know that these resolutions are “toothless,” and that their interest in cooperation with Israel and its supporter, the United States, is much more important given the dangers posed to them by Iran and the Islamic State.

Senior P.A. officials claim that the background to the UAE’s favorable attitude towards Israel is its quiet support, and Saudi Arabia’s secret support, for Trump’s peace deal—notwithstanding the two states’ public declarations and their ostensible backing for the Arab Peace Initiative instead of Trump’s deal.

The disputes between the UAE on the one hand and the Palestinians and some Arab states on the other came to the fore in the emergency meeting of the Arab foreign ministers in Cairo on April 21, 2019.

The UAE has been pushing more overtly than any other Arab state for open normalization with Israel.

P.A. officials claim that the UAE got a green light for this from Saudi Arabia, which wants to propitiate Trump, and that the groundwork is being laid for a more advanced stage in which Israel will be the Arab states’ strong friend against the Iranian danger.

These Palestinian officials say the tables have turned. The regional situation has changed in Israel’s favor, and the Gulf states now regard the Palestinians and the Palestinian problem as a big obstacle to forging closer ties with Israel and the Trump administration.

Israel is pursuing the right policy

Normalization with the Arab states should be promoted, drawn from the darkness into the light of day. Because of the Iranian danger, some Arab states have

overcome the hurdle of fear that the Palestinians set up, and no longer see open normalization with Israel as much of a problem.

It is worth recalling the important words of Oman’s Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi after Netanyahu’s visit to Oman: “Israel is an existing fact in the Middle East, and everyone understands that. The world, too, is aware of the fact, and perhaps the time has come to relate to it accordingly.”

The Arab rulers respect power and desire Israel’s and the Trump administration’s support. They see, on the one hand, how Israel has been attacking the Iranian military entrenchment in Syria with the full backing of the United States and even a certain coordination with Russia, and, on the other, Abbas’s rejectionist policy towards any compromise with Israel, while Hamas and Islamic Jihad have been turning the Gaza Strip into an Iranian stronghold.

The conditions for open normalization between the Gulf States and Israel are gradually ripening, and Israel should encourage any possible cooperation with them. This is an important process that can help the Palestinians understand that Israel is a fact of life and that even the Arab states, apart from Egypt and Jordan that have already signed peace treaties with it, are getting accustomed to Israel’s presence in the Middle East and have come to terms with it.

*Mr. Ben Menachem is a senior Middle East analyst for the Jerusalem Center. He served as director general and chief editor of the Israel Broadcasting Authority.*

## Israel Must Prepare for Next War with Hamas

By Caroline Glick

**Hamas’s latest round of aggression against Israel ended with Israel agreeing to permit Qatar to transfer cash to the terror regime that rules the de facto Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip.**

From last Friday through Sunday, Hamas and its junior partner Islamic Jihad subjected Israel to a massive assault. It began Friday when Hamas forces wounded an Israeli female soldier and an officer engaged in operations to protect Israel’s border with Gaza from Hamas’s ongoing terror offensive, which involves deploying large crowds to the border and using them as cover for various terror operations. These operations have been going on for the past year. Israel responded to the attack by bombing a Hamas installation in Gaza.

Then Saturday morning, Hamas and Islamic Jihad launched their most intensive missile and rocket offensive on Israel to date. As a military correspondent for one of Israel’s large circulation Hebrew dailies noted, whereas over the weekend, in two days the Palestinians launched nearly 700 rockets and missiles at Israel and killed four Israelis civilians, during the entirety of Operation Protective Edge (Hamas’s 2014 terror offensive against Israel, which lasted 51 days), the Palestinians launched

breitbart.com

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4,400 rockets and missiles at Israel and killed 5 Israeli civilians. In other words, the onslaught over the weekend was unprecedented.

Israel’s retaliation entailed bombing some 350 Hamas and Islamic Jihad installations; and killing the Hamas operative responsible for transferring funds from the Iranian regime to the terror group; and killing a drone operator. Israel’s counterattacks were qualitatively harsher than they were in previous rounds of Hamas missile barrages. Israel specifically targeted the homes of Hamas and Islamic Jihad commanders and other targets of high value to the terror groups and their leaders. But in the end, Israel exacted no long-term price from either Hamas or Islamic Jihad.

According to media reports, under the terms of the ceasefire reached by mediators from Egypt’s intelligence agencies, Israel agreed to loosen restrictions on the importation of dual-use products into Gaza. That is, Israel agreed to permit the terror regime to import civilian goods, like concrete, that are also used to produce armaments like rockets and terror tunnels. Israel also agreed to increase the size of the maritime fishing zones along Gaza’s coast.

And Israel agreed to permit Qatar to continue delivering cash to Hamas in Gaza.

