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Article 1.

The Daily Beast

Israel's Fatal Game

Peter Beinart

Nov 18, 2012 -- The first thing to understand about the war that

recently broke out in Israel and the Gaza Strip is that Hamas forced Israel's hand.

Almost four years ago in Operation Cast Lead, the Jewish state pummeled Gaza in response to rocket fire into southern Israel. And for a time afterward, the rocket fire diminished. But it has been rising again. There were 365 rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza in 2010, 680 in 2011, 800 so far in 2012—171 in October alone.

It's not entirely clear why the attacks have increased. Hamas may have felt that Israel would not respond aggressively for fear of angering Egypt's new, more assertive Islamist regime. It may have wanted to upstage its rival, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, who may boost his stature among Palestinians later this month when he seeks "nonstate" membership at the United Nations. For whatever reason, Hamas provoked Israel. And this week, in what it calls Operation Pillar of Defense, Israel responded with a provocation of its own, assassinating Hamas military chief Ahmed al-Jabari and sparking even greater escalation from both sides.

Will Israel's offensive accomplish anything? Yes and no. For a while, it may cow Hamas into submission. And for the long-suffering people of southern Israel, any respite is a welcome thing. But there's a problem. Israel can bomb Gaza from air and sea. It can even invade Gaza by land, as it did four years ago. But Israel cannot expel Hamas and other militant organizations from the tiny strip of land where Samson fought the Philistines, because it cannot hold Gaza. The cost of turning Israeli soldiers into beat cops on a thousand Gazan streets where even the 5-year-olds want them dead is too high. The Jewish mothers of

Israel will not allow it.

At best, therefore, whatever quiet Israel's offensive wins its people will be temporary. Once the cameras leave, and the dead bodies on both sides are beneath the ground, Hamas will rebuild its armaments and regain its moxie. And sooner or later Israel will find itself in the same position it is in today—except that Hamas and other militant groups will have better rockets, able to kill more Jews.

So no matter what you think of Israel's military offensive, it's not a long-term strategy. Israel and America desperately need a political offensive aimed at making Hamas less of an obstacle to peace. And for the last six years, their policies have mostly done the opposite.

After Hamas won Palestinian elections in 2006 and then beat back an attempted coup in 2007, Israel responded with a partial blockade; the U.S. responded by shunning the group until it met three criteria: recognize Israel, renounce violence, and accept past peace agreements. The idea was that if denied international legitimacy, Hamas would renounce its militant ways.

But instead of suffering from Israel's partial blockade, Hamas has exploited it. By shutting down Gaza's exports to Israel and the West Bank, the blockade has destroyed Gaza's independent business class, which might have been a source of opposition to Hamas. Instead, Hamas has created a new import-export system—through tunnels underneath Gaza's border with Egypt—which it controls. What's more, the blockade has isolated Gaza from the world, and this isolation has strengthened the most conservative elements in Gazan society. As a result, the

emerging political opposition to Hamas is coming not from the two-state moderates America hoped to embolden, but from Salafis and jihadists who believe, terrifyingly, that Hamas is too restrained in its use of violence and too lax in its enforcement of Islamic law.

The flip side of America and Israel's policy of isolating and punishing Gaza was, in theory, to strengthen Abbas, Hamas's West Bank rival. But although Israel has removed some West Bank checkpoints and the West Bank has seen some economic growth, Abbas has only grown weaker over the last six years. Part of the reason is that his strategy of security cooperation with Israel, and public support for the two-state solution, hasn't stopped Israeli settlement growth from eating away at the state he wants to build. Moreover, he has not benefited from Gaza's misery, because many Palestinians see him as implicated in it. Every time Israel bombs Gaza, Palestinians in the West Bank pour into the street to protest, and Abbas's soldiers beat them up and send them home. This makes him look not merely impotent vis-à-vis Israel, but complicit with it.

Most fundamentally, the Hamas strategy pursued by both the U.S. and Israel undermines Abbas because it denies him democratic legitimacy. Legally, Abbas's term as president of the Palestinian Authority expired almost four years ago. But neither Israel nor America nor Abbas himself wants new elections, because they all fear Hamas might win. The result is a deep rift between Abbas and the people he supposedly represents. So in trying to weaken Hamas because it won't recognize Israel's right to exist, Israel and America weaken the Palestinian leader who actually does.

When the shooting stops, Israel and America will need a new political strategy. It should start with a clearer assessment of what they need from Hamas now. It would be lovely if Hamas accepted the past peace agreements signed by Palestinian leaders, as America and its allies now demand. But it's not essential. It would be even lovelier if Hamas accepted Israel's right to exist instead of saying—as its leaders sometimes do—that even if Israel withdrew to the 1967 lines, all Hamas would offer in return is a long-term truce. But that's not essential now either. After all, Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party officially opposes the two-state solution too.

