5.1 ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT FROM GAZA STRIP (2003 – 2005)

On 18 December 2003, Ariel Sharon revealed his initiative for a unilateral withdrawal from some territory and settlements at the Herzliya Conference of the Private Israeli University, the Interdisciplinary Centre, Herzliya. Later on it was disclosed that it will be the Gaza Strip and four isolated, nearly empty settlements in the northern part of the West Bank.¹ The political strategy behind the Disengagement Plan remained unclear, although Sharon had an obvious strategy in his mind. In the months preceding Sharon revelation of his Disengagement Plan, there had been growing signs of dissatisfaction and protest within Israeli public. This was further accelerated by a chain of events such as² – in September 2003, a group of Israeli Air Force pilots, both on active duty and in reserve, spoke out against the policy of “targeted killings.” In a letter addressed to General Halutz, they refused to participate in the future missions in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank which brought the lives of civilians at risk. Two colonels, five lieutenant-colonels, nine commanders, six captains, and, particularly, General Yiftah Spector, who had led the attack on the Osirak Nuclear Reactor in Iraq in 1981, were the signatories of the letter.³ The event followed by the critical comments made even by the Chief of Staff, protest by soldiers

² Ibid., p. 121.
protecting settlements in Gaza, and perhaps more importantly, the criticism of the government expressed by four former heads of the Israeli Security Services in an interview to the Israeli press.

In the midst of these events, which were responsible in accelerating the protest, the Geneva Accord was announced on 12 October 2003. According to the Accord, Israel would evacuate 98 percent of the West Bank and most settlements, and the entire of Gaza Strip. A protected passage would be built between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Jerusalem would be the capital of both the states, with all Arab neighborhoods as well as esplanade of the Mosque under Palestinian sovereignty, and the Western Wall and the Jewish quarter of the Old City remaining under Israeli control. The Palestinian refugees of 1948 would be compensated and the right of return to Israeli territory would be placed under the control of Israel. These series of events catapulted the annual Rabin memorial rally of early November 2003 into a massive protest demonstration organized by the Israeli Peace Camp. After one month, Sharon began his initiative.

Another contributing factor was the extensive comments in the press regarding changing demographics of the area. It was common knowledge that very shortly Jews would become a minority in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. This type of situation would bring either an apartheid situation – an Israeli minority denying basic rights to an Arab majority under its control, or the extension of rights to all, leading ultimately a bi-national state, which would actually be the end of the Zionist ideal of a state for the Jewish people: the Jews would become a minority population in their historic homeland as in the Diaspora. Due to this realization, Sharon decided that it was time to act unilaterally to reduce the Arab population under Israeli control by 1.3 million (the population of the Gaza Strip) and thereby postpone the demographic sword of Damocles. At least official voices from

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Sharon’s supporters and occasionally from Sharon himself could be heard referring to the demographic logic behind the Disengagement. The Disengagement Plan officially presented on 28 May 2004 but it was approved by the Knesset in October, announcing that Israel “will evacuate the Gaza Strip, including all the Israeli settlements currently existing there, and will redeploy outside the territory of the Strip.”

According to the Disengagement Plan, Israel would withdraw from the Gaza Strip – with the exception of the 100 meter-broad Philadelphia corridor on the border line with Egypt – and redeploy outside it. Israel later on agreed to evacuate the corridor in support of Egyptian military control. Pending the final position of the corridor, Israeli army began to construct a wall along its 12 kilometers that will consist of “eight-meter tall concrete plates that could easily be eliminated. The new fence will be amalgamated with surveillance posts and a new highway for heavy armored vehicles paved on its southern side.”

The plan provided Israel “absolute authority” over Gaza’s territorial waters, land borders and airspace, which interprets its complete control over the movement of goods and people into and out of the Gaza Strip. Israel will also “carry on, for full charge, to deliver electricity, gas, petrol and water to the Palestinians, in conformity with current arrangements.” Israel will also carry on collecting customs duties in place of the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli currency (shekel) will continue to be the local currency. Additionally, the Israeli government is constructing a new terminal at the place where the Gaza Strip, Egypt and Israel meet, which would necessitate Palestinian labor and goods to go via Israeli territory. Israel’s Interior Ministry will have the complete jurisdiction over the matters regarding the issuing of Palestinian identity cards and all population statistics such as deaths, births, marriages and besides this all Palestinians must carry on to be registered with the ministry. In any circumstances the Palestinian Authority will not act unilaterally and issue Palestinian

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7 Ibid., pp. 121-122.
identity cards in view of the fact that Israel fully controls the Palestinian movements within the West Bank and international border crossing.\textsuperscript{10}

As for the border separating the Gaza Strip from Israel, a second wall was already under construction. It was being constructed to the east of the existing wall on Israeli territory and generates a buffer zone around the Gaza Strip 70 kilometers long and several hundred meters wide. The barrier will be supplemented with optical and electronic sensor that will discover any attempts to cross it. \textit{“It will facilitate us to better prevent illegal entries of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip,”} as stated by an Israeli army source. \textit{“We are witnessing increased attempts to cross the existing barrier around the Gaza Strip, although mostly by workers looking for employment rather than terrorists.”}

The Disengagement Plan has not mentioned any link between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, although there has been some conversation of a railway line between the two territories. The Oslo Accords confirmed that the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were “one territorial unit,” but it became obvious that Israel will not accept a genuine territorial linkage between them. With implementation of the Disengagement plan, the Gaza’s population was effectively sealed in, and the national dismemberment of the Palestinians which has been for long period a corner stone of Israeli policy was realized, at least with regard to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The section of the Disengagement plan that speaks about the West Bank called for the evacuation of four of the 120 Jewish settlements in “an area” to the north of the Nablus, allocating for territorial contiguity for Palestinians there. On the other hand, in July the Israeli security cabinet ascertained that Israel would “continue to keep the security control of the territory around the four West Bank settlements and maintain existing military bases in the area.”\textsuperscript{11}

In other areas of the West Bank, Israel will “help in advancing the transportation infrastructure in an attempt to facilitate the contiguity of Palestinian


transportation.” This “contiguity of transportation” will have to fulfill the following conditions:

1. A planned 620 – kilometer barrier (of which 205 kilometers have already been constructed) made of nine-meter high concrete slabs and impermeable walls, built on confiscated West Bank land; currently 10 percent of entire Palestinian population – 242,000 people – are separated in the closed military zone between Israeli border line and the western side of the wall, and 12 percent are isolated internally from their land as a result of settler roads and housing blocks. Once the wall is completed the Palestinians will have access to the 54 percent of the West Bank land.

2. Twenty-nine settler bypasses or highways spanning 400 kilometer of the West Bank, explicitly planned to provide freedom of movement for 400,000 Jewish settlers at the same time imprisoning 3 million Palestinians in there besieged and separated enclaves.

3. Forty tunnels have been designed for the West Bank of which 28 have been finished that will link Jewish settlements to one another and to Israel.

4. The proposed construction of 6,400 new settlement houses in the West Bank. In which almost 42 settlements are being enlarged and commercial areas, colleges, hostels and parks are being built.

5. The separation of East Jerusalem – the cultural and commercial heart of the West Bank – from Bethlehem and Ramallah and rest of the West Bank.

6. The partition of southern and northern West Bank; and the separation of Gaza, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, Ramallah, Tulkarm, Salfit, Qalqilya, Jenin and Nablus.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 315-316.}

The Disengagement Plan, whatever it claims to be, was a mechanism for Israel’s prolonged occupation of the West Bank land and the physical amalgamation of that land into Israel. In the one hand, the plan states that “in any future permanent status arrangements, there will be no Israeli villages and towns in the Gaza strip. On the other hand, “it was obvious that in the West Bank there are areas which will be part of the state of Israel, together with major Israeli population hubs, villages, towns, cities and protected areas and other places of exclusive interest to Israel.”
Therefore, it was the first instance that the formal annexation of the West Bank land has been openly and officially proposed. Everywhere with the exception of the vacated area in the northern West Bank, Israeli settlement can persist without hindrance. Israel whether under the government of Likud or Labor, has always struggled for the dominance of Palestinian land in the West Bank, and through the Gaza Disengagement Plan it obviously assumes that the battle can ultimately be won. The Disengagement Plan was not intended to provide more territorial compromise, concessions and withdrawals, unilateral disengagement can only strengthen Israeli control, leading Palestinians towards greater oppression, isolation and ghettoization.13

Aside from preliminary removal of military equipments and introductory measures, the actual withdrawal occurred in mid-August 2005, ending just within a weak. Israeli defense forces and police personnel performed the evacuations, which shifted 15,000 civilians (in which 6,000 were nonresidents) out of four settlements in the northern West Bank and 21 in the Gaza Strip. Although resistance arose, by means of few detentions, the process of disengagement went comparatively smoothly. Once the settlements were evacuated, the Israeli soldiers completed the process and left the Gaza Strip in early September 12, finishing its 38-year presence in the territory. At a flag lowering occasion the night before, Brigadier General Aviv Kochavi, commander-in-chief of the Israeli Defense Forces in Gaza, said, “The gate that is closing after us is also a gate that is opening.”14 However, in spite of the Brigadier’s optimism, life for Gazans has further worsened because of Israel’s withdrawal.

In the period earlier to Israeli disengagement, news on Gaza were already revealing its grave economic condition and attendant effects of occupation, isolation and the population’s immobility. Malnutrition levels reached at alarming stage and were being compared to sub-Saharan Africa, with unemployment at more than 50 percent, and almost everybody relying on, to varying degrees, on assistance from international aid agencies. As stated by the then – commissioner general of UNRWA,

“only the efforts of the United Nations, the Red Cross and other aid agencies have prevented the economic collapse. UNRWA alone feeds 1.3 million people and all but a few Palestinians now depend to some extent on foreign aid to survive.”  

The situation continues to deteriorate, with UN relief organizations, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNRWA, alerting that Gaza is “on the threshold of a humanitarian disaster due to lack of money and food.”  