IDF commanders told the media that they are satisfied with the results of the operation because Hamas didn't receive anything it didn't already have. But the flipside of that assessment is that Hamas paid no price for its aggression against innocent civilians. Millions of Israelis live in the areas targeted by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In 48 hours of attacks, more than 14 missiles an hour, on average, were shot into Israel. Even worse, the widely shared assessment of Israeli military analysts and commanders is that Hamas's next round of attacks is around the corner, perhaps waiting for the end of the Muslim month of Ramadan in early June, or perhaps until the load of cash Hamas receives from Qatar this week is all spent. And, the military sources warn, the next round will likely be even more lethal than the one that just ended.

There are three reasons that every round of Hamas aggression ends so inconclusively. The first is that Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, will never accept any meaningful ceasefire with Israel. It is a jihadist group that exists to annihilate Israel. This is why it devotes all of its resources to attacking Israel rather than developing Gaza for the welfare of its residents. As a result, so long as Hamas controls Gaza, it will continue to use the area as a launchpad for attacks against Israel.

The second reason is that there is no alternative to Hamas among the Palestinians. Fatah, Hamas's main rival and the group that controls the Palestinian Authority, is no match for it. Hamas seized control over Gaza from Fatah in 2007 with little effort. And no other alternative exists, even in theory.

Israelis recognize that the only way to overthrow Hamas is to fight a major war, and to pay a huge price in civilian and military casualties. And then end of the war would leave Israel with no choice but to continue to control Gaza through its military. There is little appetite in Israel for this option. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has stated repeatedly that he will only employ it if he is convinced that there is no other option.

But the truth is that even among the no-good options that Israel confronts with Hamas-controlled Gaza, there are better scenarios than the one in which Israel now finds itself, where it is literally paying Hamas for temporary ceasefires in between its massive projectile offensives against Israeli civilians.

For the first few years following Operation Protective Edge, Hamas accepted that it would receive nothing in exchange for a ceasefire with Israel other than an Israeli agreement not to attack it. The informal agreement, of ceasefire for ceasefire, meant that Israel's responses to Hamas aggression only lasted as long as Hamas continued to attack.

It wasn't an ideal situation. But at least Israel wasn't rewarding Hamas for its aggression. Over the past two years, however, Hamas's financial situation grew significantly worse as Fatah and Palestinian Authority

leader Abbas opted to end the PA's financial support for Hamas-controlled Gaza. Beginning in 2017, Abbas began suspending PA payment for electricity and water Israel supplies to Gaza. In 2018, Abbas began suspending salary transfers to PA employees in Gaza. Together, the moves rendered Hamas incapable of providing for the basic needs of the residents of Gaza.

Abbas had hoped that his move would force Hamas to accept his leadership. But Hamas had another idea. Rather than accept Fatah's authority, Hamas opened a new front against Israel. Last May, it began its assaults on Gaza's border with Israel and punctuated the assaults with incendiary balloons and rocket fire. Israel, which has a strategic interest in keeping Hamas-controlled Gaza separate from Fatah-controlled areas in Judea and Samaria, had no interest in pressuring Hamas to accept Abbas's authority or money. So, when Qatar entered the picture as an alternative funding source, Israel accepted it.

The problem is that at that point, the rocket assaults became a means for Hamas to extort monetary concessions from Israel. And its calculations seemed to shift from shooting at Israel when it felt like proving it was still in the jihad game, to attacking Israel to get money. And as the reported ceasefire terms from the weekend's offensive indicate, the balance of power has shifted in Hamas's favor.

To remedy the situation, and given Israel's reasonable aversion to carrying out a major operation to overthrow Hamas in Gaza, Israel needs to restore the balance of deterrence it maintained with Hamas for the three years following Operation Cast Lead. That is, it needs to restore the "ceasefire-for-peace" reality that held until Abbas ended his transfer payments to Gaza. To achieve this end, Israel apparently needs to deliver the sort of blow on Hamas and its key terror masters that will force them to their knees. This sort of operation would involve two major components.

First, Israel needs to undermine Hamas's ability to attack Israeli territory by restoring the kilometer-wide buffer zone on the Gaza side of the border to block assaults on its border, and by destroying Hamas's store of rockets, mortars and missiles.

Second, Israel needs to carry out strikes against Hamas and Islamic Jihad commanders.

Such operations will make clear that Hamas will receive no further payoffs for desisting from its wanton aggression against Israel. Gaza's economic plight can be solved through a combination of increased employment for Gazans in the northern Sinai on the Egyptian side of the border, and through humanitarian aid projects. The former will diminish Hamas's hold on the local population.

If Israel's military commanders are correct, and the next round of Hamas aggression is waiting around the corner, then Israel should use the coming weeks to prepare itself for an operation that will convince Hamas that it is wrong to view attacks on Israel as a means to ensure its economic survival.