Israel and America really need three things from Hamas right now. First, a ceasefire. What is more important than anything Hamas says is that it stops shooting rockets and prevents other Gazan militants from doing so as well. Second, Hamas must accept that, for now, Abbas heads the Palestinian Authority and is thus empowered to negotiate a peace deal with Israel. Third, whatever Hamas's own view as a party, it should pledge to respect the will of the Palestinian people if they vote in a referendum for such a deal.

Hamas might accept these terms. It has respected ceasefires for stretches in the past and even enforced them with other Palestinian groups. Hamas leaders have at times said that they would abide by the results of a Palestinian referendum on a peace deal. And Hamas has in the past signaled that if it received key ministries in a newly created national-unity government, it might let Abbas keep his job atop the Palestinian Authority.

Even if Israel and America backed such a deal, it might still fail. Today, both Hamas and Abbas's Fatah Party are deeply

unpopular. Each fears elections that could imperil its grasp on those parts of the Palestinian territories currently under its control. But most Palestinians badly want a unity government and the restoration of Palestinian democracy. And under the recently elected Mohamed Morsi, Egypt wants it too. Such a deal would entail risks for Hamas, but it would also bring benefits, since a unity agreement would allow it to operate freely in the West Bank, where it is now essentially banned. And as part of such a deal, Egypt would likely open its border with Gaza, which would ease Hamas's isolation from the world.

The Netanyahu government opposes a Palestinian unity deal and negotiations with Hamas. But some former top Israeli security officials disagree. And while it would be hard for Israel to tolerate Hamas's openly contesting political power in the West Bank, it is precisely this shift that would boost Hamas's incentive to abide by a ceasefire. Once Hamas won the fruits of a unity deal—freedom to operate as a political party in the West Bank and a more open border with Egypt—it would think hard before allowing rocket attacks that imperiled those gains.

To many Israelis this week, the prospect of a political accommodation with Hamas, the very group that is launching rockets at them, may seem absurd. And it's certainly not on the agenda of Benjamin Netanyahu, whose reelection campaign is premised on the belief that Israel has no Palestinian partner. But dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization was once deemed unthinkable, too, and over time Israelis leaders realized that since they could not destroy the PLO militarily, they were better off trying to influence it politically instead. Now Israel should pursue a similar strategy with Hamas: never surrendering its right to respond militarily but shaping a political strategy that

maximizes the chances of Hamas eventually accepting the two-state solution, something that some Hamas leaders, at some moments, have publicly entertained. That strategy entails risks. But those risks must be weighed against the alternative. By isolating Hamas, America and Israel are giving it every incentive to try to blow up any peace agreement that Abbas signs. By isolating the people of Gaza, America and Israel are radicalizing them.

Moshe Dayan famously said that “if you want to make peace, you don’t talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.” Hamas is today Israel’s enemy, as the bombs exploding up and down the Mediterranean coast attest. But if Israel wants to make it a less deadly and resolute foe, it must eventually follow Dayan’s advice. It must do more than prosecute this war. It must do everything in its power so it never has to again.

Article 2.

NYT

Brigades That Fire on Israel Are Showing a New Discipline

Jodi Rudoren

November 18, 2012 -- Maghazi Refugee Camp, Gaza Strip — From the time he was a boy, Ali al-Manama dreamed of joining the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of the Islamic Hamas movement. His commitment intensified when his father, a Qassam fighter, was killed by an Israeli drone in 2001

as he fired mortar shells over the border. Ali joined up at 15, relatives said, and by 23 had risen to be a commander in this neighborhood in the midsection of this coastal Palestinian territory.

On Friday, at the funeral of a fellow fighter, Mr. Manama leaned over the body and said, “I’ll join you soon, God willing,” recalled a cousin who spoke on the condition that he be identified only by his first name, Mahmoud.

His wish to die fighting and become a martyr — and the honor it would bring in his community — was fulfilled Saturday morning at 7:30, though the missile struck him not while he was in active combat, but while talking on a cellphone that Israeli intelligence might have used to track his whereabouts.

“He had been telling us all week about all the achievements of Qassam,” Mahmoud said. “When he heard about the rockets in Israel, he would be very proud.”

Mr. Manama was one of as many as 15,000 Qassam fighters who are responsible for most of the rocket blitzes that have blanketed southern Israel and reached as far as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in the five days since the brigade’s operations commander, Ahmed al-Jabari, was assassinated, experts say.

Highly organized and increasingly professionalized yet still secretive and cultlike, Qassam is emblematic of Hamas’s struggle to balance its history as a resistance movement and its governing role in Gaza since 2007.

Israel has blamed the growing number of civilian casualties in Gaza on the fact that Qassam and Hamas are inextricable, and

military storehouses are woven into residential neighborhoods. Most Qassam fighters have day jobs — as police officers, university professors, ministry clerks, and Mr. Manama's relatives said he had been sleeping at home even during last week's widening war.

Mr. Jabari in recent years had both increased the military branch's political power and become a popular hero whose visage adorned posters and billboards throughout the Gaza Strip.