The Israel based human rights organization Gisha, in an inclusive report of January 2007 on post – disengagement circumstances in the territory asserted that:

*Israeli actions since September 2005 – including severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza and an economic stronghold on the funding of civil services – have contributed to an economic and humanitarian crisis in Gaza not seen in the 38 years of Israeli control that preceded the withdrawal of permanent ground troops.*

The weeks since the final Israeli defense forces withdrawal of the Gaza Strip have been marked by violence. There were almost daily battles between Hamas and the PNA, Hamas and Fatah, and Gaza’s various clans, militia and security forces. Although the disengagement did not result in the disintegration of the Palestinian politics or a breakdown of the Palestinian community but it has undoubtedly made the condition worse, prearranged Israel’s policy to redesign the occupation without ending it – that was to maintain external control of Gaza while leaving internal control, thereby creating a vacuum that was being filled by competing internal forces. As stated by Darry Li of Harvard, “the dilemma...is how to maximize control over the territory of the Gaza Strip while minimizing responsibility in the eyes of the world for

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the welfare of its inhabitants. The upshot is a situation in which Israel exercises less direct control than before, while preventing anyone else from fully taking over.”18

5.2 HAMAS ELECTORAL VICTORY (2006)

After Arafat’s death in 2004, the political vacuum created by his absence and January 2006 elections presented new opportunities for Hamas political participation. From 1996 Hamas’ prime rival Fatah dominated the PNA. Hamas refused to participate in legislative elections of 1996 because it viewed that it was the product of Oslo Accords which it had vehemently criticized on ideological grounds. Hamas also feared that by participating in legislative elections of 1996, the movement is going to recognize a peace-process which has been rejected by it earlier and the growing popularity of the Oslo Peace Process among Palestinians is not going to bring better results in that elections for Hamas.19

The electoral platform ‘Change and Reform’ was a fourteen page election manifesto presented by Hamas. The electoral platform ‘Change and Reform’ adopted by Hamas for the 2006 legislative council elections explains that Hamas’ participation in the elections ‘takes place within a comprehensive program for the liberation of Palestine and return of the Palestinian people to their lands, and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. It reiterates that ‘this participation will support “resistance” as a strategic choice accepted by the Palestinian people to end the Israeli occupation’. In confirming these principles in the preamble of its electoral statement, Hamas was anxious to make a clear distinction between its participation and its rejection of the Oslo Accords. Hamas was fully aware that this distinction will not be able to satisfy the whole Palestinian population because legislative council itself was the result of the Oslo Accords, therefore Hamas asserted that its participation constitute a form of its wider ‘resistance program’. At the end of the long fourteen page statement, Hamas made even bolder statement that ‘realities on

the ground have made Oslo all but in the past...all parties including the Zionist occupier speak about the demise of Oslo’.  

The circumstances had changed dramatically by 2006. The Peace Process was in tatters and Fatah was increasingly weakened and fragmented internally and as perceived by general Palestinians that was increasingly ineffective and venal. Fatah and President Mahmud Abbas were unable to improve law and order or deteriorating economic conditions. Now, the political system was opened for Hamas participation with presumed prospects of success. Additionally, gaining political power against Fatah was a common interest of both hardliners and moderate leaders within Hamas. To participate in elections presented an opportunity to maintain the position of Hamas which it had achieved in Al-Aqsa Intifada and to cope with decreasing public support for violence. 

Hamas move toward political participation was further facilitated by a momentum shift from hardliners to moderates. During Al-Aqsa intifada, the military wing of Hamas was greatly weakened due to the Israeli counter attacks and improved intelligence. Furthermore, Hamas had to compensate for the loss of the senior leadership due to the Israeli targeted killings and arrests. The Israeli containment policy of its military activities greatly undermined its armed operational capabilities. Syria withdrew its strong support for Hamas and pressurized its leaders to halt their military operations because it was concerned about the possible U.S. actions against it. The political legitimacy Hamas could achieve from elections presented an ‘insurance policy’ against possible repressive actions by PNA security figures like Mohammed Dahlan and Jibril Rajoub, both of whom could well have exercised a major crackdown on Hamas had their faction, Fatah, retained complete control of the PNA. Hamas realized that by participating in Palestinian legislative elections it could gain legitimacy which would prevent PNA to take repressive measures towards the movement. Further, the Israeli disengagement from Gaza Strip in 2005 made a

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suitable starting point for political participation as Hamas credited itself for forcing Israel to withdraw from Gaza.\(^\text{23}\)

Hamas popularity was not result of sudden shift in Palestinian political opinion rather it was the culmination of a decade-long process of alienation, both from Israel and from Fatah leadership which failed to deliver results in every sphere. Yet, Hamas ability to win more support than Fatah was also influenced by developments that took place in last few months before the elections. These included the failure of the PNA to “control the narrative” regarding Israel’s disengagement and to ensure that it could transform Gaza into a prosperous entity rather than a ‘big jail’. In a year, between December 2004 and December 2005, Hamas popularity increased by 55 percent.

The rise of Hamas throughout 2005, coupled with Fatah’s failure to deal with fragmentation and with PNA corruption, dealt a severe blow to Abbas’s efforts to take advantage of the ceasefire in order to formulate a national security policy and to effectively engage Israel and the US. Both Israel and United States were not interested in serious engagement with a leader who had failed to take charge of the PNA. The Peace Process remained stagnate throughout 2005.\(^\text{24}\) In the broader political context Hamas had shown pragmatism and moderation during the past years and this tendency had been crystal clear since the movement opted for political participation. This tendency culminated during the 2006 election campaign and in negotiations with Fatah and other Palestinian secular forces.

According to Khaled Hroub, who analyzed in depth the electoral platform for “Change and Reform,” the election program as such constitutes “the broadest vision that Hamas had ever presented concerning all aspects of Palestinian life.” Hroub stated that the program presented by Hamas “was designed to carry out exactly the kinds of reform that had been demanded by international community.” As the document expressed the need for a fight against all forms of corruption, it called for a separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers, for equality before the


law, and in the document Hamas called for a political system based on political freedom, pluralism, and on peaceful rotation of power.\textsuperscript{25}

Showing political pragmatism Hamas, after less than a year of attempts to avenge the assassination of its leaders, began to realize its military limitations and concentrated on its political successes by accepting unilateral suspension in fighting. After Arafat’s death, pressing to suspend armed struggle was not an easy task in the face of continued Israeli targeted killings against Palestinian factions and against Hamas particularly. During 2003 to 2004 Israeli fatalities caused by Palestinian attacks declined by 36 percent but the number of those killed as a result of Israeli targeted killings of Hamas leaders remained at the same level which was 57 in 2003 compared to 55 in 2004. By adopting the policy to suspend armed attacks against Israel prohibited Hamas in making mistakes that many organizations always make as they try to demonstrate their feeling of vengeance rather than lay low and renew capabilities for fighting in future.

It was the suspension of attacks which enable Hamas to give up its boycott of participation in the political structure of the PNA and enter the political battle in full force by adopting a very critical stand against the new Palestinian leadership. In an attempt to consolidate his power, Arafat’s successor, Mahmud Abbas adopted a two-stage strategy by divorcing the Presidential elections to the legislative council. His aim was to centralize power before legislative elections. By contrast, Hamas emphasized that the presidential and legislative elections take place simultaneously, as they had in 1996. As Hamas claimed that the presidential elections were illegitimate, it naturally refrained from presenting a candidate to the presidency in 9 January 2005 elections.\textsuperscript{26}

Though displeased by Abbas’s decision to hold the presidential election, Hamas nevertheless eagerly plunged into the campaign for elections to the legislative council. One of the most important issues was the electoral system to be used in


deciding the then 88 seats, subsequently expanded to 132. In a meeting between Palestinian factions in February 2005 in Cairo mediated by Egyptians, Fatah committed itself, by the urging of Hamas and other factions, to the compromise position when it agreed to a system in which half of the seats would be contested according to the old system (the multiple member district system operated in the 1996 elections) and half in which lists would contest elections as a single constituency. Even after this, it took another four months of wrangling – sufficient to postpone the elections from stipulated date in the summer of 2005 to January 2006 – to turn the bill into law finally on 18 June 2005. To minimize their probable losses the incumbents voted in the law only after they enlarged the legislative council considerably from 88 to 132 members, half of whom were to be elected according to the multiple-member district system. Actually, Hamas’ subsequent electoral victory would have not been possible under the old system due to the rivalry between official and non-official candidates, which divided the nationalist vote.27

As election process unfolded, it became increasingly apparent that while Fatah possessed quantity Hamas made up for it in quality. Sharp, often overlapping ideological, geographical, generational, and professional divisions between bureaucrats and militia men hampered Fatah’s ability to project itself as a unified party or to mobilize and campaign successfully. The fragmented Fatah military wing made the situation even more complicated. The abundance of armed groups, many heavily armed, increased the probability that political rivalries over attaining a slot on the list or candidacy in a particular districts would be settled by force rather than by any civil procedure. Under these circumstances it was not surprising that irregularities in drawing up membership lists prompted acts of violence during the Fatah primaries in December 2005. Mahmud Abbas, while presiding over the Fatah Central Committee, stated that “cheating was massive.” Armed Fatah groups subsequently broke into the Central Election Commission regional offices to protest the nomination process, threatening to prevent elections altogether. Their violence was directed against Hamas also.