## Tel Aviv's Hottest Area Demands a 'Nationalism Premium'

By Yaacov Benmeleh

bloomberg.com

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**Even when offered millions for their houses in the historic port district, few Arabs in Jaffa will sell to Jews.**

A Jewish developer recently made an unsolicited offer for Nouha Siksek's beachfront home in Jaffa, Tel Aviv's historic port. With land prices surging in the city and the run-down neighborhood undergoing a major face-lift, he was prepared to pay millions of dollars for the two-story house, planning to raze it and build an apartment tower with views of the Mediterranean. Siksek said no. "I'm not interested in the money," says Siksek, 69, sitting with fingers intertwined on her black leather couch, a mural of the Dome of the Rock—one of Islam's holiest sites—on the wall behind her. "Where would I go?" she says. "My father was buried here. My uncles were buried here. I want to be buried here with them."

The quandary Siksek and her neighbors face is an economic distillation of the struggle over land in Israel. Prices have almost tripled in some parts of Jaffa since 2010, enriching—on paper, at least—many of the area's 16,500 Arabs. But cashing out means surrendering to a wave of new residents, mainly Jewish, and hastening the end of 1,400 years of Arab presence in the area. What's resulted is a market in which buyers must pay what could be called a "nationalism premium," the extra cash needed to persuade sellers to disregard ancestral loyalties. "Everyone has a price," says Abed Abou Shhadeh, a member of a prominent family that's been in Jaffa for at least seven generations. "But the price is outrageous, and a big portion of them just don't sell."

Abou Shhadeh says the reaction is rooted in the Arabic word *beit*. While it literally means "home," he says that for many Arabs it has a far greater significance: Beyond just walls and a roof, it's the place they expect to die. The feeling is especially acute in Jaffa. In the 1920s and '30s, wealthy Arabs in the city were castigated for selling their homes to Jewish newcomers. Then in the war of 1948, 95 percent of Jaffa's 75,000 Arabs fled. After Israel prevailed in the conflict—which Palestinians call the *Naqba*, or "disaster"—the new government barred their return and settled Jews from other countries in Jaffa, leaving Arabs in the minority.

For decades, Jaffa was decrepit and crime-ridden, and

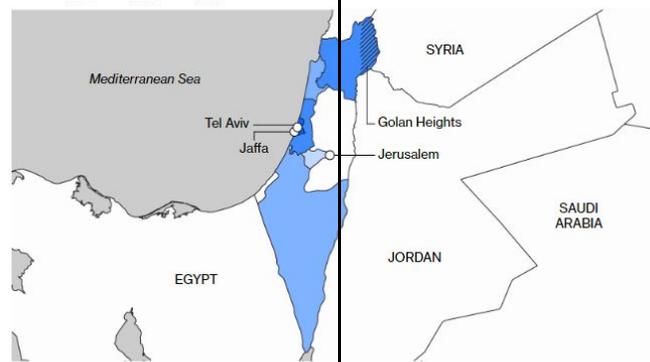
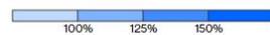
most Tel Aviv residents would visit only for cheap hummus, pot, or prostitutes. "Back then, choosing to live in Jaffa was considered hardcore, like you're taking a risk," says Yaron Tsruya, whose real estate office sits on a once-derelict Jaffa street now home to some of Israel's wealthiest families. After a few pioneering art galleries popped up, hip cafes followed about a decade ago, and today Jaffa has some of Tel Aviv's trendiest hotels, bars, and restaurants. Siksek's husband, Ibrahim, used to keep goats and a horse that grazed on vacant land near the house. Today, he has to content himself with a dozen caged canaries, because the lots have been filled with modern villas. "Animals can't eat houses," he says with a laugh.

The boom has created a two-speed Jaffa. Young Israeli couples and affluent families have moved into parts of the city, reflecting an improved sense of security. Police, however, are reluctant to patrol Arab areas, so business owners often pay young toughs for protection, according to Daniel Monterescu, an anthropologist who's studied the area. "There's a total lack of trust in the police," he says. Although Siksek says she has no problem with her new Jewish neighbors, she suspects the gentrification reflects a not-so-subtle nudge toward the exit from the Israeli government. A reminder came on March 10 in the runup to parliamentary elections, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people—and the Jewish people alone."

Pressure to resist selling homes to anyone besides immediate family or, in rare cases, other Arabs, remains intense, says Ayman Mugraby, an Arab who owns one of Jaffa's top real estate brokerages. The community "thinks like this," he says, making a tunnel with his hands around his eyes. He understands the reluctance to sell, as passions on the issue run high: Some Jewish groups fund purchases by Jews to increase control of the land, and in parts of East Jerusalem, Arabs who sell property to Jews have even been threatened with death. But Mugraby says the same forces that have made many families rich are making it difficult for young couples to buy homes. "We're sitting on diamonds," he says, "and we don't know how to polish them."

Change in Home Prices in Israel's Administrative Districts

2007 to 2017



Data: Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel