

**Slowly, Arab Attitudes toward Israel Are Changing**

By Ed Husain

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**The “anti-Semitic craze” has begun to dissipate.**

When Benjamin Netanyahu visited Oman in 2018 in a gesture of goodwill to Israel's neighbours, the welcome was not universal. For an Israeli Prime Minister to be warmly greeted in a proud Arab state was, for some, far too much. The Omani foreign minister, Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, was asked on Al Jazeera why the visit had been allowed. The reply went viral: ‘Why not? Is it forbidden to us? Israel is a nation among the nations of the Middle East. We should embark on a new journey for the future.’

A new narrative is emerging in the Middle East. New maps of the Muslim mind are being drawn and old hatreds are on the run. The anti-Semitic craze to destroy Israel was powerful in the 1960s, uniting Egypt's President Nasser with his fellow Arabs. But now, Sunni Arab neighbours are changing course. Islamist leaders are losing their appeal — at a time when Iran, with its brand of theological fascism, poses a threat to Israel and the Arab world alike.

Polls show that the percentage of Arabs expressing trust in Islamist parties has fallen by well over a third since the uprisings of 2011. Three-quarters of Iraqis say they do not trust Islamist parties at all, and the number of young people who say they're ‘not religious’ is also on the rise. This generation wants Arab leaders to increase economic prosperity and minimise political conflicts. And to build alliances, including with Israel.

This has been the ‘Year of Tolerance’ in the United Arab Emirates. In February, an open-air mass for 170,000 Catholics was celebrated by Pope Francis, the first pontiff to visit the Arabian peninsula. To commemorate the Pope's visit, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed, announced the construction in the UAE capital of the Abrahamic Family House: a synagogue, a church and a mosque within a single complex, a hub for highlighting history and a symbol of hope for a new future of co-existence.

In Dubai, Jews have been worshipping at a synagogue for several years now. Rabbis from Israel, America, Australia and Europe have been attending annual international Muslim peace conferences held in Abu Dhabi by Abdullah bin Bayyah, a renowned Muslim theologian, for two years. In full rabbi dress.

King Hamad of Bahrain has also led a path towards more open relations between Islam and Judaism. In 2016 he celebrated Hanukkah with orthodox Jews from New York, his courtiers singing and dancing. The scenes were striking: Jews with hats and beards, Muslims with keffiyeh and

robes, joining together in songs of peace. This groundbreaking gesture elicited condemnation from Iran-backed Hamas, but favourable comments erupted on social media. In return, Bahraini peace delegations have visited Israel.

There have even been signs of a religious glasnost in Saudi Arabia. The Mecca-based Muslim World League, which for five decades promoted hard-line Wahhabism, has started meetings with various Jewish organisations. Several Saudi bloggers, YouTubers and Twitter personalities have been praising Israel in Arabic. Mohamed Saud, a social media activist, visited Israel in July and spoke in fluent Hebrew that he learned in Riyadh. This infuriated Palestinian radicals, who encouraged children to pelt him with stones — as if furious that their old world, with its politicised hatred, is fading.

I've noticed a change of mood on my own travels. I regularly meet Egyptians and others who desperately want to normalise relations with Israel and they offer three reasons. First, the events of the Arab Spring exposed the fanaticism of the Muslim Brotherhood and other related Islamists, with the hardliners now being viewed as a threat to both Islam as a faith and Muslims as a people. Isis and other ‘Islamic states’ are, of course, the logical outcome of Islamism. Now that this creed has been tested to destruction, it is being seen for what it is — and rejected.

Second, the need to stand firm against Iran is becoming a cause that unites Israel with Sunni Arabs and anti-Tehran Shiite Muslims in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. It's well-known that mullahs in Tehran support Hezbollah, which is dedicated to destroying Israel. But they also meddle in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. So against this menace of Shiite political Islamism, committed to destroying Muslim secular governments and exporting Shiite revolutionary ideology, Israel is coming to be regarded as a benign neighbour.

Finally, and most intriguingly, Israel is being seen by moderate Arab governments as a trade and security partner as the West sends mixed signals. Barack Obama abandoned his Arab allies when they faced threats from the Muslim Brotherhood or Iran. He deserted Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak — to the horror of the Saudis and Emiratis — and cheered on the popular uprising in Syria. When America signed the nuclear agreement with Iran towards the end of the Obama presidency, Israel and its Arab neighbours were united in uproar. This lesson in unreliability has not been forgotten. As one Arab prince

said recently at a private meeting: ‘Who else will fly in joint missions against Iranian targets with us?’

For his part, Netanyahu is optimistic. ‘What is happening in practice with Arab states has never happened in our history, even when we signed peace agreements,’ he has said. Of course, there is a lot of history to overcome. For 70 years the Arab world was driven by an anti-Semitic ideological craze to wipe out Israel. But before that came a far-longer history of co-existence and respect. The people of Israel are honoured repeatedly in the Quran, which confirms that Jews have every right to settle in and around

Jerusalem. It was Omar, a friend of the prophet, who invited Jews back into Jerusalem in 637 after five centuries of being banished by the Romans.

There are enough historical and scriptural narratives of Muslim-Jewish fraternity to form the basis for rapprochement. The enmity has, historically, been a recent blip. With an assertive Iran and an uninterested West, the Arabs and Jews have a shared interest in building a lasting alliance with each other. This may yet be the decade of peace.

