



## Israel and Hamas

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By Boaz Ganor

**Boaz Ganor**, Ph.D., is the Ronald Lauder Chair for Counter-Terrorism and the Deputy Dean of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy and the Founder and Executive Director of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel. He is also the Founder and President of the International Academic Counter-Terrorism Community, an international association of academic institutions, experts, and researchers in fields related to the study of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Editor's Note: This article was submitted in October 2012.

**Abstract** *Inarguably, the Islamist revolutions in the Arab countries' neighboring Israel, and the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power in these countries, presents Israel with many, perhaps unprecedented, political and security challenges. However, in assessing the threat to its southern border, Israel must analyze in depth the intra- and extra-organizational influences on Hamas's motivation to attack, and formulate a responsible policy to ensure the safety of its citizens. Israel must use every means at its disposal to influence and pressure Hamas's leadership to choose responsibly, and avoid dangerous military "adventures."*

When Israel decided, in 2005, to unilaterally disengage from the Gaza Strip, many Israelis hoped that such a step would improve Israel's security and its political situation. But those hopes have been dashed. Israeli peace activists desired that the Gaza Strip would become a paragon of moderation and prosperity, and that the disengagement would build trust between Israelis and Palestinians, laying the foundation for an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord.

Instead, they watched in horror as Hamas quickly took control of the territory that Israel had evacuated, used severe violence to expel rival Fatah supporters, and won a majority in the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections. Israelis who had supported disengagement on the assumption that it would strengthen Israel's security and free Israel to conduct pre-emptive and retaliatory military strikes against any terrorist threat emanating from the Gaza Strip without fear of harming Jewish settlers, soon discovered that their assumption had been baseless. For by using the vast and sophisticated warren of tunnels dug by Palestinians under the border between Egypt (the Sinai Peninsula) and the Gaza Strip, Hamas had turned the Gaza Strip into a fundamentalist-Islamic military base. Within the expansive confines of that "base," Hamas had given refuge to local jihadist organizations like the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Global Jihadist organizations like the Army of Islam, the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), and other followers of al Qaeda.

Moreover, in the wake of the disengagement, Hamas had adopted a cynical policy of using civilians as human shields<sup>1</sup>, developed an impressive capability for high-trajectory shooting, and launched a savvy, well-coordinated effort to delegitimize Israel and its right to defend itself. When this reality hit home, Israelis realized that the disengagement had left Israel much more constrained than it had been, less able to make proactive pre-emptive strikes, and less able to protect its citizens or its home-front. Since the disengagement, the number of Israeli citizens under immediate and unceasing threat from the high-trajectory rockets fired by Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip has increased steadily—from the several tens of thousands of residents of the small towns and villages proximate to the Gaza Strip, to the over one million citizens living between the south of Tel Aviv and the Gaza Strip border.<sup>2</sup>

The military empowerment of Hamas increased exponentially once that organization had gained control of the Gaza Strip in the wake of Israel's disengagement. Moreover, this process was abetted handily by Iran and its "subsidiary," Hezbollah—which served as a role model for Hamas. Israeli Intelligence today estimates that Hamas's military arm comprises some 20,000 combat troops in the Gaza Strip—not including the thousands of military operatives of the other Islamist organizations<sup>3</sup>—most of them militiamen who are called to active duty in emergency situations only. The Gaza Strip's Police Force, which numbers several thousand additional men equipped with light and anti-tank weapons, also bows to the authority of Hamas's military arm, and functions as a reserve force in an emergency. Thus, the military wing of Hamas, known as the Izz Ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, is deployed throughout the Gaza Strip much like a

<sup>1</sup> IDF Blog, "Cover Me: Hamas's Human Shield Tactics" *IDF Blog*, February 27, 2012. Available at: <http://www.idfblog.com/hamas/2012/02/27/cover-hamas-illegitimate-human-shield/>.

<sup>2</sup> IDF Blog, "One Million Israeli Citizens Living Under Hamas's Rocket Threat" *IDF Blog*, January 21, 2012. Available at <http://www.idfblog.com/hamas/2012/01/21/hamas-rocket-threat/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ynet, "Hamas" Yediot Aharonot, Available at: <http://www.ynet.co.il/yaan/0,7340,L-93175-OTMxNzVfOTE2MDgwMDZfMTQ4Njg3MjAw-FreeYaan,00.html>. (Hebrew)

paramilitary organization with territorial brigades, regiments, companies, platoons and dedicated units such as a coast guard and artillery units.