While Fatah with every passing day was presenting itself as a lawless militia, Hamas tried to project an image of political civility by creating a nominally

27 Ibid.,
independent party, the list for Change and Reform, whose title significantly made no reference to religion or to the movement behind it, and nominated many professionals that appealed to the votes rather than merely to Hamas members. The composition of the countrywide list of 62 candidates clearly reflected a technocratic thrust as well as desire to be broadly representative. There were 34 candidates with a professional or academic title (Teacher, PhD, MD, Engineer, and Lawyer) preceding their names. Ten candidates (some of them professionals) were women. Hamas’ campaign for legislative council seemed to have been deeply influenced by the campaign for the four rounds of local elections during the course of 2005 in which its lists emphasized local concerns, professional integrity, expertise, and a willing to work with members of other lists after the elections.²⁸

Yet, however much Hamas downplayed either its religious or guerilla character in composing its lists or in its political rhetoric, it nevertheless retained its basic identity. The list included at least twelve candidates with the title of Sheikh or with an affiliation to religious institutions and the Waqf administration, along with several Hamas deportees and prisoners. Politically, Hamas continued to be loyal to its basic objective. On the eve of the fourth round of municipal elections, in an election rally in a town in Gaza, Mahmud al-Zahar claimed that one of the Hamas’ objectives was “to protect the resistance project with the goal of completing the liberation of occupied Palestinian lands.” During the election campaign it was clear that Hamas was gaining popularity due to the internecine conflict within Fatah, Hamas decisive electoral victory on 26 January 2006 surprised most analysts, including Palestinians. Hamas’s Change and Reform list won 74 seats out of 132, with Fatah trailing with only 45. However, the victory must also be placed in proper perspective. Rather than being a landslide, in the unified national list it was a very close race, with Hamas securing 440,409 of the votes and 29 seats against Fatah which drew 410,554 of the votes and 28 seats. In the districts, by contrast, Fatah’s performance was disastrous, with 45 seats going to Hamas against only 17 for Fatah.

The gap between the close race in the proportional list vote and decisive victory in the district lists shows that the victory for Hamas was just as much of Fatah’s making as it was due to the movement’s own efforts. In such constituencies

²⁸ Ibid., p. 98.
small differences in the number of votes cast to any particular candidate often determines who wins the seat. Many Fatah candidates contested even though they were not officially approved, thus splitting the vote in their camp and ensuring the election of Hamas candidates.29

The widespread activities within civil society, the perceived non-corruption in Hamas parlance, ‘White Sheets’ – inside the civil society institutions linked to the movement’s steadfast rejection of the failed Oslo Peace Process and their continued struggle against the Israeli occupation no doubt helped to create the political earthquake in January 2006. The elections signaled the most radical political shift in the Palestinian history since Yasser Arafat and his Fatah movement took control of PLO following the defeat in 1967. Hamas’ electoral victory was also a reaction against the inefficiency, corruption and internecine fighting characterizing the PLO and Palestinian National Authority (PNA), as well as their inability to realize the movement’s political agenda during the almost four decades of nationalist-controlled Palestinian politics. Hamas made history in January 2006, sweeping away Fatah’s monopoly of power in free and fair democratic elections. A new phase in Palestinian politics dominated by Islamist political culture began.30

Although Hamas won political power in January 2006 but they had severe difficulties in exercising it.31 Hamas subsequently came under massive pressure after their electoral victory, as the United States and European Union insisted that Hamas recognize the state of Israel, renounce violence and recognize the previous agreements. When Hamas refused to accept these demands, economic and aid sanctions were imposed on the Palestinian Authority (PA).32

29 Ibid., pp. 98-99.
31 Ibid.,
Immediately Israel withheld its monthly payments of more than $50 million, consisted of tax receipts and customs generally collected for and paid to the Palestinian Authority. The tactic to withhold revenue that assists “the most foreign-aid dependent society on earth” was casually described by Dov Weisglass: “The idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet.”33 “The intention” as reported in the New York Times, “is to starve the Palestinian Authority of money and international connections to the point where... the Palestinians will be so unhappy with life under Hamas that they will return to office a reformed and chastened Fatah movement.”34 The incapacity to pay over 150,000 state-owned staffs, most getting nothing and not more than 50 percent of their salaries is just an example of the consequences brought to bear by such sanctions. Although aid increased between 2006 and 2007, the bulk of assistance was to address immediate concern, not long-term, infrastructural development. Moreover, the boycott sustained until June 2007 creating a bad condition far worse in the occupied territories, and the Gaza Strip bearing the majority of the hardship.35

Hamas democratic victory not lasted for long not only for Hamas but also for the Palestinian people, followed by an U.S. and Israel – led international economic and political sanctions of the newly elected Palestinian government. The embargo amounted to a kind of collective penalty against the whole Palestinian population and, it was the first example in the history of this struggle that the international community enforced embargo on the occupied rather than the occupier. Through imposing international economic and financial sanctions and attaching conditions to urgently required help, the boycott intended to force Palestinians to overthrow the government they had democratically elected.

The Bush administration was unwilling to accept or incapable of realizing that Fatah had been vanquished politically for its year’s of corruption and incompetence

and that no amount of coercion could overturn that. The tragic mockery is that Hamas announced repeatedly that it wanted to rule normally in absence of sanctions but bloodshed between Gaza and Israel continued well into post-disengagement period, characterized by regular Israeli air attacks against militants and supposed bomb-manufacturing locations. The casualty on the civilian population in these targeted killings, as indicated, is generally significant. However, regardless of the expected consequences of firing at human being from helicopter gunships – well more than a dozen civilians killed with more injured in June 2006 only – Prime Minister Ehud Olmert vowed to continue the policy, stating “I am deeply sorry for the residents of Gaza, but the lives, security and well-being of the residents of Sderot is even more important.” At the last part of June the hostility reached war-like situation.

In an under-reported episode on June 24, the Israel army, in its first raid ever since the August 2005 pulling out, entered Gaza and kidnapped two civilians. The two brothers, Mustafa Abu Maumar and Osama, were suspected by Israeli in connection with Hamas terrorist activity, while Palestinian sources together with Hamas, stated that the two brothers were sons of a Hamas activist and have nothing to do with the organization. On the next day, Palestinian militants assaulted IDF post just outside a border crossing at the south end of the Gaza Strip, in this attack two Israeli soldiers were killed and a third was kidnapped, Corporal Gilad Shalit. Not only a reaction to June 24 event, the abduction of the soldier was commonly viewed in the perspective of Israel keeping approximately 9,000 Palestinian prisoners, with 809 of them being held under “administrative detention” in other words without charge or trial – considered by many as a kind of abduction. Nevertheless, Shalit’s abduction started a tornado in the media, together with orders by Ehud Olmert for immediate attacks on the Gaza Strip under the codename “Operation Summer Rain.”

After two days of Corporal’s kidnapping, IDF troops and tanks poured into the Gaza Strip, supported by aerial bombardment. The offensive marked the bombings of bridges, water tanks, roads, and power plants, as a result 75 percent of the region’s electricity being knocked out. Increasing its reaction, Israeli defense forces captured 64 Hamas’ members in the West Bank in which 23 were democratically elected legislators. Further, Israeli fighter jets bombed the residence of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, allegedly sending a message to the Hamas’ leadership residing in Syria, namely, Khaled Mishal, whom Israel was asserting orchestrated the June 25 attack and abduction.40 The offensive lasted until Israel and Palestinian Authority agreed to a ceasefire which came into effect on 26 November, bring about a short break of the death and destruction, and Israel’s withdrawal from coastal territory.41

5.3 FORMATION AND BREAKDOWN OF THE NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT

After winning election in January 2006, Hamas made it clear that it wanted to form a national coalition government together with Fatah and other political factions represented in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Hamas officials also stated that they were not opposed to forming a technocratic government with one of the cabinet ministers having an explicitly party affiliation. Some manifested their support for President Mahmoud Abbas and for sooner or later joining the PLO under the right circumstances. Hamas was also pursuing a strategy to let the Fatah – dominated PLO to carry out the government’s foreign policy while the new Hamas led government or the PNA would focus on internal social and economic affairs. As such its leaders were thinking to hand over Abbas, in his capacity as the PLO’s president (and not the


PNA), the foreign affairs portfolio. The purpose was to stay away from a direct confrontation between Hamas and Israel and place Abbas as a mediator.\(^{42}\)

As Fatah refused to participate in a government of national unity, the cabinet formed by Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) at the end of March 2006 was made up exclusively of members or allies of Hamas. Unwilling to participate in any meeting of Council of Ministers, president Abbas was particularly adamant in denying Hamas any competence in matters of internal security. Abbas did not believe that Hamas cabinet would last, and his initiatives in the name of “the sovereignty of the people” were planned repeatedly as a way of marginalizing, if not pushing aside, the victor of the legislative elections. Thus, in contradiction with the letter of Basic Law, in June 2006 Abbas called for a national referendum (never held), summoning population to pronounce itself on “National Conciliation Document.”\(^{43}\)

Fatah, for its part, continuously showed its refusal to let Hamas govern. Informal groups and members of security forces attached (\textit{de jure or de facto}) to the presidency assailed the very symbols of the Authority from which they felt dispossessed; ministries as well as Palestinian legislative council (PLC) and Prime Minister’s offices were vandalized. The Israeli government, aside from its routine occupation and blockade of the Gaza Strip, froze the transfer of taxes levied on all merchandize imported to Palestinian territories in the name of the PNA, in conformity with the Paris Accords of 1994. The total sum in 2005, according to the World Bank, came to at least 60 percent of the PNA’s revenue.

As of 30 January 2006, the Quartet (the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and Russia) made all cooperation conditional on a “\textit{commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of the State of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap}.”\(^{44}\) As Hamas refused to comply with the demands, the Quartet froze all its direct aid and cancelled officially the mechanism setup in 2002 to centralize the management of funds within

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 211.


a transparent Ministry of Finance. In the framework of a “Transitory International Mechanism” (TIM), the presidency and the “good” non-governmental organizations (NGOs) thus became the new beneficiaries of increased aid but deprived of its part devoted to economic development. The United States further forced the international banking system to discontinue transactions with the cabinet. These measures brought about an immediate social crisis. In the Gaza Strip, unemployment reached 36 percent and it was estimated that 87 percent of its population was living below the poverty line.45

After more than a year of intense negotiations, and Palestinians on the verge of a civil war together with Saudi mediation bring a summit meeting of Mecca in February 2007. The summit brought together the President, Prime Minister, and responsible parties in Fatah and Hamas. The parties reached an agreement for the framing of a Unity Cabinet, based on the Document of National Accord, to which was added respect for agreements signed by the PLO and an explicit reference to Arab resolutions.46 Thus, Hamas and Fatah and a large number of other secular forces created the first ever fragile Palestinian National Unity Government in March 2007.