## Israel Alone Is Willing to Use Force to Check Iran

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

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**The U.S. can and should put real pressure on the ayatollahs through Syria.**

Discussing America’s stake in the Middle East has increasingly become a shell game where our “interests” can quickly disappear depending on the changing sentiments of the president. The trajectory for American foreign policy in the Middle East is clear: down if not out. And although Democrats can occasionally give the impression that they are in favor of a more vigorous presence, that is probably just an anti-Trumpian reflex: if the president is in favor of abandoning the Kurds and leaving Syria, then Democrats are in favor of staying and reinforcing the alliance. The odds are high, however, that the left, following Barack Obama’s lead, wants much less of the Middle East, not more.

In Syria after walking away from the Kurdish People Protection Units (the YPG), Washington can no longer default significant counterterrorist tasks to local proxies. Its subsequent reinsertion of U.S. special forces—Trump again reversing himself—doesn’t change the calculus: no one now is going to count on the United States to stay a course, whatever that course may be. And we don’t know whether an Islamic State 2.0 and branches of Al-Qaida can effectively regroup in the wasteland that is Sunni Syria; we don’t know whether such groups will be significant threats to the West; and we don’t know how exercised Donald Trump, or a Democratic president, will be by radical outfits that tend to target Europeans more than Americans. Yet the odds are decent that new jihadist threats will coalesce since the Levantine Axis powers—the Alawite regime of Bashar al-Assad, the clerical regime in Tehran, and Vladimir Putin—appear unwilling or incapable of deploying sufficient manpower to quiet the country.

And it is a near certainty that Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will again try to reassert his influence in Syria through Sunni militants whom Turkish intelligence has supported since the opposition to Assad radicalized. Yes, Erdoğan has worked out a *modus vivendi* with Tehran and Moscow; his position is strengthened if he has a means to inflict pain on Assad and the clerical regime’s forces in-country. And the Turkish president is a sincere

Sunni Islamist. Also, the Sunnis aided by Ankara have usually been hostile to the Syrian Kurds, which in their YPG garb, remain Ankara’s primary foe south of the border.

To wit: if the United States wants to reassert itself inside Syria against some reborn Sunni jihadist threat, it will have to use its own forces far more aggressively, in greater numbers, than it has in the past.

But viewing Syria through a counterterrorist lens inevitably leaves us near-sighted. Radical Sunni groups blossomed in Syria because the Assad regime, in its barbarism, created them. The rebellion against Assad’s dictatorship gradually metastasized into ever more extreme outfits, which endured better upon the battlefield. Shiite-dominated Iraq, where Iranian influence also explicitly drove violent sectarianism, lent a significant hand to radicalization across a porous border. The Islamic State, an Iraqi–Syrian hybrid, arose in this vicious milieu. In opposition there were no outside forces, first and foremost the United States, France, and Saudi Arabia, willing or capable of supporting more moderate Syrian groups whose primary aim was guerrilla war against Iranian Revolutionary Guards and their allies. Obama’s small-scale military support to the Syrian opposition was designed to fail; Trump ended the farce entirely.

To put it simply but accurately: the Islamic Republic is now the primary driver of violent sectarianism since it has proven an effective vehicle for its regional ambitions. Counterterrorism against Sunni militants in the Levant ought to be seen as a subset of a much larger Persian Shiite problem.

Determining America’s interests in Syria obviously requires an appreciation for the larger region. And the country may be the linchpin of the Middle East. If the former head of the Revolutionary Guards in Syria, the late Brigadier General Hosein Hamedani can describe the country as “the key region.... In comparison to Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, Syria is the most important...it is in Syria, where our interests can most be hurt...,” then it certainly behooves senior American officials to consider the possibility that he is right.

If the ultimate American objective in the Middle East is to check the Islamic Republic's expansion, to ensure that the clerical regime cannot exploit Iraq's highway system to move soldiers and materiel, including medium-range missiles, easily into the Levant, then Syria is the choke point. This can be said with near certainty: if Tehran can develop medium-range missile bases and permanently deploy a significant ground force in Syria, all protected by advanced Russian air-defense systems, then it may be able to check Israel's capacity to play a Middle Eastern cop, which is the role the Obama and Trump administrations have defaulted onto the Jewish State as Washington has thinned its objectives and responsibilities in the region. With Trump's decision to not respond militarily to Iranian attacks against shipping in the Persian Gulf and a critical Saudi oil facility, the president has seriously undermined the fear that others have had of American power. If Washington is unwilling to risk war to thwart the clerical regime's ambitions, then the only real hard-power check on Tehran is Jerusalem.

And surrounded by ever-better missiles in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, Israel naturally would hesitate to strike the Islamic Republic. Even with the Iron Dome anti-missile shield, civilian casualties might be staggering. Very soon, if not already, the Dimona nuclear facility will likely be vulnerable to Iranian cruise missiles, creating a specter of awful scenarios. And the possibility of an Israeli military check against the ongoing Iranian nuclear-weapons quest will diminish appreciably (the atomic archives stolen by Mossad in Tehran leave no doubt that the development of nuclear weapons didn't stop in 2003, as the Central Intelligence Agency in 2007 confidently guessed). The Israelis might still make an effort to take out the clerical regime's primary nuclear facilities, given Jerusalem's existential fear of an Iranian nuke, but the Islamic Republic would have an increasing advantage: the more ballistic and cruise missiles Tehran can deploy, the more tempting it becomes for any Israeli cabinet to just live with a doctrine of mutually assured destruction.

And all those Iranian missiles and drones will certainly cut the Saudi hope that the Israelis might somehow be useful in checking Tehran's aggression. The odds of Saudi acquiescence to Iranian demands have already increased. Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, wasn't at all bellicose after the clerical regime temporarily took out half of Saudi oil production at Abqaiq. The United Arab Emirates, historically a fair-weather friend in any anti-Iranian endeavor, has already signaled to Tehran that its heart really isn't in any new anti-Persian Arab alliance. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have overwhelming air superiority in the Gulf and could easily have destroyed Kharg Island, through which about 95% of

Iran's oil exports flow, in retaliation for the attack on Abqaiq. They did nothing—except signal their fear and dependency upon Washington.

The Trump administration's hope that Sunni Arab Gulf states could somehow step up, allowing the United States to step down in the region, just doesn't look plausible. Imagine a scenario where the clerical regime has billions of dollars to spend on advanced Russian and Chinese weapons, which surely would have happened when United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, proscribing conventional arms sales to Iran, expires in October, 2020, had it not been for Trump's re-imposition of sanctions, which has drastically reduced Tehran's access to hard currency. Armed with advanced conventional weapons, in addition to thousands of ballistic and cruise missiles, Tehran's capacity to humble, if not invade, its neighbors, could become overwhelming—barring an American willingness to intercede militarily. In particular, Bahrain, with its historic ties to Iran and its large, badly-treated Shiite population, would be a sitting duck. From Bahrain, the clerical regime could easily convulse the Arabian peninsula.

It's certainly possible to imagine a situation where Washington could seriously undermine Iranian power in the Levant. For this to happen, however, it would require a bipartisan consensus if not a new Congressional authorization for the use of force. President Trump would have to make an explicit argument that Iran needs to be checked on the ground. His harsh anti-Iran rhetoric has always left a big doubt that he is prepared to do anything to check Iranian imperialism. The president would need to make it crystal clear that the counterterrorist mission against Sunni jihadists will not end as long as Tehran and Damascus are slaughtering Sunni Syrians.

Washington is certainly capable, if Republican and Democrats can agree on the baleful nature of the Islamic Republic, to make the clerical regime bleed in Syria in the way it made the United States bleed in Iraq. Simple justice, let alone strategic common sense, ought to incline Washington to train and aid Syrians willing to take the fight to the Revolutionary Guards, allied foreign Shiite militias, and Alawite forces. It's not too late to do this. If there is American will, there's always a way. Barring such action, however, U.S. foreign policy in Syria will, at best, devolve into a holding action against an Iranian-Alawite-Russian advance at Dayr az-Zor, the critical juncture of Iraqi and Syrian highways, and a waiting game to see whether American sanctions and rioting Shiites throughout the region can crack the Islamic Republic and its imperialism.

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## How a Thirty-Year Alliance with Iran Allowed the Rise of Hamas

By Sean Durns

For Hamas, 1989 was the pivotal year.

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The year 1989 is often remembered for momentous

developments in the Cold War, from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the massacre in Tiananmen Square. Less widely recognized, both then and now, that year also marked the rise of Hamas, the terrorist group that today controls the Gaza Strip. Indeed, were it not for a series of events that took place three decades ago, it is unlikely that Hamas would have become the force in Islamist politics that it is today.

Hamas's origins predate 1989. They even predate Israel's 1948 statehood – a fact obscured by several anti-Israel academics and commentators at The Washington Post's WorldViews blog, Al Jazeera and The Intercept, among others.

The group's 1988 covenant explicitly states that it is "one of the wings of [the] Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine." The Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna and expanded rapidly during the 1930s and 40s, aided in part by support from the Axis powers.

A September 22, 1947, US intelligence reports estimated that the Brotherhood's branch in British-ruled Mandate Palestine had several thousand members, with a headquarters in Jerusalem where, as a neighbor reported, they read from the Koran, prepared for "a jihad," and chanted "Allah Akbar" after messages from al-Banna were broadcast on a loudspeaker. After Israel's 1948 War of Independence – in which a contingent of Brotherhood members, many trained by the Egyptian Army, fought in the South – Jordan occupied the West Bank and Egypt held the Gaza Strip. The result was that the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood was split into two separate geographic entities. It would take another war to bring them together.

The 1967 Six Day War ended with both an Israeli victory over the Arab armies and Israeli control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Ironically, the latter helped unify the two Brotherhood branches. And the former led to a loss in popular support for the Arab nationalism embodied by Egyptian dictator Gamal Abdel Nasser. Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement gained influence at Arab nationalism's expense.

But as Jonathan Schanzer noted in his 2008 book, *Hamas vs. Fatah*, "By the late 1970s, the Israelis believed that they had found Fatah's Achilles' heel... Fatah had become anxious over the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza," and arguments between the two movements "sometimes turned violent, spilling into the streets."

In an effort to undermine Arafat's Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), "the Israelis made the ill-fated decision to permit the Brotherhood to operate with relatively little oversight." In 1973, the Israeli government allowed a Muslim cleric named Ahmed Yassin to operate an Islamic center. It would become the operational center for the Brotherhood.

Yassin used the center to expand the Brotherhood's reach via a network of healthcare, daycare and food

services. The Brotherhood was filling a void left by the Fatah-dominated PLO, which was busy carrying out terrorist attacks abroad from its home base in Lebanon and later from Tunis. Awash in cash from Arab states and its chief patron, the Soviet Union, the PLO was increasingly viewed as both out-of-touch and corrupt.

Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 led to a fissure in the Brotherhood, with several zealous members, inspired by the example set in Tehran, breaking away to form Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). In contrast to Yassin and others, PIJ demanded an immediate confrontation with Israel. By the mid-1980s, after PIJ had carried out several major attacks, Israel began to clamp down, arresting and imprisoning operatives of the terrorist group.

But as Schanzer noted, "Thanks to PIJ, more elements from within the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood called for active participation in 'resistance' activities against Israel." The Brotherhood was further emboldened by the First Intifada, which erupted in December 1987 after a car accident between an Israeli Defense Forces truck and a car of Palestinians.

Shortly thereafter, Yassin's followers in Gaza announced the creation of an umbrella organization, Harakat al-Mueqawamma al-Islamiyya, whose acronym, Hamas, meant "zeal" in Arabic. Largely comprised of members younger than the aging Fatah cadre, Hamas began distributing pamphlets that covered everything from the group's "ideology to logistics surrounding strikes." The group's 1988 charter, meanwhile, asserted, "There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through jihad" and claimed that Jews controlled "imperialist countries" and fomented revolutions and wars.

1989, however, enshrined Hamas's ascent.

Beginning in January, Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) sought to wrest control from the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU), which served as the principal organizing body during the Intifada. Hamas leaders and schools began to refuse to cooperate with Fatah elements during the Intifada, declaring their independence.

By February, "Hamas for the first time took credit for kidnapping Israeli soldiers," Schanzer records. In May, July, October and November, the group launched terrorist attacks, murdering 22 Israelis – 16 of them civilians. Israel responded by rounding up hundreds of Hamas members, including Yassin who, in June 1989, reportedly admitted to being its founder and leader. By September, Israel officially designated Hamas as a terrorist group – ironically enhancing their "street cred."

Israel's crackdown forced Hamas to restructure into cells – a move copied from its rival, Fatah. At the direction of top operative Musa Abu Marzook, some Hamas members left and began to establish bases in Amman, Jordan, and Springfield, Virginia, where Marzook lived until his 1997 deportation. Hamas's new command structure "enabled the perpetuation of a campaign of

terror and violence against Israel that continued for decades,” Schanzer noted.

Perhaps most importantly, on November 16, 1989, Hamas announced that it had formed an alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Relations between the two would wax and wane over the next three decades, but Tehran’s support has been crucial to Hamas’s power. Without Iranian largesse, it is unlikely that Hamas would have survived, much less grown to mount a full-scale challenge to Fatah, eventually seizing the Gaza Strip after besting the older movement in 2006 elections.

“By the end of 1989,” Schanzer observes, “Hamas appeared to command the respect of nearly all Palestinians.” This was “best demonstrated by the fact

that, when it called for a general strike in the Palestinian territories on Christmas Day in 1989, despite the protests of Palestinian Christians, the strike was obeyed.”

It was a fast – and for both Palestinians and Israelis, fateful – ascent. Three decades later, including Hamas’s suicide bombings of the 1990s, no fewer than five wars have been fought between Israel and the terrorist group.

“History,” the novelist Philip Roth wrote, is “where everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as inevitable.”

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## The International Criminal Court’s Incoherent Case against Israel

By Ben-Dror Yemini

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### Why go after the country with the lowest proportion of civilian casualties?

For years now, we have seen an international campaign to indict Israel in the International Criminal Court in the Hague (ICC) for various allegations, almost all unfounded.

Following the announcement of ICC Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda's decision to begin conducting a probe into allegations of war crimes perpetrated in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the campaign has overcome its first hurdle - to Israel's detriment.

Although this is a victory of the campaign of lies, an indictment is still far away.

There is no reason to turn Bensouda into a public enemy. Experience proves otherwise.

When a petition was filed at the ICC over the 2010 IDF raid on a flotilla to Gaza, in which nine activists of Turkish Jihad organization IHH were killed, Bensouda decided that there wasn't sufficient need to conduct a probe.

And while on two occasions ICC justices decided that an investigation was in order, both times Bensouda deflected them, clarifying that after looking into the matter several times, she would not change her mind.

In November 2016, she published an opinion on the torture of prisoners in Afghanistan by the United States.

She was supposed to arrive in Washington in early 2019 in order to, among other things, promote legislation on the issue.

The U.S. responded by canceling her entry visa, with President Donald Trump declaring: "America is a sovereign nation and our first priority is always the safety and security of our citizens."

The ICC justices were shocked. A week after Bensouda's entry visa was revoked, they decided to cancel the investigation.

Human rights organizations protested, but they couldn't change the decision, with Trump refusing to initiate new policy on the matter.

The American Service-Members' Protection Act - a bipartisan piece of legislation passed in 2003 by Congress and nicknamed the "Hague Invasion Act" - states clearly that if the ICC lays a finger on an American soldier, the United States has the unequivocal right to invade the Hague.

Israel doesn't possess the same power and influence as the United States. It cannot make any threats, but the U.S. did announce Saturday that the ICC has no jurisdiction to investigate Israel.

We are not talking about a hostile entity such as the UN Commission for Human Rights, and Israel does have a fair argument that a complaint to the ICC can only be filed by a state, which Palestine is not.

In addition, the Oslo Accords state that the Palestinian Authority does not possess the authority to file such a petition at an international court.

But still, this is an assembly of judges who have been appointed by nations hostile to Israel.

It is a fact that the majority of fatalities over the last two decades have been innocent civilians.

Sometimes it is done with malice, such as the Darfur genocide or the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against its civilians or the Iranian-sponsored bombings and starvation in Yemen.

Sometimes it is done unintentionally, such as the death and destruction in the Iraqi city of Mosul, where some 190,000 civilians perished in the battle against Islamic State.

Apart from the former president of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, none of the people involved in these incidents was ever indicted.

Al-Bashir was never extradited, due to widespread support from various Arab and Muslim nations, nations in Africa, as well as China and Russia.

The absurdity of allegations against Israel is twofold, firstly because the U.S. Army Chief of Staff and the former **Visit [suburbanorthodox.org](http://suburbanorthodox.org) for the most recent weekly issues. Click on Israel Action tab.**

commander of the British forces in Afghanistan, not to mention other military experts, have repeatedly made it clear that Israel is the country taking the most strenuous measures to protect innocent lives.

Secondly, data shows that compared to other militaries around the world, Israel has far fewer civilian casualties during its military operations.