With an expanding arsenal and financing provided by Iran, Syria, Sudan and other foreign sources, Qassam expanded and matured under Mr. Jabari, adopting clear training regimens and chains of command. Last year he even negotiated with Israel to return an Israeli sergeant, Gilad Shalit — whose kidnapping he had engineered five years earlier — in exchange for 1,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Yet Qassam remains a fundamentalist jihadi enterprise whose culture and goals — terrorizing and obliterating Israel — resemble those of ragtag militia cells.

“The point of departure shouldn't be that we have a state and within a state we have institutions and within the institutions you have a division of labor,” cautioned Shaul Mishal, a professor of political science at Tel Aviv University who wrote a book on Hamas. “Hamas maybe dreams about being a state, and Qassam, sometimes they delude themselves that they are an army, but at the end I think their basic perception is that they're part and parcel of a community. It's blurred boundaries between the political activities and the military operations.”

Named for a Syrian who was killed in 1935 while battling the

British occupation of what was then known as Palestine, the brigades made their first strike on Jan. 1, 1992, killing a rabbi in the former Kfar Darom settlement, not far from here. It has grown over two decades into by far the largest and strongest of Gaza's many militant factions — though others have also been lobbing rockets into Israel in recent days and months — with a strong sociological pull on the Gaza population.

The welcome banner over the entrance to this refugee camp is signed by the Qassam. Mosques are decorated with Qassam slogans and pictures of its more than 800 fallen fighters. Those who know active brigade members use them as conduits with the Hamas authorities, to speed passage through the Rafah crossing into Egypt or help resolve problems with the police.

When a fighter dies, his comrades show up in force on the third and final day of tent-sitting and set up a projector to show a film about his achievements. Qassam also takes responsibility for ferreting out suspected collaborators with Israel, like the one it took credit for executing in a public square on Friday.

“It’s no longer a secret that the Qassam has the final word in Gaza,” said Adner Abu Amr, dean of journalism and political science lecturer at Umah University in Gaza. “He who has a relation with a commander of Qassam, he considers himself the holder of a diplomatic passport. You have a password that opens all doors.”

Jonathan Schanzer, author of the 2008 book “Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine,” said Qassam has had four distinct phases. The first was a single-minded focus on suicide bombings, until Yahya Ayyash, the engineer of that strategy,

was killed in 1996, when the cellphone he was holding was blown up remotely.

Leading up to the start of the second intifada in 2000, Hamas joined forces with its rival Fatah faction and the brigades expanded suicide bombings but also began using rockets they called Qassam.

Over the last decade, Mohammed Deif — who was severely injured in 2003 but technically remains Qassam's commander — upgraded and expanded rocket production and import, and Mr. Jabari professionalized operations, culminating in the Shalit deal.

With the death of Mr. Jabari, a charismatic figure influential with Hamas leaders inside and outside Gaza, "They are off balance for sure," Mr. Schanzer said. "Every time this happens it forces change, it forces adaptation."

But Qassam "has long operated in a decentralized structure, so that if its leadership is decapitated it will always find new leaders to rise up," he added. "It's compartmentalized. They work in cells. So even if he was the leader, there are other leaders."

A 2009 paper published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy contains an organizational chart of the Qassam Brigades showing Gaza divided into six geographic areas, each with its own commander reporting to Mr. Jabari. Each also has separate artillery, antitank and antiaircraft units as well as snipers, engineers and infantry, according to the paper, titled "Hamas in Combat," with forcewide units handling communications, logistics, smuggling, weapons, intelligence

and public affairs.

“Almost by any definition they have become more institutionalized,” said Nathan Thrall, an analyst who covers the Palestinian territories for the International Crisis Group. “They more or less have been keeping a calm in Gaza. A very imperfect calm, and one that has escalations every three or four or five months, but they are the party that Egypt has gone to to ensure that things don’t get out of control.”

Mr. Abu Amr, who has followed Qassam closely since its inception, said most fighters join at the age of 16 or 17, and spend about a year in religious indoctrination, security education, and finally combat training before secret induction ceremonies in which they take an oath on the Koran. But Gaza is a 150-square-mile strip with 1.5 million people who know one another’s business, and parents are proud when their sons enlist.

Banners and plaques, in homes and on streets, display the brigade’s signature seal: an M-16 rifle in front of Jerusalem’s Al Aqsa Mosque, with a green Hamas flag and green copy of the Koran. “No God but Allah,” it says. “You did not kill them, it’s God who killed them.”

After the current conflagration began, Mr. Abu Amr’s only son, Mohammed, 15, changed the profile picture on his Facebook page, to Mr. Jabari from Cristiano Ronaldo, the soccer star of Real Madrid. And what if Mohammed, the eldest of Mr. Abu Amr’s six children, decides that he, like Ali al-Manama, wants to be a fighter?

“It will be hard for me — I will be sad, and his mother as well,” Mr. Abu Amr said, aware that martyrdom is both the aspiration

and the expectation of those who take the oath. “But there are something called the hard choices. He’s not the first and he’s not going to be the last one. My only condolence will be that he has gone for the sake of a national cause.”

Article 3.