The multiple weapons smuggled by tunnel from the Sinai Peninsula into the Gaza Strip, as well as weapons manufactured by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, are used to supply these forces. Between manufacturing weapons and smuggling them in, Hamas has managed to obtain thousands of short-range Qassam missiles, hundreds of medium- and long-range Grad missiles, Sager anti-tank missiles, anti-aircraft weapons such as heavy machine guns and shoulder missiles, intelligence and communications equipment, night-vision equipment, land mines, thousands of kilograms of standard explosives, tens of thousands of rifles, and millions of bullets. Many of the weapons smuggled through the tunnels into the Gaza Strip originated in the arsenals of the Libyan Army, looted after the fall of Qaddafi. Others of them are the tangible evidence of Iranian support, also smuggled into the Gaza Strip via Sudan and the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>4</sup>

Concurrent with this recently accelerated race to arms, Hamas has learned from the experience of Hezbollah in Lebanon and established an underground system of bunkers. These function as hideouts, weapons caches, war rooms and command posts, and are connected to the vast network of tunnels, which in turn connects them to manned positions, mosques, training camps, and rocket launching sites. The sandy earth of the Gaza Strip has been conducive to creating this parallel world underground, to the benefit of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations. Above ground, and also like Hezbollah, Hamas has established an extensive system of “nature preserves” whose thick underbrush and plant growth conceal Katyusha rocket launching sites and piles of explosive devices; these are also stored in densely populated urban areas.<sup>5</sup>

As effective ruler of the Gaza Strip, Hamas is responsible not only for its own deeds, but also for those of the other terrorist organizations functioning there. Like Arafat during the 1990s, Hamas today demands obeisance from the jihadist terrorist organizations in the territories under its command. However, it stops short of directly confronting them, or of insisting they disarm. In fact, Hamas has used the terrorism and high-trajectory rocket fire of these organizations to maintain its limited military struggle with Israel, without directly taking responsibility for any bellicose activity. Moreover, according to Israel Security Agency (the Shin Bet), interrogation of incarcerated Hamas members indicates that at least some of the opposition jihadist organizations (known as Jaljalat) are actually “subsidiaries” of Hamas, established for the express purpose of conducting low-profile terrorist

<sup>4</sup> Israeli Security Agency, “Smuggling of Weapons and Military Build-up,” *Israeli Security Agency (ISA)*, June 2012, Available at <http://www.shabak.gov.il/publications/study/Pages/21-06-12.aspx>. (Hebrew)

<sup>5</sup> Israeli Security Agency, “Review on Hamas’s use of tunnels in Gaza” *Israeli Security Agency (ISA)*, November 2008, Available at <http://www.shabak.gov.il/publications/study/Pages/hamas-tunnel-report.aspx>. (Hebrew)

attacks against Israel. For example, Hamas operative Ayoub Abu Kareem admitted that the “Defenders of Al-Aqsa” to which he had been recruited was ancillary to Hamas, and was established and funded by Hamas’s Minister of the Interior to conduct terrorist attacks in Israel.<sup>6</sup>

The second-largest jihadist organization in the Gaza Strip is the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) which, like Hamas, calls for the destruction of the State of Israel and the establishment in its stead of an Islamic state on all of the territory of Palestine. According to the PIJ, “the liberation of Palestine” is the first stage in the “redemption of Islam”; this will be achieved through “jihad”—that is, uncompromising terrorist activity against Israel. Another organization whose ideology is similar to that of Hamas is the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC),<sup>7</sup> established in 2000 by former members of Fatah in the Gaza Strip. Over the years, the PRC has splintered into two groups: the Central Group, which cooperates with Hamas and acts under its auspices and with its financing; and the Army of Islam, which positions itself as an opposition to Hamas and identifies with Global Jihad in the Palestinian arena. Yet another Palestinian organization in the Gaza Strip that identifies with Global Jihad and al-Qaeda is the Army of the Ummah.

Seeing itself as part of the Muslim Nation [ummah], this Salafist group has avoided adopting nationalistic Palestinian attributes, and strives to impose Islamic rule throughout the world. Several more Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip identify with al-Qaeda and Global Jihad, among them Fatah Al-Islam in Palestine, established in 2006 in Lebanon but with members in the Gaza Strip<sup>8</sup>, and Jund Ansar Allah (The Army of the Supporters of Allah). In clashes in August 2009, Hamas shot and killed the leader of Jund Ansar Allah and 24 of its members after the latter declared the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in the Gaza Strip. The Jalalat—smaller, ephemeral Salafist groups that identify with al-Qaeda and Global Jihad and present themselves as an alternative to Hamas, which they feel has strayed from the path of true Islam—include the Swords of Truth Brigade, the Shari’a Council of the Army of Islam, the Salafi-Islamic Jama’ah, and the Islamic Liberation Army.