In this instance, Bensouda's behavior is reminiscent of the damning 2009 report by Richard Goldstone,

commissioned by the UN after the first war between Israel and Hamas.

Neither individual hates Israel, but they are operating within a system that has been methodically brainwashed about "the crimes" of Israel.

The same is true of the media, academia, international institutions and now legal tribunals.

With this in the background, the decision to blame Israel specifically has a black flag hanging over it.

## Israel's Iron Dome Works—for Now

By Jonathan Schanzer

commentarymagazine.com

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**Masses of precision guided missiles could change the equation.**

Israel's southern population came under attack once again in November 2019. The Iran-backed terrorist group Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fired more than 450 rockets into Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israelis sprinted to shelters, and the Iron Dome air-defense system once again shielded them from the onslaught. Thousands of miles from the action, sitting in the back seat of an Uber, I was on the phone with an Israeli official on the Gaza border who explained to me, without hesitation, that Israel had picked this fight.

There would be no attempt to spin this, the official said, even as rockets hurtled across the sky above him. Israel fired first, he said, by liquidating Baha Abu al-Ata, the PIJ military commander in the Gaza Strip. Israel tracked him for months, but he always surrounded himself with human shields. So the Israelis stalked him—and when, at last, he failed to shield himself with living human bodies, they struck with deadly precision. The Israeli Air Force did not just isolate its strike to the building, or the floor of the building, or the room on that floor. It struck al-Ata in his bed, reportedly with only his wife at his side. No one else in the building was hurt.

PIJ, in consultation with the group's paymasters in Tehran, responded with predictable ferocity. Yet as rocket fire increased, and even when occasional volleys pierced the Iron Dome's defenses (one struck a highway near the town of Ashdod, narrowly missing traffic), Israel's decision makers demonstrated remarkable restraint. As the official on the phone explained to me, the Israeli Air Force was calmly and selectively taking out PIJ military leaders and operatives when they had a clear shot. The majority of the bombing runs, however, were aimed at PIJ rocket stores. "We're hunting rockets," the official said flatly.

That kind of cool-headed discipline would not be possible without the Iron Dome system. When rockets are prevented from hitting their intended targets, Israeli officials don't hear calls from the public to send in ground troops. And for most defense officials (at least in this current government), there is no desire to escalate in Gaza. Even as it takes out occasional targets of opportunity, Israel prefers to keep its powder dry. The real danger lies to the north, where a brutal conflict is brewing.

Over the past five years, the Israelis have been fighting a quiet war nearly every night. During what is now known as the "Campaign Between Wars" or "War Between Wars," the Israelis have taken out high-value targets—more than 200 of them, according to estimates published last year, and it's probably closer to 300 now—from Syria and Iraq to Lebanon and beyond. As early as 2013, the Israelis spoke euphemistically about such strikes, noting that they were targeting "game-changing weapons" that Iran was transferring to its proxies amid the chaos of Syria's civil war.

Recently, the Israelis have become much more specific. Their targets are precision-guided munitions, or PGMs.

Until now, Israel has been blessed with ill-equipped enemies. The efforts of Iranian proxies such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and PIJ have been mitigated by Iron Dome, which has an 86 percent success rate (some Israeli officials say it's even higher) in neutralizing incoming enemy projectiles. That rate is boosted by the fact that Israel's foes have been firing unguided, or "dumb," rockets. Without GPS or target-acquisition capabilities, many of these rockets undershoot or overshoot their intended targets. When Iron Dome assesses a rocket's errant trajectory, it declines to intercept it and allows it to explode in an uninhabited space.

Iran is now working overtime to establish a program that will allow its proxies to convert their dumb rockets into smart ones. The United States began a process of converting its own unguided rockets into PGMs back in the late 1990s. The Israelis utilized similar technology. The result was the deadly Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM). If the Iranian project proves similarly successful, Israel's enemies will achieve the capability of striking within five to 10 yards of their intended targets.

Converting an unguided rocket (what some Israeli military types call "statistical" rockets) into a precision-guided munition is both simple and complicated. It's simple because all it takes are tail fins, a circuit board, and the right software. One former Israeli official estimates that an entire PGM-making kit might cost as little as \$15,000 per munition. But it's also complicated because dismantling a rocket to retrofit it with precision-guided technology and then reassembling it requires knowledge and infrastructure that Iran's low-tech proxies don't have.

They are laboring to acquire them. But with the Israelis patrolling from the skies with remarkably accurate intelligence, the tasks of transporting parts and assembling PGMs have become hazardous. Israel's estimated 300 strikes in recent years have reduced the PGM talent pool and destroyed a significant amount of hardware.

Iran and Israel have been playing a quiet game of chess across the Middle East—difficult for the casual observer to discern but punctuated by the periodic explosion. The Iranian effort continues despite the occasional setbacks. And so does the Israeli effort, which is thankless and time-intensive. Both sides understand that when enough PGMs reach the hands of Israel's enemies, the effect will indeed be game-changing.

First, PGMs will force Israel to use far more Iron Dome interceptors than it currently deploys. The cost of each ranges roughly from \$50,000 to \$100,000. Thus, defending Israel could soon become much more expensive. If Israel had been forced to shoot down all 450 PIJ rocket volleys with Iron Dome in November, the cost would have been as much as \$45 million.

More worrying, with enough PGMs fired at the same target, Iran's proxies may be able to outmaneuver, outsmart, or overwhelm Israeli missile-defense systems, with the result that one or more rockets would get through. Hamas already claims to be able to do this with its unguided rockets. Such claims are dubious now. But in the future, if the intended target is the chemical plant in Haifa, the Kiriya (Israel's defense headquarters) in Tel Aviv, Ben Gurion International Airport, or a Tel Aviv office building, the results could be catastrophic. As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's former national-security adviser Jacob Nagel recently told me, "with enough PGMs, the impact on certain targets could be close to the impact of a nuclear weapon." He adds that, for this reason, "after the Iranian nuclear threat, Israeli leaders cite the PGM threat as next on their list."