Foreign Affairs

Hamas' Miscalculation

Barak Mendelsohn

November 18, 2012 -- The escalation in the fighting last week between Israel and Hamas caught many observers by surprise. Operation Cast Lead, Israel's 2008 campaign against Hamas, had led to an uneasy calm between the warring sides. And last year's release of Gilad Shalit (the Israeli soldier who had been kidnapped by militants in 2006) in exchange for a thousand Palestinian prisoners had even given observers hope that Israel and Hamas had found a way to manage their conflict. But then, Hamas attacked an Israeli mobile patrol inside Israeli territory on November 10 and Israel retaliated by assassinating Ahmed Jabari, Hamas's military chief. This time, the violence that has followed has not faded quickly; indeed, the fight is still intensifying.

Given the destruction wrought by Israel and Hamas' last major conflict, Hamas' calculations in the lead-up to this round of fighting are especially puzzling. The typical explanation is that Hamas ramped up its rocket campaign earlier this year in an effort to break Israel's siege on the Gaza Strip. Under fire, Israel had to retaliate.

That answer, though, is unsatisfying. In many ways, the siege had already been broken. True, the Gaza Strip is tiny, densely populated, squeezed between Israel and Egypt, and dependent on both countries for the passage of people and goods. And all of that makes it a rather claustrophobic place. Yet Israel's efforts to tightly control the area's borders, which started after Hamas won elections there in 2006, had gradually wound down. After the public relations disaster that followed Israel's 2010 mishandling of the Gaza-bound Turkish aid flotilla, the flow of goods over the Israeli border into Gaza increased substantially. Moreover, the tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border, through which most of the goods coming into Gaza are smuggled, became so elaborate that they resembled official border crossings. In fact, the volume of trade that travels through the tunnels could be up to \$700 million dollars a year [1].

To some extent, Hamas had a political interest in perpetuating the siege idea, which could be used to foment anger against Israel and drum up popular support. Further, it made sense for the movement to preserve some limitations on the movement of goods into Gaza, since the smuggling industry lined its coffers. Thus, although life in Gaza might not have been all that pleasant for Gazans, Hamas wanting to break the siege is not a compelling explanation for its renewed violence against Israel.

In fact, two factors pushed Hamas to ramp up its bombing campaign: competition from Salafi groups and Hamas' belief that its strategic environment had improved in the wake of the Arab Spring. Since Hamas was elected, it has found the Salafi groups in Gaza especially difficult rivals to manage. Fatah, Hamas' main competitor before it pushed the group out of the area in 2006, was never such a challenge: with the Oslo peace

process discredited and Israel's retreat from the Gaza Strip largely attributed (at least in the Gazan psychology) to Hamas' militant activities, the remnants of Fatah just couldn't compete. The small jihadi outfits, though, embodied the fighting ethos. And unlike Hamas, they were free from the constraints that governing puts on ideological purity.

Under pressure, Hamas repeatedly tried to quell the Salafi threat, and it did not shy from using brute force to do so. The clearest demonstration came in August 2009, when Hamas killed the leader of Jund Ansar Allah, a Salafi group that had openly challenged Hamas' authority, and a number of its members. But short of using extreme violence to suppress Salafism in Gaza, which would have been too costly for Hamas, Hamas could not eliminate the Salafi challenge. It watched with worry as new Salafi groups emerged and strengthened throughout the strip.

The pressure on Hamas only increased in the wake of the 2011 Arab uprisings. The Egyptian revolution and the subsequent chaos in the Sinai Peninsula were a backwind in the sails of Gaza's Salafis. The collapse of authoritarian regimes in North Africa unleashed a flood of weapons and fighters, which Salafis channeled into the Sinai Peninsula. With the Egyptian military unable to control the area, Gazan Salafis turned the peninsula into a staging ground for attacking Israel. They believed (correctly) that Israel, anxious not to kill its peace accord with Egypt, would not dare to respond directly.

Indeed, Israel resorted to thwarting attacks emerging from Sinai and the Gaza Strip as best it could by preventing Gazans from getting to Sinai in the first place. On a number of occasions, Israel preemptively targeted Salafi leaders in Gaza. The Salafis

responded by lobbing rockets back at Israeli's southern towns. Periods of quiet between rounds of violence became shorter and rarer.

The new regional order presented Hamas with a serious dilemma. As the ruler of Gaza, it could not sit on the sidelines while Israel targeted territory under its control. But it was unable to fully rein in the Salafis without proving once and for all that it was no longer a resistance movement. For Hamas, then, the only choice was to tolerate the attacks. It portrayed them at home as a way to preserve the struggle against Israel. Abroad, it refused to acknowledge any role in them at all to reduce the danger of a backlash. Over time, pressure from Hamas rank and file led the organization to take a more active role in each round of violence.

The flaw in Hamas' logic, though, was that it assumed that Israel would cooperate and not retaliate. Israel would not let Hamas shirk responsibility, though, and demanded that Hamas assert its authority over the radical factions. To reinforce the message, this year, Israel carried out a number of strikes on Hamas targets. Once it became a target itself, Hamas was even less able to show restraint. It eventually resumed carrying out its own strikes on Israel, a move that was cheered by the Hamas rank and file, who, without such attacks, might have defected to the more radical groups.

Another of Hamas' miscalculations was expecting Egypt to be supportive of its actions, which, when combined with Israel's fear of alienating the regime in Cairo, would allow Hamas to escalate the conflict without it spinning out of control. The hope was not off base. In August, Egyptian President Mohamed

Morsi had retired the military's top brass and taken full control of Egypt's foreign and security police. The development was particularly significant given that the Supreme Military Council, which had maintained close relations with the United States, was not as interested in helping Hamas. But, the group was wrong again. Hamas' closer ties with Egypt did not discourage Israel from fighting back.

Simply put, Hamas' strategic environment was not as favorable as it thought. When it tried to push Israel's boundaries, Israel pushed back. Now the group is in a bind. It needs a face-saving resolution to the fighting, one that would allow it to claim some achievement worth of the devastation inflicted this month on Gaza. Even after that, the group will still face the same old tension between its ideology of resistance and the responsibilities that come with governing. And all the while, its Salafi challengers will be lurking, challenging its commitment to the struggle against Israel. If Hamas wants to avoid future such escalations, it will need to crack down on these groups. But that would come with a price -- in popularity and legitimacy -- that Hamas seems unwilling to pay. Hamas must also finally make the transition from resistance movement to normal political party. It will probably take a push from Cairo for that to happen. Hamas' alliance with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood offers the group some of the cover it needs to make the much-needed transition. And the Muslim Brotherhood is a good model for Hamas to follow, besides. Absent Hamas' political transformation, no cease-fire with Israel will hold for long. The next round of violence awaits, just over the horizon.

Barak Mendelsohn is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Haverford College and the author of Combating Jihadism: American Hegemony and Interstate Cooperation in the War on Terrorism.

Article 4.

Ahram Online

From Cast Lead to Pillar of Cloud

Abdel Moneim Said

18 Nov 2012 -- It is inappropriate to compare Israel's Cast Lead and Pillar of Cloud operations because regional circumstances and strategic conditions have completely changed between them

I had hoped to write a different article this week about the troubles of General David Petraeus, not to talk about the scandal but the role of the individual in history and how destiny often has the last word.

But in Egypt and the Middle East, as usual, it is difficult to divert one's attention because developments are relentless. And so I find myself writing this article as Israel's war on Gaza enters its third day of successive air strikes. The question is whether Israel will transition from air to ground operations by invading Gaza once again or, based on strategy or international pressure, will stop here, especially since it scored an important hit by killing Ahmed Al-Jaabari, a key figure in the operations

of the Ezz El-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military wing. According to Western sources, Al-Jaabari is responsible for suicide attacks inside Israel during the second Intifada and masterminded the capturing of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Most analytical articles published after the Israeli assault began interpreting it in light of Operation Cast Lead, which began at the end of 2008 and continued into January 2009. Accordingly, they predicted scenarios similar to what happened before. On the political front, the Arab world — as usual — objects and condemns and asks for diplomatic and international help. Once Israel achieves all or some of its goals to its satisfaction, it will agree to withdraw and in return will enjoy some quiet for a while. From a military perspective, the previous war developed the same way as this one has so far. Groups in Gaza launch enough rockets at Israel to make residents in southern Israel complain; the government reacts by launching air and ground military operations that are enough to destroy Gaza. This is followed by talk about reconstruction while waiting for another round of war. But this time, the battle is taking place in dissimilar circumstances. Like in the past, it began with rockets launched by radical Islamist groups, such as Islamic jihad that is closely connected to Iran. But these rocket attacks cannot be separated from the ongoing silent war between Iran and Israel on several fronts in Syria, Lebanon and now in Palestine. The difference here is that Palestinian rockets that were primitive three years ago have now grown into a full arsenal that is far more advanced in terms of range and destructive power. Today, they can reach the outskirts of Tel Aviv, into the cities of Ashdod, Askalan and Beir Sab'e, and can destroy a house and kill three people inside it. Today, Palestinian groups can dip into Libya's military arsenal that collapsed and is now available after

Gaddafi's elimination, by being smuggled through Egypt — currently too distracted with the revolution and a painful and agonising transitional phase. It is obvious that Egypt's role has influence in its absence or presence; when absent, it is clear that it was a pivotal contributor to negotiating a ceasefire and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2009. This was possible because it was close to both parties in Tel Aviv and Gaza and had deliverables for both sides. It ignored the tunnels, opened border crossings, and guaranteed basic needs of life, health and passage of a variety of things. For Israel, peace was in place, natural gas flowed through the pipes, trade was robust, and they were both friends of the US.