The relationship between these Palestinian organizations and al Qaeda is confirmed by documents captured during the raid on the home of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan in 2011, and recently published by the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point.<sup>9</sup> Among these documents was a letter sent

<sup>6</sup> Israeli Security Agency, “Hamas’s military faction used to disguise the Hamas military activity against Israel” *Israeli Security Agency (ISA)*, 2012, Available at

<http://www.shabak.gov.il/PUBLICATIONS/STUDY/Pages/hamas-130611.aspx>. (Hebrew)

<sup>7</sup> The PRC sometimes takes responsibility for terrorist attacks under the name of the “Salah Al-Din Brigades.”

<sup>8</sup> This organization is also known as Fatah Al-Islam in the Land of Rabat and the Fatah Movement in the Land of Islam Rabat.

<sup>9</sup> Don Rassler, et.al., “Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Laden Sidelines, *Harmony Program*, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point Military Academy, United States, May 3, 2012, Available at: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/letters-from-abbottabad-bin-ladin-sidelined> & [http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2012/05/CTC\\_LtrsFromAbbottabad\\_WEB\\_v2.pdf](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2012/05/CTC_LtrsFromAbbottabad_WEB_v2.pdf).

by the Army of Islam in 2006 to Attiyyah Allah, aka Abu Abd Al-Rahman or Sheikh Mahmoud, a religious scholar and senior member of al Qaeda who was close to bin Laden. In the letter, the Army of Islam asked Attiyyah Allah three questions regarding the religious laws governing the funding of the group.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, the letter-writers described their “sense of suffocation” in the Gaza Strip because of the blockade imposed on their group by Israel and by Hamas, and asked Attiyyah Allah whether it would be permissible for them to receive funding from other organizations—in particular, the PIJ, which is heavily funded by Iran, and Fatah in the Gaza Strip, which was willing to pay the Army of Islam protection money so as to escape harm.

Attiyyah Allah responded that the group could receive money from these sources, as long as there was no Islamic-legal sanction against doing so, and provided as the money would not be used to humiliate Muslims, strengthen the infidel, or cause Muslims to be subordinate to the infidel. Attiyyah Allah concluded that it was permissible to receive money for the purpose of managing jihad and attacking the Jews, and that in fact this was preferable to abandoning jihad for lack of funds. In addition to evidencing the Army of Islam’s reliance on al Qaeda for guidance, the correspondence bears witness to the state of inter-organizational relations in the Gaza Strip in 2006. Since then, however, the relationship between Hamas and the Army of Islam has deteriorated—in part because of the latter’s identification with Global Jihad, and in part because of its having carried out terrorist attacks that embarrassed Hamas and challenged its authority. (Specifically, the Army of Islam kidnapped BBC correspondent Alan Johnston in the Gaza Strip in 2007; Johnston was rescued only after a shootout between Hamas and the Army of Islam)<sup>11</sup>.

By allowing Palestinian Salafist terrorist groups to grow and flourish in the Gaza Strip, it appears that Hamas has made the same mistake that Yasser Arafat made in his attitude toward Hamas during the 1990s. This attempt to “ride the tiger,” based on the principle, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” again and again proves to be misguided—and dangerous. As noted, these organizations see themselves as part of Global Jihad; they regard Hamas as having lost its way, and today openly challenge its authority. Although most of them maintain a balance of deterrence with Hamas most of the time, their occasional attempts at terrorist

<sup>10</sup> Attiyyah Allah relieved himself of the obligation to determine whether it is permissible for the Army of Islam to invest in the stock market to benefit jihad, claiming that this depended on the particular market’s regulations and money management. The petitioners also asked whether it was permissible to attack and kill drug smugglers and steal their money, or use their drugs to lure addicts to become double agents against the Jews, or sell drugs to Jews or use drugs to kill Jewish soldiers. Attiyyah Allah responded that, in special cases, it was permissible to steal and use the money of drug smugglers (as long as the money was not derived from the sale of drugs)—but not the drugs themselves.

<sup>11</sup> Chris Tryhorn, “Johnston’s kidnappers’ surrounded” *The Guardian*, July 3, 2007, Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/jul/03/bbc.israel?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>

attacks against Israel—in contravention of Hamas guidelines—threaten to leave Hamas vulnerable to reprisals from Israel, and to devolve the whole region into chaos.

### The “Terrorism Equation”: Terrorism= Motivation x Capability

To define the threat of terrorism facing the State of Israel from the south (the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula), we must first examine the “terrorism equation,” whose two variables are operative capability, and motivation. These two variables determine the likelihood of any terrorist organization—and, for the purposes of our discussion, Hamas—to engage in terrorism.