Currently, the Israelis believe that the Lebanese terrorist organization Hezbollah is the only Iranian proxy group that possesses Iranian PGMs in any significant number. The Israelis are not saying how many Hezbollah has. But they acknowledge that the efforts to interdict PGMs or PGM parts have not completely prevented the technology from reaching Iran's Lebanese surrogate. And Hezbollah continues to work feverishly on this project. Netanyahu also recently indicated that the Iranian proxy in Yemen, the Houthis, may also have PGMs. So far, the Houthis have targeted only Saudi Arabia with simple rockets, cruise missiles, and drones. Netanyahu's warning implies that the group may one day target Israel with long-range PGMs at Iran's urging.

Of course, the Iranians have their own arsenal of PGMs—more formidable ones. They are not retrofitted but rather built from scratch. And some of them are even immune to GPS-jamming systems, which is one of the best countermeasures Israel has against these munitions.

Israel's military brass would much rather destroy PGMs on the ground than intercept them in the air. One problem they have is patrolling the vast territory Iran controls to build, store, and launch its munitions.

Iran has, for the past five years, been building a land bridge extending across the Levant. The ultimate goal is to establish hegemony across the region. But the short-term goal is far more attainable: to control, via proxy, territory stretching from western Iran through Iraq, into Syria, through Lebanon, and all the way to Israel's doorstep. In addition to deploying Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran is using the Assad regime in Syria and Shiite militias in Iraq to maintain this real estate. Some question whether these proxies would dare fire on Israel with PGMs. The Israelis have answered that question, in part, with those punishing air strikes on Iranian assets in Iraq and Syria.

Critics assert that Netanyahu has cynically used such strikes as a means to campaign as the tougher defense candidate during Israel's unprecedented two rounds of stalemated elections in 2019. But Israeli strikes in Iraq and Syria were not optional in the eyes of the country's military planners. Iranian PGMs, or at least PGM parts or infrastructure, were thought to be there.

Targeting precision-guided munitions will become even more complicated in the future. The regime in Iran is not only working assiduously to obscure their transport and assembly. It is also devising ways to store them under homes, schools, hospitals, apartment buildings, refugee camps, and other heavily populated civilian infrastructure. Israel has already dealt with this problem in Gaza. Hamas conducts military operations from within civilian population centers. The Israelis warn that it will be worse in Lebanon, with Hezbollah's arsenal already strategically embedded in civilian areas. PGMs of an unknown quantity will be among these caches. The decision to strike these weapons on the ground will be excruciating for the IDF. And every strike will create immense public-relations damage, as images of injured or dead civilians fill the television screens and Twitter feeds of news consumers worldwide.

Of course, Israel is not the only country forced to deal with this problem. The United States has encountered human shields on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, too. The prevalence of the problem prompted President Donald Trump to sign into law the "Sanctioning the Use of Civilians as Defenseless Shields Act." The bill passed unanimously in both the House and Senate before reaching the president's desk in December 2018. A variant of the bill is also circulating at the United Nations.

These measures are important for two reasons. First, when those complicit in building the human-shields infrastructure (tunnels, bunkers, and storage facilities, for example) know they can be sanctioned by the U.S. government or even the UN, they may be less inclined to contribute to this cynical project. Being named can have an immediate impact among the local population, which (with

a few exceptions) would not appreciate being treated like cannon fodder.

More important, these measures can enhance the operational legitimacy and freedom of the Israel Defense Force in future conflicts. Once it has been established that targeting human-shields infrastructure is legal and protected from international opprobrium (to some extent), Israel's enemies lose one of their key advantages.

Unfortunately for Israel, no amount of inspired legislation will stop Hezbollah or Iran's other proxy groups from pursuing this precision project. If anything, when the Iranian PGM project comes online, the only significant disruption to the status quo will be inside Israel.

With PGMs, the era of Iron Dome's total dominance may come to an end. This does not mean that the Israelis will stop using this remarkable system to protect its citizens from incoming rockets. But barring significant improvements to counter PGMs, Iron Dome may no longer provide the Israeli leadership with the luxury of time to weigh their options when they must respond to a hailstorm of precision strikes.

Should PGMs pierce Israel's defenses and hit more of the intended targets, the Israeli public will demand a response. The political and military leadership will be forced to respond more rapidly and with greater force. This will increase the odds of mistakes on the battlefield and thus the odds of escalation. And if PGMs are fired from multiple locations, the natural result will be a multifront war.

If Israel doesn't find a way to halt Iran's PGM project, the very character of its wars will change. Despite a steady stream of attacks perpetrated by their enemies in recent years, the Israelis have not needed to fight long or particularly bloody wars. Instead, they have been conducting limited operations. Israel has, in fact, often been able to determine the beginning and end of these flare-ups. Iron Dome's ability to neutralize rudimentary rockets has made that possible. But now, with PGMs in play, Israel may no longer be able to dictate the terms of conflict when its enemies want one.

*Mr. Schanzer is senior vice president for research at Foundation for Defense of Democracies.*

## **NATO Must Pressure Turkey to Throw Out Hamas By Colonel Richard Kemp**

telegraph.co.uk

December 11, 2019

### **And the UK must ban the organization outright.**

An investigation by this paper has made clear that Hamas terrorists have been planning attacks against Israel from Turkey. President Erdogan knows this but denies it. He even denies that Hamas is a terrorist organisation despite the group's categorisation as such by the US and EU.