But that is not the situation today. The regime in Egypt has stronger bonds than brotherly relations with Hamas in Palestine, which has restrained Egypt's response to the actual occupation of Sinai by armed jihadist groups that have attacked the Egyptian police and armed forces. On the other hand, the cool peace between Egypt and Israel has frozen over. This basically means that Egypt has essentially lost its ability to handle the conflict. More ominously, it seems that within a few months of President Morsi being in office, Egypt could become party to the conflict. At least that is what extremist jihadist groups are working towards, along with corresponding fanatical groups within the Muslim Brotherhood. Thus, there is no mediator this time. The world is distracted with other matters, especially in Europe and the US, and Israel has succeed in courting world opinion that negatively views jihadist groups solely through the prism of terrorism and sees no reason to sympathise with them. In Gaza especially, Hamas is not only classified as a terrorist group but also has no legitimacy. After launching between 750-800 rockets at Israel since the beginning of the year, the Israeli

assault on Gaza is being interpreted as a legitimate right to self defence, forgetting that Palestinian land has been occupied for decades. Meanwhile, Israel is going to battle this time after it too underwent a military transformation after starting to create the yet incomplete anti-missile system Iron Dome, which is only effective in defending key military and strategic positions. Thus, both the Israelis and Palestinians are going into battle after regional circumstances and strategic conditions have shifted, as well as changes in their own military situations. Drawing parallels between Cast Lead and Pillar of Cloud would be unfair to the latter and inaccurate in its predictions. Our biggest concern right now is Egypt, which has been plagued by events in Sinai. But emotions have poured towards Gaza and gathered a million people, while Sinai did not even gather 100 in support of the armed forces and to commiserate the martyrs who defend the country.

Article 5.

The Guardian

We in the Gaza Strip will not die in silence

Musa Abumarzuq

18 November 2012 -- The latest Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip has prompted several European countries and the US to reaffirm their position of unwavering support for the aggressor.

William Hague, Britain's foreign secretary, Cathy Ashton, the EU high representative for foreign affairs, and Barack Obama, have all claimed that Hamas's rockets were responsible for the crisis and that it is the right of Israel to defend its citizens. Had they checked the facts, they would have realised Israel started the attacks. The escalation started when an Israeli military incursion into Gaza on 8 November killed a Palestinian child. That was followed by other Israeli incursions and attacks, provoking a response by Palestinian factions.

Despite that, there were serious efforts to calm the situation and reach a truce. But clearly Israel had another agenda. By targeting Ahmed al-Jabari, leader of the al-Qassam Brigade, it sabotaged Egyptian efforts to conclude a truce between all Palestinian factions and the Israelis. This was confirmed by Egypt's president on Saturday.

With the approach of the Israeli elections, the Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, wanted to trade with the blood of the Palestinians, especially after his alliance with the ultra-extremist Avigdor Lieberman failed to boost his popularity in the polls as he'd expected. This is not the first time the Israelis have launched a war for electoral gain. Shimon Peres did it to Lebanon in 1996 and the Olmert-Livni-Barak alliance did it to Gaza in 2008. What is important here is the immoral and short-sighted stance of the European and US governments; they have misconstrued the facts and displayed complete partiality in favour of the aggressor.

The western position has given political cover to the Israeli aggression and encouraged its leadership to continue their attacks. Thus, in the eyes of our people and those of the entire

region, western countries are complicit. European governments, in contrast to their peoples whose majority support Palestinian rights, have demonstrated their double standards and hypocrisy again.

The human rights that Europe claims to defend all over the world are denied to the Palestinian people. European governments have done nothing while 1.7 million Gazans have been subjected for the past five years to an Israeli blockade – denying them food, water, medicine and even determining how many calories they should be allowed each day.

The right of people to resist occupation and confront aggression is guaranteed to all peoples; but if Palestinians seek to exercise this right it immediately becomes terrorism and for this they must be persecuted.

The Israeli military attacks on Gaza did not stop after the last Gaza war. Since 2009, 271 Palestinians have been killed, compared to three Israeli deaths. In the last few days more than 700 Palestinians have been killed or injured – more than half of them women or children. Yesterday 12 people from same family were massacred.

But Israeli aggression is not just against Gaza. It has continued its confiscation of Palestinian land, and expulsions in Jerusalem and the West Bank, despite the efforts of PLO leaders to achieve peace agreements. It has multiplied the number of settlements since the 1993 Oslo accords tenfold. Even after they got rid of Arafat, Israel has given nothing. Now Lieberman wants to get rid of Abu Mazen, president of the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas has decided to defend the rights of its people with a

measure of deterrence against one of the most well-equipped (and western-funded) armies. As the world refuses to defend Palestinians, we will defend ourselves. Our people have the right to self-defence and we will not die in silence anymore.

Hamas may not be able to defeat Israel but we can stand firm against it, and paralyse life in a significant part of the country. This is the right of any free people. Gaza and Hamas are not alone, and the enemies of Israel are increasing. The Arab world is changing. The Palestinian people today see in Hamas hope and leadership.

Israel has embarked on an adventure it has not calculated properly. It must now bear the consequences. A truce will be on Hamas's terms, not Israel's. The first of these will be to lift the oppressive blockade on the Gaza Strip.