As noted, despite the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip by Israel subsequent to its disengagement, Hamas has found ways to procure, through manufacture and smuggling, Katyusha rockets, anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, and other weapons. The success of the security fence erected between Israel and the Gaza Strip, and the withdrawal of Israeli settlers as part of the disengagement, have all but eliminated the ability of Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations to infiltrate Israel and conduct suicide, hostage-barricade, and other terrorist attacks on Israeli soil. In response, Hamas and the other organizations have developed their capability for high-trajectory rocket fire into Israeli territory. Initially, the matter of precision was secondary; the goal of this high-trajectory rocket fire was first and foremost to attack densely settled civilian enclaves and sow destruction and death there—not necessarily to hit specific military targets. This is evidenced, also, by the addition to missile and rocket warheads of bits of metal, ball bearings, and nuts and bolts, which increase the spray of lethal particles when the projectiles hit ground. As indicated here, the terrorist organizations headed by Hamas have an almost unlimited capacity to fire mortars, rockets and missiles at southern Israel. Thus, the only variable curtailing their decision to do so is motivation.

What motivates a terrorist organization to act? This is a complex and problematic issue to analyze and understand. Multiple and varied—and sometimes contradictory—considerations may simultaneously influence what motivates the leaders and members of a terrorist organization to launch, or refrain from launching, terrorist attacks. As a rule, the influences motivating a terrorist organization to act may be divided into two types: intra-organizational influences, and extra-organizational influences.

The first of the intra-organizational influences to be taken into consideration is the terrorist organization’s fundamental ideology: that is, the extent to which terrorist attacks are an integral part of its *raison d’être* and, if so, the extent to which they are central to the organization’s strategy, relative to other types of activity. Also under the rubric of intra-organizational influences affecting the motivation to conduct terrorist attacks is rivalry among an organization’s members. They may be competing with each other over the leadership of the organization, or over closeness to the leader, or over their relative efficiency, loyalty, and perseverance and that of the unit or cell they head—and so on. Another intra-



organizational influence on an organization's motivation to deploy terrorist attacks is the organization's financial situation. For example, if a terrorist organization has a deficit; its leaders may choose to conduct a kidnapping or blackmail attack, or a bank heist, with the aim of filling the organization's coffers.

Chief among the extra-organizational influences on an organization's motivation to conduct terrorist attacks—that is, those influences external to the organization—we may cite the relationship between that terrorist organization and other, allied or rival, terrorist organizations. For example, a terrorist organization may decide to engage in terrorism to boost its reputation or jockey for position with rival organizations. A terrorist organization's population of origin—the population it purports to represent—also constitutes an extra-organizational influence on its motivation to conduct terrorist attacks. Many terrorist organizations hearken to the opinion dominant among their population of origin, which may either encourage them to engage in terrorism, or frown on their doing so, forcing them to avoid certain types of attacks not sanctioned by their public.

Also, a terrorist organization's motivation to conduct or avoid conducting terrorist attacks may be affected by pressure exerted by the country sheltering it and supporting it financially, militarily or ideologically. An extreme instance of this is the terrorist organization that becomes a puppet that tethers its policy on terrorist attacks to the interests of its patron state. A terrorist organization's motivation to engage in terrorism may also be influenced by regional and international political processes, such as peace agreements, revolutions, and the rise or fall of superpowers. Another, very significant extra-organizational influence on the motivation of a terrorist organization to conduct terrorist attacks is the activity of the targeted country. Proactive efforts to thwart terrorism, aggression, defensive security measures, and the public declarations of heads of state can all increase or decrease an organization's motivation to engage in terrorism against that state. State deterrence of terrorism is thus an essential extra-organizational influence on a terrorist organization's motivation, even when that organization has the capability to attack.

To arrive at such deterrence, the targeted state must analyze the intra and extra-organizational influences on the terrorist organization's motivation to attack it—taking into consideration the relative rationality of that organization. Western decision makers tend to err by treating enemy terrorist organizations as irrational or, conversely, by imputing to them the exact same rationale that they themselves employ, and then assuming they understand the organization's motives. In this context, it is important to remember that any rational decision-making process weighs the advantages and disadvantages of all possible alternative courses of action; the alternative chosen is the one that, in the eyes of the beholder, is more beneficial than harmful. By nature, this process is dependent on culture, religion, collective history, values and belief systems. A key challenge of coping with terrorist organizations, therefore, is understanding their *rationality* and that of their leaders,

with full knowledge of their cost-benefit considerations, as well as of the influences and impetuses likely to affect their process of decision making.

### **Intra- and Extra-Organizational Influences on Hamas's Motivation to Attack Israel**

As may be concluded from the above, it is not operational capability that limits Hamas's terrorist activity against Israel—at the very least as regards high-trajectory firing from the Gaza Strip at towns and villages in southern Israel. In recent years, the activity of Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations against Israel has largely been determined by their *motivation* to shoot at Israel or hold their fire. Like any other terrorist organization, Hamas's motivation to engage in actual terrorism against Israel is the outgrowth of intra- and extra-organizational influences.