In fact, this event witnessed the level of pragmatism shown by the leadership of Hamas. Not only did they insist on the need of national unity immediately after the election victory, they also showed willingness of inclusion. Some secularists in Palestine indicated that they are nervous that Hamas will use its power to Islamize society, but Hamas made clear that they are genuinely pragmatic and ready to compromise and include even atheists. The appointment of the Minister of Culture, Bassam al-Salehi, in the unity government provides an example of Hamas pragmatism. Bassam al-Salehi comes from the Palestinian Peoples Party formerly known as the Palestinian Communist Party. The mere fact that the Islamists accepted a communist in government in the role of Minister of Culture, which in Islamist circles is an office of high importance due to culture’s influence on public morale, is a

46 Ibid.,
proof of the movement’s readiness to take responsibility for the interest of the nation.\textsuperscript{47}

However, on 17 March 2007, the PLC approved a National Unity Cabinet. Ismail Haniyeh confirmed in his duties as Prime Minister, headed it, accompanied by a Fatah Vice-Prime Minister. With the Popular Front of Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Islamic Jihad refusing to become associated with the executive, cabinet consisted of 12 Hamas ministers, 6 Fatah ministers, 4 ministers from “small” parties, and 3 independents. Officially, the Quartet timidly welcomed the installation of this cabinet. Announcing the resumption of its aid, it nonetheless maintained the TIM and abstained from renewing direct financing. Moreover, the Israeli government refused to resume the transfer of the taxes it collects for the PNA and to handover the roughly $600 million it had placed in escrow.\textsuperscript{48}

Actually, the National Unity Government did not last for long. Power sharing proved to be more difficult than anticipated, especially within the field of security. The factional conflict between Hamas and Fatah culminated in June 2007, with scenes in Gaza resembling a civil war. The Palestinian civil strife in Gaza led to a political division of the Palestinian territories divided in a West Bank controlled by Mahmud Abbas and Salam Fayyad and a Gaza Strip controlled by the domestically elected Hamas government. This resulted in eventual break down of the National Unity Government.\textsuperscript{49}

5.4 GAZA CIVIL WAR AND HAMAS’ TAKEOVER OF GAZA

Domestically, the newly emergent Hamas government had to face the reality of a split regime: a parliamentary majority and cabinet headed by Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh and an incumbent President Abu Mazen who enjoyed the


support of the security forces, of which 75 percent voted for Fatah in legislative council elections. The tension was aptly captured by an editor of a Palestinian daily who wrote about the prospects of “Algerianization” of the situation, a reference to the Algerian military regime’s abrogation of the second round of elections in 1992 after the Islamist FIS won conclusively in the first balloting. This coup set off a bloody Islamist insurgency against Algerian regime.

For Hamas, it was critical to bring the security forces under the control of its government, and more specifically, under the jurisdiction of the Hamas controlled Ministry of Interior. The new Hamas government argued plausibly that placing the bulk of security forces under the government’s wing was in accord with the modifications in the PNA Basic Law, which ironically Mahmud Abbas had introduced when he was Prime Minister during his struggle with Yasser Arafat.50

The friction reached all the way into the security institutions, which spring 2006 were still in the process of being reformed. In April 2006, Abbas reinforced the Palestinian Guard and made it answerable directly to him, and also established an organization tasked with monitoring the borders, which in practice meant the crossing between Gaza and Egypt at Rafah. Hamas responded by establishing the Security Forces Unit, a body that took it orders from the Ismail Haniyeh government’s Interior Ministry, thereby challenging Abu Mazen’s authority. These security forces later called Executive Force51 was headed by Said Siam, well known one of the movement’s hawks and one of the man who had contacts not just with Hamas’s military wing, but with other armed factions within the Gaza Strip. Actually many said it was Siam himself who insisted for the Force’s establishment.

The Executive Force brought together the groups that had been established and consolidated during the Al-Aqsa intifada. Thus, it was not just Hamas’s militants who joined the Executive Force, but more importantly the members of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), as well. The PRC was itself heterogeneous and not

integrated into Islamist movement. In a move that appeared to be aimed at strengthening links with PRC, Siam appointed as Director General of his ministry the founder of the PRC, Jamal Abu Samhadana, who was also second on Israel’s most wanted list. Abu Samhadana’s appointment, therefore, was yet another spark over a very dry pyre, and one that could not but seriously embarrass Abbas.\textsuperscript{52} Abbas quickly ruled it illegal and ordered its dissolution. In a meeting of the PLO Executive Council, he claimed that the attempt to transform Hamas’s military arm into an official PNA security force could begin a round of internal strife that had to be avoided at all costs.\textsuperscript{53} The Executive Force initially comprised 3,000 men but practically doubled within a few months. The perception was that the Force had been established for two reasons: to reinforce and “regularize” the military tools at Hamas’s disposal in the Gaza Strip and to establish an organization strong enough to confront the Preventive Security Force – which had traditionally been close to Dahlan – head-on. The sheer numbers were still relatively small, compared to the 60,000 – strong forces controlled by the Presidency. The 3,000 men initially incorporated under Siam’s \textit{tanfisiyya}, however, gave Fatah more than a little to ponder, not merely because of their training and their cohesion as a force and their religious zeal, but because they heralded a confrontation that could be expected to be bloody, given what had already happened in the Strip.\textsuperscript{54}

Within five months of the election, the Executive Force was involved in violent confrontation with both rival security forces and Fatah. The conflict took an international dimension after the United States, worried about the empowerment of the Hamas government and its strong links with Iran, began to train the new Special Presidential Guard in August 2006. The target was to expand the force from 3,500 to 6,000 by the end of the year and deploy most of them in Gaza’s sensitive border crossing with Israel and Egypt. Regional power politics soon conflated with growing civil strife when one of the border crossings, Rafah, became the scene of the most


serious confrontation in December 2006. The violence was sparked by an attempted assassination of a senior PNA officer suspected of arresting and torturing Islamist opposition members. In the attack on his car, three of his children, his driver, and a bystander were killed. The following day a judge linked to Hamas was executed, thus starting a heavy round of violence between the PNA’s security forces and Hamas.56

To deal with the crisis, the Hamas Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh, decided to cut short a month-long trip to Iran and Arab capitals. The United States, perturbed by Haniyeh’s visit to Iran where he was apparently provided with the $36 million he was suspected of carrying with him, pressed Israel to close Rafah crossing. Israel readily complied, and Haniyeh and his bodyguard were detained on the Egyptian side. The Egyptians stepped in and succeeded in reaching a compromise. Meanwhile, hundreds of Hamas and Executive Force members descended on the Rafah border crossing site, where fighting broke out between the Presidential Guard guarding the crossing and Hamas. The melee turned into fierce firefights after unknown assailants attacked the Prime Minister and his entourage at the border crossing, killing Haniyeh’s bodyguard and wounding his son and a senior aide. Senior Hamas officials accused the Presidential Guard of stimulating an assassination attempt. The Hamas government announced that, in retaliation, it would double the Executive force from 6,000 to 12,000 personnel.57

The accusation made by the Islamist movement was clear: it was Mohammed Dahlan who had orchestrated the assassination attempt on Haniyeh, and Abbas was morally responsible because control of the Rafah crossing was in the hands of the Presidential Guard. Fatah rejected the accusations, threatened to call the early

election, and violence spread throughout the streets and towns of the Gaza Strip, with the risk of spreading to the West Bank, as well.\footnote{58}

In 2006 and 2007, 407 Palestinians were killed – the vast majority in Gaza – and thousands wounded as a result of internecine violence, and attack against institutions associated with every faction increased.\footnote{59} Severe Human rights violations – abductions, torture, extrajudicial executions, vandalism of homes and institutions – were committed by both sides in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.\footnote{60} Despite the short-lived establishment of a unity government, the rifts between Hamas and Fatah had become so sharp and so deadly that by May 2007, whole neighborhoods of the Gaza Strip were under the control of either Hamas or Fatah; in some locality, factional control came down to individual street blocks.\footnote{61}

The fight with Israel also intensified, due to Israel’s growing concern that Hamas’ increasing power and influence would ultimately spread not only in the Gaza strip but also to the West Bank which is more important for Israel. This violence was marked by continuous and terrifying bloodshed mostly from Israel, whose military invasions into the Gaza Strip and the West Bank continued almost daily.\footnote{62} According to Israel’s Human Rights group B’tselem, during the years between January 2006 and December 2007 Israeli defense forces killed 1,041 Palestinians in which 657 in 2006 and 384 in 2007, almost half (480) civilians and the majority (823) from the Gaza


\footnote{Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, (B’tselem), \textit{Severe Human Rights Violations in Intra – Palestinian Clashes; and} idem, \textit{Statistics}, (www.btselem.org/english/statistics/casualties); See also, for example, the reports of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) in Gaza: PCHR, “\textit{Internal Palestinian Fighting Continues . . . ,}” Gaza, January 29, 2007; “Attacks on Public Institutions Continue: Over the past two days, scores of armed Palestinians have carried out attacks on Al-Aqsa University in Khan Yunis, Al-Karama Military Hospital in Khan Yunis and the Electric Power Station located in the centre of the Gaza Strip,” Gaza, March 13, 2006.}

\footnote{Human Rights Watch, \textit{Internal Fight: Palestinian Abuses in Gaza and the West Bank}, (New York, 2008).}


\footnote{Amira Hass, “\textit{The Fear in Gaza},” \textit{Ha’aretz}, October 8, 2006.}
Strip. During the same period 42 Israelis were also killed by Palestinians, nearly 13 of them by Qassam rockets fired from Gaza.\(^6^3\)

It took one more round of massive violence in January 2007 to reflect shift in the balance of power in Gaza in Hamas’ favor. On 4 January, Hamas and the Executive Force laid siege in a refugee camp wherein the home of Colonel Muhammad Ghurrayib, head of one of the main security services in northern Gaza was located. Neither repeated attempts by Fatah fighters to reach his home in order to break the siege nor his own desperate appeal on Palestinian TV for help prevented subsequent waves of attacks, which resulted in the death of Ghurrayib and six others, including his brother and two daughters. It took two more rounds of fighting in May and June for Hamas to rout the President’s security forces and Fatah militia and take over Gaza completely. In effect, while Hamas had won the election, it then used the subsequent situation to stage a coup, wiping out the opposition party.