According to Erdogan, Hamas is "a resistance movement trying to protect its country under occupation". This is a lie. In fact, Erdogan's support for Hamas is itself an act of aggression against Israel. In 2015 Turkey agreed to prevent Hamas planning attacks from its territory but has never done so. This inaction harms Israel but is even more damaging to the Palestinian people. Rather than developing Gaza, which it has controlled since Israel left in 2005, Hamas has consistently used the Strip as a base to attack the Jewish state.

Millions of dollars of international aid have been diverted to stockpiling missiles and other weaponry, digging attack tunnels and funding strikes against Israel. Much has also been diverted into the personal bank accounts of Hamas leaders who have been branded the wealthiest terrorists in the world. Not only have Gazans been deprived of much-needed economic development, hospitals, schools, utilities and humanitarian supplies, they have also been blockaded by Israel to protect its own citizens from attack. This has in turn intensified the hardship and suffering faced by ordinary Palestinians.

By encouraging and facilitating Hamas, Erdogan has helped make this situation worse. But any concern he may have for the Palestinian people is heavily outweighed by his long-standing animosity towards the State of Israel.

### **Hamas | Israel's public enemy no. 1**

*Hamas is a Palestinian militant group whose ideology mixes Islamist extremism and Palestinian nationalism.*

*The group was founded in 1987 and opposes Israel's existence within any borders. It swears instead to establish an Islamic state in historical Palestine, which includes Israel.*

*Its secular rival, the late Yasser Arafat's Fatah, takes a more moderate approach and supports a two-state solution.*

*Hamas pioneered the use of suicide bombers in the 1990s and 2000s and is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Israeli civilians and soldiers. It is considered a terrorist group by the US and EU, while the UK has designated its armed wing as a terror organisation.*

*Hamas won the most recent Palestinian elections in 2006 and subsequently seized power in Gaza by force and drove out its Fatah rivals.*

*The two groups remain bitter rivals and Hamas struggles to operate in the West Bank partly because the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority there cooperates closely with Israeli forces to combat its activities.*

*The group fires rockets into Israel but is increasingly focused on improving economic and humanitarian conditions in Gaza as a way of preserving its own grip on power in the Strip.*

*The group has long maintained links with Iran; the Iranian Revolutionary Guard has supplied it with finances and, allegedly, weapons. And despite near-total isolation in the West, it also enjoys backing and ties with major regional and international powers.*

*Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the Hamas politburo, met president Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey last Saturday and the Emir of Qatar in Doha on Monday, and is expected to fly on to Russia and Malaysia.*

*The grand tour, which came after Egypt granted him permission to travel outside the Gaza Strip for the first time in three years, has raised speculation about the group's future in the region.*

*There is even unconfirmed speculation that US President Donald Trump may push the group into a tri-partite peace deal with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority.*

*Although Hamas and Israel publicly consider one another mortal enemies, behind the scenes the two have been quietly exploring diplomatic options to de-escalate the conflict.*

*Over the past year they have held stop-start talks towards a deal in which Israel loosens its 12-year blockade of the Strip, in return for Hamas halting rocket fire and keeping the border quiet.*

*That has caused some tension with rival militant groups. Last month Islamic Jihad, a smaller group also based in the Gaza Strip, fired rockets into Israel and accused Hamas of standing aside when Israel launched retaliatory airstrikes.*

Hamas does not wish to control Gaza and the West Bank only. Its charter demands the removal of the State of Israel and its replacement by an Islamic state. Hamas leaders re-affirmed this objective – to be achieved at gunpoint – on the recent 32nd anniversary of the movement's founding. Osama al-Mazini, a senior Hamas official, called upon Jews to leave the land, threatening them with thousands of suicide bomb attacks. These are not empty words. All of Hamas's energies have been devoted to attacking Israel and inciting global condemnation of its leaders and armed forces when they are forced to defend their people.

Recent years have seen a significant shift in the attitude of many Arab states towards Israel, with relations thawing and unprecedented connections forged. This is in part due to the common fear of Iran. It includes growing support among Arab leaders for the Israel-Palestine peace proposals yet to be publicly unveiled by the Trump administration. Hamas condemn any such moves towards normalisation. They have repeatedly made clear they have

no interest in peace or any solution, two state or otherwise, that does not lead to the annihilation of the Jewish state.

This is on their own account and also on behalf of another major sponsor, the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran's relations with Hamas have been varied but they share the common goal of destroying Israel. As well as the value of Hamas as a constant thorn in Israel's flesh and an effective propaganda tool, Iran intends for Gaza to be the southern prong of a pincer attack against Israel with the main thrust in the north from proxies in Lebanon and Syria. The attraction for Iran of striking Israel is increased as unrest continues at home.

Erdogan's support for Hamas reduces the prospects for peace in the region and makes more likely a full-scale war involving Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Iran and Gaza, embroiling Russian forces in Syria and with inevitable spill-over into Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Yemen. Given the vast array of Iranian-supplied rockets facing Israel, it is the population of southern Lebanon that will suffer most as the Israel Defence Forces are compelled to launch both heavy air strikes and large-scale ground incursions.

Erdogan will not trigger this conflict but his support for Hamas is a major aggravating factor. Jerusalem know this and despite immense restraint so far, might at some point have no choice but to take action against Hamas in Turkey. Israeli operations on the territory of a Nato member would have dire consequences.

NATO, the UN, the EU and the US therefore have an obligation to pressure Erdogan to kick Hamas out and cease all backing for them. The UK should be part of this effort. Its message of condemnation should include proscribing Hamas in its entirety. Currently only the so-called military wing is designated as a terrorist organisation. This is a false dichotomy, fabricated to allow continued dialogue with Hamas's political leadership. But all elements of the group are interlinked and overlapping and all contribute to terrorism. Proscribing it in its entirety would greatly damage Hamas and send a clear signal to Erdogan.