Chief among the intra-organizational influences governing Hamas's policy of terrorist attacks against Israel is its fundamentalist-jihadist ideology. This is clearly delineated in Article 8 of the Hamas Charter from 1988, according to which, "Allah is [its] goal, the Prophet [its] model, the Qur'an [its] constitution, jihad [its] path, and death for Allah's sake the loftiest of [its] aspirations."<sup>12</sup> The use of terrorist activity to achieve its ideological goals is, therefore, a cornerstone of the worldview of Hamas's leaders and members. In addition, the extent and nature of Hamas's terrorist activity have in the past also been influenced by the tension, rivalry, competition and interests of its various leaders. To wit: the "external" political leadership of Hamas has been in the hands of Khaled Meshaal, who until recently operated out of Damascus; the "internal" leadership of Hamas, operating in the Gaza Strip, has been divided between the political leadership of Ismail Haniya and the military leadership of Ahmad Al-Jabari.

The internal and external leaderships of Hamas differ in their approach to terrorist attacks. It is impossible to understand these differences without analyzing the extra-organizational influences and pressures exerted on Hamas by Arab Muslim nations, chiefly Syria, Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Over the years, Hamas has benefited from the support of Syria. That Hamas's external political leadership, headed by Khaled Meshaal, had been headquartered in Damascus since 1998 enabled Syria to affect Hamas's policy regarding terrorist attacks against Israel, and to promote its own interests in the Palestinian arena and *vis à vis* Israel. The civil war in Syria, emanating from the events of the "Arab Spring," created an intolerable situation for Hamas. On the one hand, the greater Hamas's interest in preserving its good relations with Syria and its allies—Iran and Hezbollah—the greater the imperative to stand with President Bashar Al-Assad in his fight against the Syrian opposition.

On the other hand, a key member of that opposition is the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood—a sister organization and ally of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine

<sup>12</sup> The Charter of Hamas is available at: <http://www.acpr.org.il/resources/hamascharter.html>



—that is, Hamas<sup>13</sup>. Assisting Assad would therefore have hindered, and alienated, Hamas's parent organization—the Muslim Brotherhood—and the man who was Hamas's first ideologue and religious authority, Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qardawi, who had publicly expressed his support for the uprising in Syria<sup>14</sup>. Hamas quickly resolved the dilemma and effaced this dissonance by moving most of its political leadership—chiefly Khaled Meshaal—from Damascus to other Arab capitals. However, this exit from Damascus, and the concomitant loss of Syrian support and increase in tension with Iran and Hezbollah, has decreased the standing of Hamas's external leadership, and changed the balance of power between its external and internal leadership<sup>15</sup>. In this way, extra-organizational influences on Hamas's policy regarding terrorist attacks have indirectly altered intra-organizational influences on this policy.

Prior to the recent events in Syria, Hamas's external leadership had customarily been more militant in its attitude toward terrorist attacks against Israel than had its internal leadership. Perhaps because of proximity, Hamas's external leadership was influenced by, and even dependent on, the so-called “radical axis” of Syria, Iran and Hezbollah. At times, the external leadership guided Hamas's military leadership in the initiation of terrorist attacks; its attitude toward terrorist attacks was at times opposed to that of the internal political leadership, and its intervention in the policy governing terrorist attacks left the internal leadership disgruntled. Although Hamas's internal political leadership was formally subordinate to its external leadership, it was the one that carried the burden of responsibility for the situation in the Gaza Strip, needed the support of the Palestinian people, and paid the price of Israeli retaliation for terrorist attacks. Consequently, the break in communications between the external leadership of Hamas and the “radical axis” caused by the uprising in Syria, and the physical departure of the external leadership from Damascus, may reinforce Hamas's policy of restraint—even if only temporarily.

Unlike other Palestinian jihadist organizations (such as the PIJ), Hamas's relationship with Iran and its emissary, Hezbollah, has known ups and downs; traditionally, it has been founded on wary respect. On one hand, Hamas has enjoyed Iran's patronage: since the 1990s, Hamas has received copious military and financial aid from Iran. On the other hand, Hamas's leadership has been suspicious of too tight an Iranian embrace, both because a religious-ideological abyss divides Iran and

<sup>13</sup> Article 2 of the Hamas charter states: “The Islamic Resistance Movement (i.e. Hamas) is one of the bodies comprising the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. The Muslim Brotherhood is a worldwide organization, the largest Islamic movement in modern times...”.