Hamas military takeover of Gaza Strip, palpably demonstrated through the conquest of all key institutions associated with the Presidency and the brutal public killings of senior members of the security forces and of Fatah, led to the effective emergence of two political entities: the Hamas – dominated Gaza Strip, in which the elected government of Ismail Haniyeh prevailed, and a West Bank PA under Mahmud Abbas. The latter, in a flurry of Presidential decrees, dissolved Haniyeh’s government, established an emergency government under former finance minister Salam Fayyad, outlawed Hamas as a political faction and militia, and declared the Executive Force illegal. Haniyeh and Hamas responded by adamantly rejecting the constitutionality and legality of the decrees, principally the one dissolving the elected government of the PNA.\(^6^4\)

The inter-factional violence also was rooted in U.S. government’s plan to weaken and ultimately overthrow the Hamas-led government, inaugurated soon after Hamas’ electoral victory. While the Palestinian leadership – both Fatah and Hamas – must take responsibility for the anarchy they created, foreign powers have also

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contributed directly and destructively to the combustion, which Hamas constantly and perfectly analyzed as an attempted coup against its democratically elected government. In fact, in a confidential “end of mission” report disclosed to the public, the former U.N. Middle East envoy, Alvaro De Soto, exposed that following its electoral victory Hamas sought to form a strong coalition government with Fatah and other political factions. The United States, he asserted, restrained Fatah from joining.65

The U.S. plan to turn back a national unity government and overthrow Hamas through arming Fatah so it could combat against Hamas for the control of the government (and thereby ignited internal clash), which Israel itself realized as unworkable folly, was initially encouraged by Elliot Abrams, the U.S. deputy national security advisor.66 Reports revealed that President Abbas, who in the beginning refused to accept pressure from the United States and from within Fatah itself to fiercely confront Hamas and was even eager to work with a Hamas-led government, ultimately agreed when the pressure became too powerful.67

Confirming what many viewers already knew, in April 2008 *Vanity Fair magazine* published “The Gaza Bombshell” in which the U.S. plot was exposed. The article referred David Wurmser, Vice-President Cheney’s former chief advisor on Middle East affairs: “It looks to me that what happened in June 2007 was not so much

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a coup by Hamas but an attempted coup by Fatah that was preempted before it could happen.”

The United States and Mahmud Abbas had allegedly demanded Israel to approve the shipment of weapons, armored vehicles and ammunitions into the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to assist Fatah’s Presidential Guard a policy that endangered and aroused Hamas leaders and supporters. Other accounts revealed that Israel informed the U.S. that it would forbid weapons from entering Gaza for panic that Fatah would lose them, which is what occurred as Israel did allow some arms deliveries comprising two thousand automatic rifles and two million bullets. In reality, the United States preferred $86.4 million in security assistance for the Presidential Guard. A further source citing a U.S. government document expressed a $1.27 billion plan (over five years) that would have additional 4,700 men to the 15,000 – member Presidential Guard. According to the document, “The direct outcome will be the transformation of Palestinian security forces and provide for the President of the Palestinian National Authority to be able to safeguard decisions such as dismissing the cabinet and forming an emergency cabinet.” To strengthen Fatah by supplying weapons in which Jordan and Egypt also contributed was openly intended for obliterating Hamas and its military infrastructure.

According to Ha’aretz, “The primary reason for the breakup of the unity government is the fact that Fatah, headed by the Palestinian National Authority chairman Mahmud Abbas, has refused to fully share the PNA’s mechanism of power with its rival Hamas – in spite of Hamas decisive victory in January 2006 elections. Fatah was forced to overrule the Palestinian voters because entire world demanded it to do so. The United States, the European Nations, most of the Arab leaders and, of course, the State of Israel, warned Fatah not to share power with Hamas.”

68 David Rose, “The Gaza Bombshell,” 

Vanity Fair, April 2008.


70 Roy, Sara, 


By middle of the June 2007 the Palestinian National Authority was effectively devastated, and both factions, Hamas and Fatah, were involved in eradicating each other, a truth that was usually new and terrifying. Fatah was undoubtedly in turmoil, divided between those officials in Gaza who sought to talk and cooperate with Hamas and those who were not in favor to negotiate. It was obvious that Abbas did not have complete control over Fatah or its political bodies, particularly the Central Committee. Hamas was now the unchallenged power in the Gaza Strip.

Following the Hamas takeover of Gaza, Israel and other major players in the international community strengthened their plan of siege, isolating Hamas even more and penalizing the whole Gaza in the deceptive belief that by undermining Hamas and its capability to deliver, they would compel Gazans to overthrow it. Israel strictly cut down cross-border transportation (while certain restrictions were for the time being eased after the 19 June 2008, when a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel went into effect), whereas the Ramallah-based Authority curtailed connections with Gaza, blocking the normal functioning of government. In the last part of August 2007, Salam Fayyad proclaimed the shutting down of 103 religious, charitable and educational institutions connected to Hamas, saying that they were running in violation of Non-Profit Organizations law. In October 2007, the PNA further closed the Hamas charity committees in the West Bank with the goal of transforming and restructuring these groups, since they “serve as the terror group’s civilian infrastructures and operate a network of mosques, schools, institutions that support jailed terrorists.” It is safe to say that though Hamas has gained total control in the Gaza Strip, it paid heavily for that victory in the West Bank.

5.5 OPERATION CAST LEAD (2008)

Israel and Hamas indirectly agreed through Egyptian mediation to the six-month ceasefire in June 2008. In exchange for a freeze on attacks, Hamas perceived that Israel would open the Gaza border crossings to let a flow of goods and workers.

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One genuine aim of the ceasefire was to make convenient a prisoner exchange agreement – Israel’s emancipation of a number of Palestinian prisoners in return for Hamas’ release of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit.

During the first five months, the truce held comparatively well. Some rockets were fired into Israel but most of them were connected to the non-Hamas militant factions and, later, Hamas seemed gradually more competent and willing to repress even these attacks. No fatalities reported (only negligible property damages), and Israel remained unresponsive.\textsuperscript{75} Israel highlighted the periodic rocket fires as justification for maintaining the border crossing and Gaza’s seaport blocked to almost everything, even to the basic humanitarian supplies. Hamas, many Arab leaders and international organizations busy in facilitating aid to Gazan civilians blamed Israel for noncompliance of its promises under the agreement. Israel viewed that the pressure applied via a blockade could overthrow Hamas from power by turning Gazans against Islamist group. The total closure of the highly reliant Gazan economy\textsuperscript{76} burden Israel and its well-wishers with the charges that they were worsening the already dangerous situation of Gaza’s civilian population – one of the most densely populated (Gaza’s 1.5 million people live within an area of 146 square miles) and poorest in the world.\textsuperscript{77}

On 4 November, the ceasefire was broken. A month and a half before its natural term, Israeli tanks entered a few hundred meters into the Gaza Strip under cover of Israeli Air Force. The official justification was that the tanks were attempting to destroy a tunnel that Israel believed was being used in an attempt to capture Israeli soldiers. During the offensive, six Hamas militants were killed. The Hamas’ military wing responded quickly and fired dozens of rockets against Israeli cities in the Negev. The Goldstone Report summarized the events: “The soldiers attacked a house in the Wadi al-Salqa village, east of Deir al-Balah, which was alleged to be the starting point of tunnel, killing a member of the Qassam Brigades. Several Israeli soldiers were wounded. In retaliation Qassam Brigades fired more than 30 Qassam rockets into Israel. Israel responded with an airstrike which caused death of further five


members of Qassam Brigades. Both sides accused each other for escalation of violence. Hamas also blamed Israel of attempting to disrupt the talks between Fatah and Hamas that were scheduled for the following week in Cairo.\(^{78}\)

Thus the drums of war already begun beating well before the ceasefire was due to expire on 19 December and well before Hamas formally refused to sign it again without renegotiation. Between November and December 2008, Israeli sources estimate, almost 200 rockets and more than 100 mortars had fallen across Gaza’s border and into the Kibbutzim and town in Negev and north toward Ashkelon.\(^{79}\)

On 27 December 2008, Israel launched an extensive military campaign known as “Operation Cast Lead” against Hamas in the Gaza Strip with the aim to counter Hamas rocket fires into southern Israel and generally, to severely weaken all aspects of Hamas rule in Gaza.\(^{80}\) In fact, very few figures of Hamas military wing had expected such an overwhelming show of strength by Israel. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) launched the offensive at 11:30 a.m. on that Saturday with a surprise airstrike campaign that targeted police stations and security premises. It was a devastating attack, not only due to the high number of victims among the policemen and young recruits, but also of the timings, which coincided with the school arrival and departure times, and so involved almost all of Gaza’s student. At 11:30, the airstrike sparked a state of panic among the hundreds of thousands of student in the streets of Gaza, several of whom were killed. It was only the beginning of a very short and very bloody military campaign, one which could be compared with the 33 day Israel – Lebanon war in the summer of 2006.

From 27 December 2008 to 19 January 2009, the entire Gaza Strip was pounded by airstrikes, artillery bombardments, and infantry attacks; many unreported or only distantly reported by the independent foreign journalists, who were for the entire duration of the operation, not allowed to enter the Gaza Strip by Israeli


\(^{79}\) Ibid.,

authorities. Besides Hamas weapons seizes and bombardment of military facilities, Israel has targeted other elements of Gaza’s infrastructure which it believes that supports Hamas’ military objectives, including mosques, the Islamic University of Gaza, Hamas Al-Aqsa television station, the homes of Hamas militants and government officials, a wide range of government buildings, and a web of smugglers tunnels by the side of the border with Egypt. Israel airstrikes killed senior Hamas officials and militants, including Hamas Interior Minister Said Siam, Salah Abu Shrakh (head of Hamas’s general security service), and Mahmud Watfah and Sheikh Nizar Rayyan (influential figures of Hamas military wing).