## **Israeli Army Chief Flexes Muscles at Iraq, but Warm to Hamas Deal**

**By Yaniv Kubovich**

**haaretz.com**

**December 26, 2019**

**In a future war with Gaza or the north, Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi says, the Israeli home front needs to prepare for physical and psychological damage.**

In a future war with Gaza or the north, Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi says, the Israeli home front needs to prepare for physical and psychological damage

Iran's Quds Force is moving advanced weaponry into Iraq on a monthly basis, Israeli army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi said on Wednesday, adding that this is something Israel cannot allow to go on unchecked.

"We cannot allow this to pass without authority," Kochavi said at a conference held at Herzliya's Interdisciplinary College, adding that the weapons transfer is occurring while "Iraq is undergoing a civil war, when the

Quds Force is operating there on a daily basis, when the country itself has turned into an ungoverned area."

He said that the IDF is undertaking enormous efforts, "in the open and undercover, not to allow the enemy to equip itself with high-accuracy weapons, even at the price of confrontation."

Kochavi also discussed Israel's arrangements with Hamas in the Gaza Strip, saying that, at the moment, there is an opportunity to strike an agreement.

According to him, Hamas is once again dictating the agenda, and missile deployment, in the Strip and Israel is involved in a mediation process aided by Egypt where "in exchange for a considerable improvement in the security situation in the Gaza Strip, we will allow for relief for civilians."

He added that this is Israel's policy, and he stands by it. As such, Kochavi noted, the opportunity is a fragile one. "It demands that both sides know how to take advantage of this very unique moment, and in the same breath not to forget for a moment" that Hamas is still holding the bodies of Israeli soldiers Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin.

"We have to deal with that and return them home, not just the security concerns of the State of Israel," he said.

Kochavi also spoke about Iran, which he said is "continuing alongside the restrictions on its nuclear plan to build missiles that can reach our territory and to double its enriched uranium."

All of Israel's fronts are operational, Kochavi said. "In the past months, there was no one front that did not have at least two immediate alerts that needed attention." Some were out in the open, but others were clandestine. And others, he said, "faded out by themselves." He added, "Not only were all fronts operational, but some fronts were added as well."

Kochavi also discussed wars that may be on the horizon in the north or with Hamas in Gaza. "The firepower on the home front will be tremendous," he said. "We must prepare the civilian authorities and mentally prepare for this as well."

He added that a large number of the rockets and missiles at the moment are "statistical": "They won't hit exactly where the enemy planned, but because they're planning to fire them on visible areas and central cities, then yes, it will have an effect and it will do damage." He added that Israel deals with this threat "with many

different methods."

In this war, he said, "We will forcefully strike the urban zone," adding that "the enemy chose to situate themselves there, and from there they fire thousands of missiles at Israel. Unlike the enemy, who is aiming at civilians, we will strike based on intelligence. We will warn them, allow them to evacuate and strike with force immediately after."

He added, "Be aware that the country that hosts terror organizations bears responsibility. It is the responsibility of the Lebanese government, of Hamas, of Syria."

Kochavi also made mention to the killing of nine members of Gaza's Al-Sawarka family in Deir al-Balah last month. "We investigated this incident for dozens of hours. The investigation was carried out at every level. We investigated for hours why we hit civilians."

On Tuesday, Haaretz published that the IDF's inquiry found that the family's home was miscategorized as a "military compound" used by Islamic Jihad, instead of as a civilian complex "with some military activity," as it should have been. Were it accurately defined, such a target wouldn't have been struck in what was considered a low-intensity operation, and those inside would have been warned in advance to give civilians time to escape.

The IDF has major difficulty with defining Hamas targets in Gaza, Kochavi said, "and hitting it with a surgical strike with a half-ton bomb is a very big challenge." That being said, he added, "there can be mistakes, as happened to my regret during Operation Black Belt [in November], where in one strike many civilians were killed."

## **Federal lawsuit filed against weekly anti-Israel demonstrations in front of Michigan synagogue**

**By Marcy Oster**

**jta.org**

**December 24, 2019**

**Beth Israel Congregation in Ann Arbor, Mich., has been the site of a weekly anti-Israel protest since 2003.**

A member of an Ann Arbor synagogue has filed a federal lawsuit against anti-Israel protesters and the Michigan city over weekly demonstrations that have been held since 2003.

Marvin Gerber, a member of the Beth Israel Congregation, filed an 85-page complaint last week in U.S. District Court, mlive.com reported.

The lawsuit, which claims the demonstrations amount to anti-Semitic hate speech, asks the court for an injunction to stop the protesters, calling the demonstrations "harassing conduct," or to place limits on them.

He also is requesting a jury trial and is seeking damages from the protesters and the city for emotional distress.

The groups have been named as Deir Yassin Remembered and Jewish Witnesses for Peace and Friends.

Five demonstrators also were named as defendants.

The six to 12 protesters who show up between about 9:30 and 11:30 during Saturday morning services and stand on the sidewalk outside of the synagogue each week plant signs on the grass that read "Resist Jewish Power," "Jewish Power Corrupts," "No More Holocaust Movies," "Boycott Israel," "Stop U.S. Aid to Israel" and "End the Palestinian holocaust," according to the report.

City officials have said they can not intervene, citing free speech rights.

The Southern Poverty Law Center in 2017 identified Deir Yassin Remembered as a Holocaust-denying hate group. The Palestinian village of Deir Yassin was the site of a massacre by Israeli troops in 1948.

Protest leader Henry Herskovitz said in 2013 that his group was not blaming the synagogue for Israel's actions, but was holding the congregation accountable for supporting the State of Israel.