<sup>14</sup> See the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Israeli Intelligence and Heritage Commemoration Center: <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/he/article/17811>, accessed December 11, 2011. (Hebrew and English)

<sup>15</sup> Yaari Ehud, “The Agony of Hamas,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, February 27, 2012, Available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1829>.

its Shiite allies from Sunni Hamas, and because Hamas wishes to maintain its freedom of action. Israel's exile of 415 jihadist operatives, most of them Hamas members, from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1992, only to be forced to let them return a year later, strengthened the relationship between Hamas and Hezbollah.<sup>16</sup> However, this relationship has been challenged by the uprising in Syria, as noted. In an immediate show of support for Assad, Iran sent Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah operatives to help Assad suppress the revolution. Hamas's passive support for the revolution placed it on the opposite side of the fence from Iran. Although this rift has led to a significant reduction of Iran's monetary support for Hamas, precipitating a financial crisis for the latter, it has not severed the strategic bond between the two. However, it has also led to a gradual reduction in the militant influence on Hamas of Iran and Hezbollah, further restraining Hamas's motivation to conduct terrorist attacks against Israel—at least at present.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood is the parent organization of Hamas. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, founder of Hamas, was educated in the Egyptian movement and even served time in an Egyptian prison for membership in the Brotherhood. It would thus seem that the revolutions in the Arab world which have led the Muslim Brotherhood to power in Arab Spring countries, and especially in Egypt, will play into the hands of Hamas, which defines itself as "one of the segments of the Muslim Brotherhood." Hamas leaders have watched with satisfaction the processes that led from Mubarak's fall to the parliamentary and presidential elections that have brought the Muslim Brotherhood and Muhammad Mursi, respectively, to power. Egypt now gives Hamas a crucial strategic advantage, because the Gaza Strip has historically been an integral part of Egypt, because the Egyptian border is the Gaza Strip's only friendly land border, the life and welfare of the Gaza Strip are dependent on the transfer of goods through that border, and the affinity, if not identity, of the ideologies of Hamas and Egypt's new rulers.

The revolution in Egypt and the transfer of power to the Muslim Brotherhood there have also so far served as a restraint on Hamas's terrorist attacks: during this interim stage, Hamas has not wanted the region to descend into a military conflict the outcome of which could not be predicted, and which could impede what Hamas perceives as the welcome strengthening of the Muslim Brotherhood. Unlike former President Mubarak, who saw Hamas as a danger to Egypt's stability and its relationship with Israel and to the Palestinian arena, the new Egyptian regime offers Hamas a sympathetic and strategic home front; so far, this has led Hamas to avoid conducting hasty and unconsidered terrorist attacks.

What will be the continued effect of the Islamist revolution in Egypt on Hamas's policy regarding terrorist attacks? It is too soon to tell. Of course, it will depend on the foreign policy of the Mursi government, including its attitude toward Egypt's peace agreement with Israel. Yet Mursi's personal record reveals that the

<sup>16</sup> The Lebanese government refused to let the exiles move past Israel's border, and left them vulnerable to the weather. It was Hezbollah and its patron, Iran, that aided them and met their daily needs. The intra-organizational status of these activists had improved by the time Israel was forced to return them to its territory, and their ties with Hezbollah and Iran had been reinforced.

newly-elected president of Egypt once founded “The Egyptian Association to Combat Zionism.” And it is common knowledge that the Muslim Brotherhood’s Islamist platform sees the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a religious conflict over *makaf* [Islamic holy] lands, and thereby negates Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state on those lands. Thus, the fear that recent political changes in Egypt will remove the bridle on Hamas’s terrorist activity, leading to regional escalation, is neither unreasonable nor outlandish.

If the new Egyptian government decides to strengthen its ties with Iran to create strategic balance *vis à vis* Israel, it will not bode well for regional stability. On the other hand, Egypt’s dire economic situation and its dependence on the United States may well force the Muslim Brotherhood to adopt a pragmatic policy toward Israel, at least until an alternative is found to American economic support. It is in this context that we may understand President Mursi’s declared intention of respecting “all of the agreements signed by Egypt” (including those with Israel). Hamas is thus likely to continue to be motivated to constrain its terrorist activity—at least until Egypt’s internal situation, and its relationship with Israel, on one hand, and with Iran, on the other, has been clarified and stabilized.

As a regional Sunni superpower, Saudi Arabia has significantly influenced Hamas’s terrorism policy, in part through substantial economic aid provided directly by the Saudi government or indirectly through charitable funds. Saudi Arabia has used this aid to balance, and sometimes to replace, the aid of its rival, Iran. Saudi Arabia’s ability to constrain Hamas in the future will largely depend on the policy of Saudi leadership regarding the Egypt-Iran-Saudi Arabia triangle of power. The greater the Saudi opposition to an Egyptian-Iranian alliance and the more it acts as an alternative by strengthening its relationship with Egypt, the more likely this is to have a restraining effect on Hamas’s terrorism policy. Conversely, the greater the equanimity with which Saudi Arabia accepts possible growing ties between Egypt and Iran, the more likely it is that Iran’s militant influence on Hamas will grow, mediated by Egypt.