The casualty counts of the 22 day Israeli military campaign were shocking, even considering the difference between the numbers collected by NGOs and those collected by international organizations. UNRWA states that “almost 1,400 Palestinians, including 347 children and 209 women were killed and a further 5,300 persons were wounded. The attacks targeted military and civilian structures, as well. Around a quarter of all housing stock – more specifically, the homes of 59,779 families – damaged or destroyed, affecting more than 300,000 individuals.

On 3 January 2009, Israel expanded its operations by starting a ground attack – employing thousands of troops throughout the Gaza’s northern border, along with tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery divisions. Observers presumed that the ground offensive began in the north mostly to disable Hamas rocket launching spots that took benefit of the area’s comparative closeness to targets in southern Israel. Hamas and other allied Palestinian factions reportedly shifted more rocket-launching operations

84 Ibid.,
into densely-populated areas of the Gaza City and to locations further south that are less endangered by Israeli forces.\textsuperscript{85}

On 9 January 2008, some Hamas leaders crossed Rafah to negotiate the ceasefire. Among them were Jamal Abu Hashem, Salah al-Bardawil, and Ayman Taha. Each of the represented a different generation inside the Hamas: the founders, the middle generation and the youth, this last represented by Ayman Taha, then 38 years and himself the son of the highly profiled Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza. Hamas selected its envoys among the officials known widely for their capabilities as mediators. Over the course of weeks, several meetings held in Cairo with Egyptian government officials, Hamas leaders from Gaza, and movement members from the political bureau, all were present. The Damascus-based office sent the second-in-command in the political chain, Mussa Abu Marzouq, as well as Mohammed Nasr, considered the man nearest to Khaled Mishaal.

After a tough negotiation with Egyptian officials, Hamas accepted a ceasefire, provided that Israel would commit itself to withdraw from Gaza Strip in a week’s time. Both parties verbally agreed to the truce, and Mussa Abu Marzouq announced it publicly at noon on 18 January 2009. Israel withdrew its troops before the deadline. In less than two days – (before dawn on 21 January, when Barak Obama was sworn in as forty-fourth President of the United States of America) – Israel had redeployed its soldiers along the border between Israel and Gaza. It was perceived that Israeli move was an attempt to ease tensions with the new administration. In fact, rumors widely spread that the president-elect’s transition team had “also helped persuade Israel to end the bombardment of Gaza and to withdraw its ground troops before the inauguration.”\textsuperscript{86}

As the Operation Cast Lead in Gaza Strip ended, the situation in the Middle East considerably changed. The death toll due to the bombardment was high and humanitarian crisis was self-evident. Even Israel experienced a dramatically weakened position due to the strong accusations made by international community

that Israel had used brutal force. The Operation Cast Lead was a failure for the Israel not only with respect to international community, but also one with respect to its own relationship with dual leadership of Palestine. During the operation, Israel had performed targeted assassination attempts against senior Hamas ministers, notably the Interior Minister Said Siam, but the flexibility of Hamas movement’s structure had already survived similar assassination and remained unaffected by the new attempts. Moreover, Israel had failed to bring any serious damage to the foundations of Hamas’s infrastructure by repeatedly bombing the movement’s office which the Israel viewed as important for the organization.  

However, while Israel has been condemned by international community for its offensive in Gaza but this has changed nothing. The privileged relationship between the United States and Israel and Tel Aviv’s strong opposition to involving Hamas without preconditions meant that U.S. Middle East policy could not depart from its traditional track, even with Barak Obama installed as a president. Despite the change in government and what changes there were in the diplomatic situation, Israel maintained its traditional attitude toward Hamas and toward the blockade on Gaza.  

5.6 HAMAS AND ISRAEL RELATIONS AFTER OPERATION CAST LEAD

MAVI MARMARA INCIDENT (MAY 2010)

Turkey’s involvement in the Freedom Flotilla affair finally disrupted the diplomatic impasse on Gaza and forced Israel to alter, significantly, the restrictions it placed on the goods entering the Gaza Strip. The latent conflict between Turkey and Israel that led to its involvement in the Gaza situation exploded with the Israeli navy’s bloody attack against the Turkish vessel Mavi Marmara on 31 May 2010 – an attack that once again showed the extent to which the Israel was still the cornerstone for the American strategy in the Middle East. Even an ally like Turkey – crucial in terms of U.S. military position in the region – could not undermine the relationship between

88 Ibid., p. 285.
Washington and Tel Aviv. In response, Turkey after the dispute with Israel over attack on the Freedom Flotilla, moved strategically toward the East.

The attack took place live on television. It was half past four in the morning, and the dawn had yet to rise on the eastern Mediterranean when the boats of the Israeli navy’s special operations unit Shayetet 13, along with helicopter, started the attack against the *Mavi Marmara*. The *Mavi Marmara* had sailed from Istanbul under the Turkish Flag ten days earlier, and was the largest in a convoy of six ships, called the Freedom Flotilla, that intended to break the siege Israel had imposed on the Gaza by bringing 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid. The whole operation was recorded by the journalists on the board. The Shayetet 13 men were fully armed as they attached their ropes to the ship and climbed the board. They started shooting indiscriminately. These live broadcasts, ending at 5:08 a.m. on 31 May, were the last news from *Mavi Marmara* until official Israeli sources later provided their report. Thus a silence descended over the fate of over 700 peace activists from all around the world. The nine dead in the attack of the *Mavi Marmara* were all Turks.\(^8^9\) Turkey acquired significance in the minds of the people: it was the only power that had not bent to Israel and that had defied the blockade around Gaza. They paid a high price: the lives of nine men, for whom the Gazan population organized funerals in absentia and after whom they named streets. The Turkish flag became almost as important as the Palestinian flag, as Turkey overnight became a regional player in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Hamas was already looking at the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as a model for what could have happened after the 2006 elections. And once again, after the *Mavi Marmara* incident, Hamas saw Turkey as an important ally at various negotiating tables.\(^9^0\)

In fact, Turkey had been the staunchest defender of Gaza, especially after Operation Cast Lead. Despite being one of the pillars of NATO in the Mediterranean, Turkey was crying out to break the siege. The war in Gaza marked the tombstone of the mediation efforts that Turkey had performed between Syria and Israel in 2008, but gave Erdogan’s government a new route to becoming regional power. In an attempt to minimize the role of Egypt and Jordan which they had played for decades, therefore,

\(^8^9\) Ibid., p. 286.
\(^9^0\) Ibid.,
Ankara tried to be called on to intervene with good offices in the Palestinian – Israeli conflict. This same motivation was behind the Turkey’s request at the end of July 2009 to enter negotiations between Fatah and Hamas.91

**SOUTHERN ISRAEL CROSS – BORDER ATTACKS (AUGUST 2011)**

On 18 August 2011, a series of cross-border attacks with similar attacks and mutual cover was performed on Highway 12 in southern Israel close to the Egyptian border by a team of possibly 12 militants in four units.92 The attacks took place after Israel’s interior security service Shin Bet had previously alerted of an attack by militants in the region and subsequent deployment of Israeli troops in the area.93 The militants firstly started firing on a bus Egged No. 392 as it was running on Highway 12 in the Negev nearby Eilat.94 After several minutes, a bomb was exploded close to an Israeli army patrol alongside Israel’s border with Egypt. In a third attack, an anti-tank missile hit private vehicle and killed four civilians.95 Eight Israelis which comprised six civilians, one Yamam special unit police sniper together with one Golani Brigade soldier were killed in the multiple-phase attack.96 In a statement the Israel Defense Forces revealed that they have killed eight attackers, at the same time Egyptian security forces also reported to have killed another two.97

Five Egyptian soldiers were also killed. As stated by Egypt, they were killed by Israeli defense forces pursuing militants across the Egyptian border, although an Israeli military official initially said they were killed by a suicide bomber who had

91 Hroub, Khaled, “Pressures on Hamas in Reconciliation Talks,” *Sada* (formerly *Arab Reform Bulletin*), Carnegie Endowment for Peace, April 2, 2009; Available at: [http://carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&amp;article=22929](http://carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&amp;article=22929)

92 Issacharoff, Avi, “Three Egyptians took part in terrorist attacks on southern Israel” *Ha’aretz*.


95 “Additional shooting attack north of Eilat, one injured” *The Jerusalem Post*, August 18, 2011.

96 Katz, Yaakov, “Israel kills PRC leadership in Gaza airstrike” *The Jerusalem Post*, August 18, 2011; See also, “Counter-terror officer killed by terrorist fire near Eilat” *The Jerusalem Post*, August 19, 2011.

97 Issacharoff, Avi, “Three Egyptians took part in terrorist attacks on southern Israel” *Ha’aretz*. 
escaped across the border into Egypt. These five deaths of soldiers caused a diplomatic rift between Israel and Egypt and led to mass protests outside the Israeli embassy in Cairo. According to news bulletins, Egypt threatened to withdraw its ambassador from Israel, however, it was later denied by Egyptian foreign minister. Israel expressed grief for the deaths, and sent an apology letter to Egypt. The Israel Defense Forces was ordered to conduct a military investigation of the incident, and on 25 August 2011, Israel allowed to conduct a mutual investigation with Egypt of the incident.

The identity of the militants, three of whom were Egyptian as reported, is not widely accepted, and until now no group has taken responsibility for the attacks. The Israeli government blamed the Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), a Gaza-based alliance of Palestinian militant factions, for organizing the attacks, but the PRC refutes its involvement. However, Israel immediately attacked seven targets in the Gaza Strip just after the terror attacks in the Negev in which five members of the PRC were killed together with its leader.