Musa Abumarzuq is deputy head of Hamas's political bureau.

Article 6.

Asharq Al- Awsat

Why doesn't Egypt defend Gaza militarily?

Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed

Sunday 18 November 2012 -- I don't think that millions of Arabs today accept the statements of sympathy, symbolic field visits, and diplomatic activities that are being showcased to address the aggression on Gaza.

Yet if Egypt decided to defend Gaza in a military fashion, perhaps the political equation would be entirely different, even if it wasn't victorious. What's more, this wouldn't have to be a major war.

The visit paid by [Egyptian Prime Minister] Hisham Qandil to Gaza was no more politically valuable than those conducted by the late Omar Suleiman, the former head of Egyptian intelligence during the Mubarak era. Qandil's statements of condemnation do not scare Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, who launched the attack for electoral purposes and to challenge the new Egyptian regime. He wants to determine Egypt's limits on the ground and to clarify the boundaries of the relationship between the two states.

The truth is that Hamas has been extremely disciplined and has honored the commitments it has made to Israel. Of course it responded to the latest Israeli act of aggression, and to the military provocations over the past few months, but Hamas has also done its utmost to prevent and pursue extremist Salafi jihadist groups, which have deliberately launched missiles or attempted to cross the border into Israel.

It is clear from recent statements that Israel holds Hamas responsible for the actions of these uncontrolled jihadist groups. Most of the attacks from the Israeli side, sometimes aerial bombardments, have been aimed at Hamas and not at the rogue groups that are a threat not only to Israel but to Hamas itself. Therefore, it is clear that Israel is using its latest aggression for

purposes that have nothing to do with responding to threats or protecting its territory. It is a military operation purely for political reasons.

I believe that President Mohammed Mursi knows that this time the war on Gaza is primarily directed at him and not at Haniyeh's government. Israel wants to ensure his obedience from the outset and embarrass him before his citizens and the Arabs, who are watching and wondering what the difference between him and Mubarak is. Sending messages, dispatching officials and withdrawing ambassadors were the weapons that Mubarak used to show solidarity with the Palestinians. What will Mursi's tactics be to stop the Israeli aggression?

We always say that when an opposition movement is on the street it is more vocal and outspoken than the government, but when it assumes office it conforms to certain parameters, and this is exactly what is happening with Mursi.

Ever since it came to power, Mursi's government has dealt with diplomatic norms in a civilized and harmonious manner, and has shown its commitment to the legacy of the Camp David Accords and other agreements. In this respect, it has outdone any previous government. President Mursi has closed the tunnels that were used to smuggle arms into Gaza. Of course, there is neither any logic nor truth in the assertion that closing these tunnels will protect Sinai from weapons and fighters infiltrating from Gaza. Sinai is the passage and Gaza is the destination, or the downstream. Egyptian forces have also waged the largest military confrontation in Sinai since 1973, only this time against Egyptian extremists and jihadist groups that threaten both Israel and Egypt's security. As long as Mursi remains committed to the Camp David agreement, he is obliged to do so.

Yet despite all this evidence, the Netanyahu government has

failed to respect the new Egyptian regime and has deliberately embarrassed Mursi on several occasions, most recently with the attack on Gaza, which is, in fact, partially an attack on Egypt. Does Egypt dare get involved in a war with Israel? Personally, I think the question should be reversed: Does Israel risk opening a military front with Egypt?

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Article 7.

The Council on Foreign Relations

The Israel-Hamas Conflict's Unintended Consequences

Robert M. Danin

November 18, 2012 -- By Israel's accounting, Operation Pillar of Dust has achieved many if not most of its major objectives: assassinating Hamas' long-sought after military mastermind Ahmed Jaabari and other top officials, destroying much of Hamas' long-range arsenal of imported Iranian-produced Fajr-5

missiles, and eliminating other significant high-value military targets. Despite this, however, a number of unintended consequences have already emerged, ranging from the boosting of Hamas' prominence, undermining its isolation, further weakening the Palestinian Authority's Mahmoud Abbas, and diverting regional attention from Syria.

Fundamentally, the operation — an outgrowth of a rapid escalation of the past year's episodic firing from Gaza into southern Israel and IDF strikes against limited targets — appears to have been the unintended consequence of Hamas' miscalculation: The organization apparently determined it could build up long-range rockets in Gaza and allow its truce with Israel to erode without incurring a significant price. Over the past year, Hamas, the de facto ruler in Gaza, allowed even more militant groups to launch mortars and rockets into southern Israel seemingly thinking that Israel's response would be limited. The fact that its military leader, Jaabari, felt confident to let strict operational security lapse and leave himself vulnerable to an Israeli strike while riding in an unprotected vehicle reflects that.