What transpires in the Palestinian arena also exerts a key extra-organizational influence on the terrorism policy of Hamas. As noted, in addition to Hamas, the actors in this arena include other Palestinian terrorist organizations, the Palestinian Authority headed by Abu Mazen, and Palestinian public opinion. As a hybrid terrorist organization, Hamas functions simultaneously as a terrorist entity that attacks the citizens of Israel, and as a political entity in the internal Palestinian arena, where it strives to cement its rule by winning hearts and minds through extensive *dawa*—missionary work—that is, by providing religious, educational and welfare services.

Over 20 years of political and welfare activities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, supported heavily by Saudi Arabia and Iran, have borne fruit for Hamas, as evidenced by its surprise victory in the elections for the Palestinian Authority’s governing council in 2006. Despite some contradictory public opinion polls, it

appears that the status of Hamas in the Palestinian arena has only gotten stronger since 2006.<sup>17</sup> Ostensibly, Hamas is now well-positioned to benefit from the historic strengthening of Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood. It is therefore reasonable to assume that, despite reforms and an improved economic situation in the West Bank under the leadership of Abu Mazen, Hamas would gain in power if elections were to be held today in the Palestinian Authority, and might even defeat the secular Fatah. Hamas's immense, protracted investment in *dawa* has made it popular—perhaps the most popular organization in the Palestinian arena.

However, this achievement also keeps Hamas indebted to the Palestinian population and attentive to its needs, aspirations, and opinions. Hamas's relationship with the Palestinians, particularly with those who live in the Gaza Strip, is one of mutual feedback: Hamas influences the attitudes of the Palestinians, and the Palestinians' attitudes are taken into consideration by Hamas in formulating its policy regarding terrorist attacks. As a rule, fear of escalation with Israel and its implications for Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip circumscribes Hamas's terrorist attacks. However, a decline in the security of the Palestinian arena could quickly change Palestinian public opinion, and spur Hamas to attack Israel.

The Islamist terrorist organizations active in the Palestinian arena also constitute an extra-organizational influence, which has untold potential to affect Hamas's motivation to conduct terrorist attacks against Israel, corroding regional security. The greatest danger is posed by the organizations that identify ideologically with, and sometimes enjoy support from, either Iran or al Qaeda (Global Jihad). Given that the region is a hair's breadth away from deterioration, as described above, these militant Islamist terrorist organizations have immense power: they could ignite a conflagration. Terrorist attacks or high-trajectory attacks aimed at Israel from the Gaza Strip or Sinai Peninsula are liable to drag Israel down a slippery slope of preventive or retaliatory military action, which would quickly induce Hamas, under the pressure of Palestinian public opinion, to join the fray. The road from there to a regional war is shorter than ever.

Seen in this light, Hamas's policy of avoiding military conflict with these organizations (except in isolated cases) and allowing them to increase their military strength, may soon appear—if it drags Hamas, against its will, into a military conflict with Israel—to have been a double-edged sword. True, the balance of intra- and extra-organizational influences has, in recent years, acted as a constraint on Hamas's motivation to plague Israel with terrorist attacks or missile fire. However, these influences have yet to motivate Hamas to challenge the military capabilities of the other jihadist terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, even as the latter defy the authority of Hamas, endangering the region's stability.

An analysis of the web of interests of the various actors in the Middle East, their balance of power, and historical and political processes in the region, suggests that military deterioration is almost deterministic. Local and Global Jihadist organizations have studied at the feet of al Qaeda and Iran. That they are the ones

<sup>17</sup> Public opinion polls

holding the wick on the powder keg which, if ignited, would detonate the entire region, should banish sleep from the eyes of all who fear escalation in the Middle East.

One of the actors most likely to emerge defeated from such a corrosive scenario is the Palestinian Authority (PA). At present, the PA wields negligible influence on Hamas's policy of deploying terrorist attacks from the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. (It is worth noting, however, that the PA has been able to curtail the activity of Hamas members in the West Bank.) Similarly, the PA's influence on Palestinian public opinion in the Gaza Strip is minimal. Therefore, its ability to indirectly pressure Hamas through public opinion is doubtful. It appears that Abu Mazen's tactic for coping with the dangerous political changes in the Middle East, and their effect on the Palestinian arena, has been to attempt conciliation with Hamas, as if to say: "if you can't beat them, join them."

It is in this light that we may understand efforts to establish a Hamas-Fatah unity government, to be run by Palestinian technocrats until elections can be held in the PA. Presumably, an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement would balance the negative trends described above. However it is doubtful that Abu Mazen has either the will or the necessary political clout to make such an historic move, and it is doubtful there is a partner on the Israeli side who is willing to take the immense risks to Israel's security, during a sensitive and dangerous time, that such an agreement would necessitate.