On 21 August 2011, an unofficial ceasefire was called by Hamas and Israel after days of fierce fighting in which fifteen Palestinians were killed and several were wounded. Israel witnessed more than 100 rockets and mortar shells fired from Gaza

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98 Michael, Maggie & Deitch, Ian, “Egypt to withdraw ambassador to Israel over ambush” The Independent, August 20, 2011.
99 Issacharoff, Avi, “Three Egyptians took part in terrorist attacks on southern Israel” Ha’aretz.
102 Issacharoff, Avi, “Israel to allow Egypt to deploy troops in Sinai” Ha’aretz, August 26, 2011.
103 “Doubts emerge over identity of terrorists who carried out attack in Israel's south” Ha’aretz, August 25, 2011.
106 Ibid.,
107 “Israel continues deadly air strikes on Gaza” Al-Jazeera, August 20, 2011.
into Israel which killed one Israeli and wounded more than a dozen.\textsuperscript{108} The truce was broken almost instantly due to rocket fire from Gaza on southern Israel, followed by retaliatory Israeli airstrikes which caused the death of almost seven Palestinians, along with two leaders of the Islamic Jihad. On 26 August 2011, a second ceasefire was called by Gaza’s militants.\textsuperscript{109} The secretary-general of the Popular Resistance Committees, Zuhir al-Qaisi, was killed on 9 March 2012 in an Israeli Air strike. Zuhir al-Qaisi was considered by Israel as “one of the masterminds” of the 18 August 2011 terrorist attacks.\textsuperscript{110}

According to SITE a group calling itself Ansar Jerusalem took the responsibility for the attack.\textsuperscript{111} However, Israel confirmed that it have enough evidence which indicates that the attacks were orchestrated by the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) in Gaza.\textsuperscript{112} The Popular Resistance Committees refused any involvement in the attacks, while they glorified it. The PRC spokesman stated that, “The occupation wants to pin this operation on us in order to escape its own internal problems”\textsuperscript{113}. As stated by Ha’aretz, there is suspicion in Gaza that members of the Popular Resistance Committees were behind the attacks. The Egyptian daily \textit{Al-Masry Al-Youm} described that Egyptian security forces recognized three of those involved in the attack as Egyptians.\textsuperscript{114} Hamas, which rules Gaza, also repudiate its involvement.\textsuperscript{115} Sky News mentioned Hamas spokesman Taher al-Nunu as saying: “The Palestinian government denies the accusations made by Barak about the operation in Eilat and affirms that there is no relation between the Gaza Strip and

\textsuperscript{108}“Five killed in Gaza as rockets hit Israel despite truce” \textit{BBC}, August 25, 2011.

\textsuperscript{109}“Islamic Jihad: Gaza factions agree to new cease-fire with Israel” \textit{Ha’aretz}, Associated Press, August 26, 2011.

\textsuperscript{110}Issacharoff, Avi, Cohen, Gili & Yagna, Yanir, “IDF strike in Gaza kills leader of Popular Resistance Committee” \textit{Ha’aretz}, March 9, 2012.


\textsuperscript{112}“Israel launches strikes on Gaza after attacks” \textit{Al-Jazeera}, August 19, 2011; See also, “IDF strikes Gaza in response to attacks; 6 reported dead” \textit{The Jerusalem Post}, August 18, 2011.

\textsuperscript{113}“Gaza-based PRC denies responsibility for Eilat attack” \textit{The Jerusalem Post}, August 19, 2011.

\textsuperscript{114}Hass, Amira, “Doubts emerge over identity of terrorists who carried out attack in Israel’s south” \textit{Ha’aretz}, August 25, 2011.

\textsuperscript{115}“Israel pounds Gaza after deadly attacks near Eilat” \textit{BBC}, August 20, 2010.
what happened near Eilat.” In spite of this, Hamas “admire” the attack. The Washington Times stated that U.S. intelligence bureaus connected Al-Qaeda to the attack, asserting that either the PRC or the Gaza-based Jaish al-Islam carried out the attacks.

OPERATION RETURNING ECHO (MARCH 2012)

Operation Returning Echo was an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) military operation in the Gaza Strip from 9 March to 14 March 2012. It was the most horrible eruption of hostility covered by the media in the territory since the Operation Cast Lead or the Gaza war of 2008 – 2009.

On 9 March 2012, Israel launched a targeted air attack in the Gaza Strip which killed the secretary general of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), Zohair al-Qaisi. Another Palestinian militant was also killed in the attack which also gravely wounded a man nearby. As stated by the IDF, although the PRC repudiates this, Zohair al-Qaisi had directed the 2011 southern Israel cross-border attacks, which killed eight Israelis together with six civilians. Israeli officials said that he was planning the final stages of a new mega-attack that could have taken many lives. Palestinian fighters retaliated by launching rocket attacks on Israel, with more than

117 Pfeffer, Anshel, “Hamas: We didn't carry out southern Israel attacks, but we praise them” Ha’aretz, April 10, 2011.
118 Lake, Eli, ”Al Qaeda linked to Israeli bus ambush” The Washington Times, August 22, 2011.
120 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17319054
121 “South bombarded by rockets after air force kills Gaza terror head” Times of Israel, March 9, 2012.
123 “At least 15 killed in Israeli air strikes on Gaza” The Guardian, March 10, 2012: The strikes began on Friday, when Israeli air raids killed the senior militant leader Zohair al-Qaisi, the secretary general of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC). Israel claimed he was targeted because he was planning an attack. Militants retaliated with a fierce rocket attack on Israel's southern border communities, which seriously wounded one civilian; See also, “Israel launches deadly air strikes on Gaza” BBC, March 10, 2012: The Israeli military said dozens of rockets had been fired into Israel.... Some of the rockets had
300 Grad missiles, mortar shells and Qassam rockets fired, of which 177 struck Israeli territory\textsuperscript{124} hitting the main urban centers of Ashkelon, Ashdod and Beersheba, besides smaller communities. Twenty-three Israelis were wounded mostly civilians and schools all over southern Israel remained closed for almost entire week to save students from rocket fire. Israel’s Iron Dome missile defense system intercepted several rockets fired by Palestinian militants directed towards big cities and destroyed 56 rockets in 71 attempts.\textsuperscript{125}

Israel attacked with 37 air strikes and targeted Gazan weapons storage sites, weapon manufacturing facilities, rocket launching sites, training centers, posts, tunnels and militants, killing 22. Most of them were the members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the others from the Popular Resistance Committees. Four civilians were also killed in this attack.\textsuperscript{126} Approximately 74 Palestinians were reportedly wounded in the attack, largely civilians.\textsuperscript{127}

France, the United States and an official from the United Nations criticized the Palestinian attacks, and the U.S. emphasized that Israel has the right to protect itself.\textsuperscript{128}

\begin{itemize}
\item The Organization of the Islamic Conference, Egypt, Syria, the Arab League
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\item been intercepted by Israel’s “Iron Dome” anti-missile system, she added... The rockets were apparently fired in retaliation for the killing of PRC leaders.
\item \textsuperscript{124}“Rockets and Mortar Shells Fired at Israel” at Jewish Virtual Library, March 9-15, 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{125}“Following rocket attacks, many Netivot students stay at home” Times of Israel, March 14, 2012; See also, “Some 100 rockets hit Israel since Friday” Ynet News, March 10, 2012; Also, “Israeli airstrikes kill 15 in Gaza; militants fire barrage of rockets” The Washington Post, March 10, 2012; Also, “MDA: Total of 8 people injured by rocket, mortar shell fire” The Jerusalem Post, March 9, 2012; Also, “Top official: Israel gave no guarantees in exchange for Gaza truce” Ha’aretz, March 14, 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{126}“Israeli airstrikes kill 15 in Gaza; militants fire barrage of rockets” The Washington Post, March 10, 2012; See also, “Gaza militants fire rocket at Israeli town, despite truce” Ha’aretz, March 13, 2012; Also, “Israeli airstrike kills commander, 15 militants in Gaza” USA Today, March 10, 2012; Also, “IAF strike on rocket squad brings Gaza death toll to 16” The Jerusalem Post, March 11, 2012; Also, “Gaza: New Israeli air strikes leave several dead” BBC, March 4, 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{127}“U.S., UN call for end to Gaza conflict” Montreal Gazette, March 13, 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{128}“Israel kills five more Gaza militants; rockets hit Israel” Reuters, March 10, 2012; See also, “Clinton condemns rocket fire on Israel” The Jerusalem Post, March 10, 2012.
\end{itemize}
and Iran strongly criticized Israel’s reactive air attacks on civilian population. On 13 March, Egypt mediated a truce between Palestinian militant factions and Israel. Hamas did not take part in the combating openly, and asserted that full-fledged war would “be destructive to the Palestinian people.”

**OPERATION PILLAR OF DEFENSE (NOVEMBER 2012)**

Operation Pillar of Defense (literally means: “Pillar of Cloud”) was an eight-day military operation by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the Hamas-rulled Gaza Strip, formally launched on 14 November 2012 with the killing of Ahmed Jabari, head of the Gaza military wing of Hamas.

The operation was launched in reaction to Palestinian groups firing more than 100 rockets at Israel within a 24-hour period, a strike on an Israeli military patrol jeep inside Israeli borders by Gazan militants, and a tunnel blast caused by IEDs close to Israeli defense forces on the Israeli side of the fence. The Israeli government declared that the objectives of the military operation were to stop rocket

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133 Lappin, Yaacov, “Gaza groups pound Israel with over 100 rockets” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 12, 2012.


attacks directed against civilians targets launching from the Gaza Strip\textsuperscript{136} and to weaken the potentialities of militant groups.\textsuperscript{137} The Palestinians accused the Israeli government for the rise in violence, blaming the IDF of attacks on Gazan civilians from the beginning of the operation, and quoting the encirclement of the Gaza Strip and occupation of the West Bank, as well as East Jerusalem, as the major cause for rocket attacks.\textsuperscript{138}

During the course of the operation, the IDF stated that it had targeted more than 1,500 locations in the Gaza Strip,\textsuperscript{139} as well as rocket launching sites, weapon depositories, governmental facilities and apartment buildings.\textsuperscript{140} Gaza officials revealed that 133 Palestinians had been killed in the attack of which 53 were civilians, 79 militants and a police officer,\textsuperscript{141} and assessed that 840 Palestinians were injured. A lot of families were dislocated.\textsuperscript{142} One air attack\textsuperscript{143} killed ten members of the al-Dalu family. Several Palestinian fatalities were caused by misfired Palestinian rockets

\textsuperscript{136}Stephanie, Nebehay, “UN rights boss, Red Cross urge Israel, Hamas to spare civilians” \textit{Reuters}, November 20, 2012; See also, Al-Mughrabi, Nidal, “Jerusalem and Tel Aviv under rocket fire, Netanyahu warns Gaza” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, November 16, 2012.