The world's three superpowers, the United States, Russia and China, are also extra-organizational players likely to have an indirect but important and moderating influence on Hamas's motivation to conduct terrorist attacks. Each of these superpowers has different, sometimes contradictory, interests in the Middle East, the Muslim world, and Arab countries. However, they appear to share a common denominator: fear of regional escalation, and the implications of such escalation for the world's economy and stability. Each of the three superpowers has the potential to influence the region's players, both directly and indirectly. Russia and China, for example, can influence the behavior of Iran, Syria and possibly Egypt. The United States can influence the behavior of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and, of course, Israel. It therefore seems that a coordinated effort of these superpowers to intervene in the region with the aim of neutralizing Iran's dangerous influence while strengthening the pragmatic tendencies of the region's regimes, is more necessary today than ever before.

### **Implications for Israel**

What does all of this mean for the security of Israel? What lessons must Israel derive for its policy? Many in Israel believe that the damage to Hamas in the Gaza Strip caused by Operation Cast Lead in 2009 is the main reason Hamas's motivation to conduct terrorist attacks or high-trajectory shooting against Israel has

been dampened. Consequently, some in Israel call for embarking on another extensive military operation, to revitalize Israeli deterrence of Hamas.<sup>18</sup> The analysis presented herein should show just how very mistaken this approach is, and how great the danger it poses for Israel and the entire region.

Inarguably, the Islamist revolutions in the Arab countries neighboring Israel, and the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power in these countries, presents Israel with many, perhaps unprecedented, political and security challenges. However, in assessing the threat to its southern border, Israel must analyze in depth the intra- and extra-organizational influences on Hamas's motivation to attack, and formulate a responsible policy to ensure the safety of its citizens. Israel must use every means at its disposal to influence and pressure Hamas's leadership to choose responsibly, and avoid dangerous military "adventures."

To this end, Israel must engage the superpowers to wield their influence to ensure stability and security in the region. Concurrently, Israel must create communication channels with actors that have a direct or indirect influence on Hamas—such as Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Even if it is not possible to normalize relations with these countries in the current geo-political climate, Israel must nevertheless use them to establish mechanisms of negotiation, arbitration, and mediation that will halt any deterioration in security, and facilitate a cease fire if necessary. Israel must avoid a knee-jerk response to provocations by Palestinian or other organizations that are emissaries of Iran and Global Jihad.

Of course, Israel has the right and the obligation to use its military to thwart terrorist attacks and high-trajectory shooting—acts that challenge its sovereignty and endanger the lives of its citizens. However, Israel must weigh the need for, and the effectiveness of, military action against the danger it poses of creating a worst-case scenario: escalation to a regional war. Israel should consider proactive military operations and targeted interventions as a last resort only; even so, it should prefer acts conducted behind the scenes, "under the radar," which will leave no traces and which thus are less likely to lead to unbridled escalation. Israel must increase its intelligence capabilities and efforts in the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. It must develop defensive capabilities founded on innovative technologies, which will thwart attempted terrorist attacks and reduce the damage of successful attacks.

At the same time, Israel must use classic channels of communication (radio and television), as well as the Internet, to send messages in Arabic to the population of the Palestinian territories and of neighboring Arab countries independently, without the agency of local leaders. Israel must strive for peace even as it prepares for war. Given current regional processes, Israel must try to bridge remaining gaps with the Palestinian Authority and its leader, Abu Mazen, and revive the peace process.

Lastly, Israel must prepare for a regional war. Given the volatile situation of the Middle East, in general, and of Israel's southern border, in particular, the space between a regional war and the current tense quiet may be no greater than the

<sup>18</sup> Efraim Inbar and Max Singer, "The Opportunity in Gaza," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 13, 2012. Available at: <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=261731>.



distance between the launching pad of a single Qassam rocket and the place that it lands. If and when such a rocket were to land on a crowd of people in Israel—a school, a hotel, a mall—killing and injuring dozens, heaven forbid, Israel would be obligated to retaliate against Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip, in direct proportion to the severity of the damage caused in Israel. It is reasonable to assume that this would lead Hamas to fire a large volley of rockets deep into Israeli territory...which would in turn force Israel to conduct an extensive military ground operation in the Gaza Strip, and perhaps even re-occupy it to silence the rockets.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Israel must prepare for a scenario in which it is dragged, against its will, into a ground operation, which may lead to a limited or comprehensive regional war. This would require Israel to prepare its military system, build a base of international legitimacy for such an operation and a base of internal consensus within Israeli society, prepare the Israeli home front for potential damage and loss, define attainable goals for the operation itself, and set policy for “the day after”—if and when Israel again conquers the Gaza Strip.



<sup>19</sup> Based on Israel's past experience in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, massive air activity, effective though it may be, does not eliminate the sources of rocket fire embedded in densely-populated civilian centers. Moreover, it causes undue and disproportionate harm to civilians.