\textsuperscript{137}“Israeli air strike kills top Hamas commander Jabari” \textit{The Jerusalem Post}, Retrieved November 14, 2012.


\textsuperscript{140}“Fact box: Gaza targets bombed by Israel” \textit{Reuters}, November 21, 2012.

\textsuperscript{141}“Israeli strikes kill 23 in bloodiest day for Gaza” \textit{The News}, Pakistan, November 13, 2012.

\textsuperscript{142}“After eight days of fighting, ceasefire is put to the test” \textit{Times of Israel}, November 21, 2012; See also, “Israel Gaza Attacks Intensify Despite Truce Talks” \textit{The Huffington Post}, The Associated Press, November 20, 2012; Also, “Initial Findings: 40 of the Palestinians killed by the Israeli military up to the night of 19 Nov. were civilians, among them 19 minors” \textit{B’Tselem}, November 21, 2012; Also, “Escalation in Hostilities, Gaza and southern Israel” Situation Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, November 26, 2012.

\textsuperscript{143}“Dalu Family in Gaza Mourns Dead After Israel Bombs House” \textit{The Huffington Post}, Reuters, November 19, 2012.
landing within the Gaza Strip. Eight Palestinians were put to death by members of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades for alleged cooperation with Israel.

Throughout the operation, the al-Qassam Brigades and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad further accelerated their rocket attacks on Israeli towns and cities, in an operation code named **Operation Stones of Baked Clay** by the al-Qassam Brigades, firing more than 1,456 rockets into Israel, and an extra 142 which landed within Gaza itself. Palestinian militant factions used weapons consisting Iranian-made Fajr-5, Russian-made Grad rockets, Qassam rockets and mortars. Some of these weapons were fired into Beersheba, Rishon LeZion, Ashkelon, Ashdod and other major population centers; Tel Aviv was hit for the first time since the 1991 Gulf War, and rockets were fired at Jerusalem. The rocket fires caused the death of three Israeli civilians in a direct hit on a house in Kiryat Malachi. Till the termination of the operation, six Israelis had been killed, 240 were wounded, and almost 200 had been treated for nervousness by Magen David Adom. Israel’s Iron Dome missile

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144 “Israeli forces prepare for war as troops mass on Gaza border” *Telegraph*, Retrieved November 18, 2012.
147 Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General, “Secretary-General’s remarks to the Security Council (as delivered)” *Tel Aviv*, November 21, 2012, Retrieved November 22, 2012: “Overall, in that same time period, more than 1,456 rockets have been fired from Gaza into Israel. 142 have fallen inside Gaza itself. Approximately 409 were intercepted by the Iron Dome anti-missile system. Since Israel’s targeted assassination from the air, on 14 November, of Ahmed Jabari, chief of Hamas’ military wing, and with Israel’s offensive in Gaza in its eighth day, the Israel Defense Forces publicly reported that it has conducted strikes at more than 1,450 targets in Gaza.”
150 “Israel under fire – November 2012” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Israel, November 22, 2012; Retrieved November 23, 2012; See also, Rettig, Haviv, “Title: After eight days of fighting, ceasefire is
defense system intercepted almost 421 rockets, another 142 rockets landed within Gaza itself, 875 rockets fell in open areas, and 58 rockets hit urban areas in Israel.151 A bus in Tel Aviv was bombed by an Arab-Israeli, wounding 28 civilians.152

The United States, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom and other Western countries expressed support for Israel’s right to protect itself, and criticized the Hamas rocket attacks on Israel.153 Russia, Egypt, Iran, Turkey and many other Arab and Muslim countries condemned the Israeli attacks.154 The United Nations Security

151 Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General, “Secretary-General’s remarks to the Security Council (as delivered)” Tel Aviv, November 21, 2012; Retrieved November 22, 2012. “Overall, in that same time period, more than 1,456 rockets have been fired from Gaza into Israel. 142 have fallen inside Gaza itself. Approximately 409 were intercepted by the Iron Dome anti-missile system. Since Israel’s targeted assassination from the air, on 14 November, of Ahmed Jabari, chief of Hamas’ military wing, and with Israel’s offensive in Gaza in its eighth day, the Israel Defense Forces publicly reported that it has conducted strikes at more than 1,450 targets in Gaza.” See also, Levinson, Charles & Adam Entous, “Israel’s Iron Dome Defense Battled to Get Off the Ground” The Wall Street Journal, November 26, 2012; Retrieved November 26, 2012.

152 “Terror attack: Blast on Tel Aviv bus; 28 hurt” Ynet News, 21 November 2012.


154 “Russia condemns ‘disproportionate’ strikes on Gaza” The Daily Star, LB, November 15, 2012; Retrieved November 15, 2012; See also, “At the UN, Pakistan slams Israel’s offensive in Gaza” The Express Tribune, PK, November 15, 2012; Retrieved November 16, 2012; Also, “Morocco Strongly Condemns Israeli Raids on Gaza” Rabat, BH, Bahrain News Agency, November 15, 2012; Retrieved
Council called an emergency session on the situation but did not arrive at a decision. On 21 November a ceasefire was proclaimed after days of talks between Hamas and Israel brokered by Egypt. Hamas and Israel both claimed victory. Israel proclaimed that it had realized its goal of weakening Hamas’ rocket-launching capacity, while Hamas declared that Israel’s choice of attacking Gaza had ended. In accordance with Human Rights Watch both sides committed war crimes and dishonored international war laws during the warfare.

**KHALED MISHAL VISIT OF GAZA**

Hamas exiled leader Khaled Mishal visit followed a ceasefire which brought an end to the conflict between Hamas and Israel. He entered Gaza City from Egypt at the Rafah border crossing, kissed the ground in celebration. Khaled Mishal said on his first-ever visit to Gaza on Friday 7 December 2012 that he wished to become “a martyr” there.

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155 “Gaza toll rises as UN calls for end to the bloodshed” The Daily Telegraph (UK), November 15, 2012.


157 “Israel dealt Hamas ‘a heavy blow’ and is prepared to resume offensive if need be, Netanyahu says” Times of Israel, November 22, 2012.

158 “Gaza leader Haniyeh thanks Iran for helping to make Israel ‘scream with pain’” Times of Israel, November 22, 2012; See also, Ibrahim Barzak & Karin Laub, “Hamas claims victory as ceasefire starts” The Chronicle Herald, November 22, 2012.

“I hope God will make me a martyr on the land of Palestine in Gaza,” Mishal said shortly after crossing from Egypt into Gaza.\textsuperscript{160} Officials present there said his wife had arrived late on Thursday. While addressing the media he stated that “I consider this moment my third birth, and I pray to God that my fourth birth will be the moment when all of Palestine is liberated.”\textsuperscript{161}

Mishal has been expelled for years from entering Palestinian territories via crossings controlled by Israel. Entry from Egypt had been blocked by expelled president Hosni Mubarak but was facilitated by the country’s new Islamist-led government. Travelling through Gaza City on Friday in a march that was mobbed by hundreds of followers, Mishal visited the home of the assassinated founder of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, as well as the home of Ahmed al-Jabari, the head of Hamas’ military wing, who was killed at the start of last month’s Israeli attack. Although Mishal belongs from the West Bank village of Silwad, his visit to Gaza, a come back to Palestinian territory, demonstrated strong symbolic meaning after a life spent moving from one Arab state to another.\textsuperscript{162}

After leaving the West Bank due to its occupation by Israel in the 1967 war, Mishal and his family moved to Kuwait, where his father worked. He went to Jordan after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait that led to the 1991 Persian Gulf War and became active in Hamas. In 1997, in an operation authorized by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, agents of Israel’s abroad intelligence agency the Mossad, attempted to assassinate Mishal on a street in Amman, injecting him in the ear with a lethal poison.

Irritated, Jordan’s King Hussein demanded that the Israelis hand over an antidote. The Israeli agents, who had been arrested, were released in exchange for an

\textsuperscript{160}“Hamas chief Mishal makes historic Gaza visit” Al Jazeera, December 7, 2012; See also, Issacharoff, Avi, “Hamas leader Khaled Mishal makes historic visit to Gaza, with eye on presidency” Ha’aretz, December 7, 2012; Also, “Hamas chief Khaled Mishal’s historic Gaza visit” The Australian, December 8, 2012.


Israeli apology and the release from jail of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and 19 other prisoners. When Jordan outlawed Hamas in 1999, Mishal and other Hamas leaders were expelled. He lived in Qatar until 2001, when he moved to Damascus, Syria.\footnote{Ibid., See also, Erlanger, Steven, “Political Leader of Hamas Visits Gaza for the First Time” \textit{The New York Times}, December 7, 2012.} The chairman of Hamas’ political bureau since 1996, Mishal became the group’s top political leader in 2004 after Israel assassinated Yassin and Hamas’ political leader in Gaza, Abdel Aziz Rantisi.\footnote{“Hamas chief Khaled Mishal's historic Gaza visit” \textit{The Australian}, December 8, 2012.}

Mishal was based in Damascus until early this year, when he moved to Qatar because of Syria’s civil war. After years of backing from the government of President Bashar al-Assad, Hamas’ relations with Syria ruptured on the group’s support for the anti-Assad rebellion.\footnote{“Hamas chief Khaled Mishal hopes to be ‘martyr in Gaza’” \textit{Al Arabiya News}, December 7, 2012; See also, “Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal to make first visit to Gaza” \textit{The Telegraph}, December 06, 2012.}