But rather than marginalize Hamas, Israel's operation so far has only enhanced the centrality of that organization. That by-product is entirely consistent with Israel's aim — to compel Hamas to take responsibility for developments in Gaza. As in the 2009 Cast Lead operation, Israel's goal now is not to destroy Hamas, but to compel it to behave more responsibly and keep order in Gaza. Much of the mortar fire over the past year against southern Israel has been launched by groups more radical than Hamas. By holding Hamas responsible, Israel inadvertently bolsters Hamas' standing and legitimacy as the ultimate power-

broker and arbiter in Gaza.

Yet this objective of forcing Hamas' responsibility has unintentionally contributed to undermining Israel's longstanding objective of keeping Hamas isolated internationally, if not regionally. With the United States, Israel, and other countries urging Egypt to rein in the Gaza leaders, Hamas' centrality as the locus of decision-making grows rather than diminishes. This then encourages other Middle East leaders to accelerate their rush to Gaza while skipping Ramallah to court Hamas' leadership.

This Qatari, Turkish, Tunisian, and Egyptian courting of Hamas has the unintended consequence of further eroding the stature of the Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas, a Palestinian leader avowedly committed to the non-violent path. By bypassing Ramallah and President Abbas, they further marginalize the moderate leaders as the proper address for resolving problems. This still leaves the Ramallah based Palestinian authority shouldering much of the burden for the situation in Gaza by being the largest source of sustenance for the Strip's wage-earners. It also has the unintended consequence of boosting the diplomatic standing of Islamist supporters: Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey.

The fact that Israel has acted with considerable restraint compared to its conduct of Operation Cast Lead has created conditions boosting Hamas' domestic popularity, at least for now. Gazans have sustained the majority of the casualties and damage so far, and don't expect to beat the Israelis militarily. Just causing the Israelis pain — piercing the "Tel Aviv bubble" and lashing out against Israeli Jerusalem — is seen as a tactical

achievement, so long as it does not incur demonstrable defeat or the populace overwhelming loss. That perception is why, in addition to taking out Hamas' increased military capabilities in Gaza, Israel feels the need to strike a decisive psychological blow — an aim that may well prove elusive.

The current conflict will also have the further unintended effect of reinforcing President Abbas determination to seek non-member state status at the end of the month. In Palestinian eyes right now, it is Hamas that is seen to be taking action, not Abbas. Abbas thus no doubt feels all the more compelled to carry out his threat to resume his U.N. gambit, despite strong American, Israeli and other international opposition.

A final unintended consequence of the conflict has been to eclipse the regional and international focus on Syria, where hundreds of people have been slaughtered on a daily basis for the past year and a half. Assad will likely exploit this by ratcheting up his brutality against Syrian rebels and civilians while eyes are gazed elsewhere. While the course of Operation Pillar of Dust is still to be played out, we can be sure that it will be filled with surprises.

Article 8.

The Financial Times

Obama's path to Xanadu runs via Jerusalem

Edward Luce

18, 2012 -- All in is the title of the Paula Broadwell biography of David Petraeus – and thus a good phrase to avoid just now. Yet Tom Donilon, Barack Obama's national security adviser, was not amiss last week in using it to describe the US pivot to Asia. Even four years ago it was hard to imagine a freshly elected president heading straight for southeast Asia – and in the midst of negotiations to avert the fiscal cliff. Yet it seems natural in 2012 that Mr Obama's first itinerary should comprise three of China's neighbours.

Mr Obama has important business at the East Asia Summit in Cambodia and in gently helping the tide of democracy in Myanmar – both notable stopovers before Thanksgiving. As indeed is his visit to a politically shaky Thailand. But the larger game will always be about a rising China. If Mr Obama has his way, America's "rebalancing" to Asia will be his chief diplomatic legacy in 2016. Yet if the Middle East is true to form, he will be continually wrenched back into the quagmires on the other side of the Strait of Hormuz.

As we are reminded by the incendiary situation in the Gaza Strip and the looming showdown over Iran's nuclear threshold, the tug of war between Middle East realities and the unfolding strategy in the Pacific is likely to be the chief tension through Mr Obama's second term. He already has four years of this

under his belt. In spite of the surge in Afghanistan, Mr Obama's big first-term goal was to close the military accounts in the Muslim world so that the US could refocus its attention on the Asia-Pacific region.

The US troop presence in Afghanistan concludes in 2014. But the scaling down there and in Iraq has already freed up resources to go east. Earlier this year, Leon Panetta, the Pentagon chief, said the US would deploy 60 per cent of its naval assets in the Asia-Pacific and 40 per cent in the Atlantic – from the previous 50:50 division. According to the Pentagon, this will include one aircraft carrier, four standard destroyers, three Zumwalt destroyers, 10 Littoral combat ships and two submarines – as well as the new base in Darwin, Australia that will host 2,500 marines.

Many in China are paranoid about America's intentions. US officials stress that the military side is only one aspect of the pivot. There is the Trans Pacific Partnership, an ambitious US-led coalition of the willing to dismantle remaining trade barriers. China assumes it is not welcome in the TPP. But the grouping has the potential to grow. There is also the burgeoning calendar of US strategic and economic dialogues, not least with China itself.

Even in the US defence build up, where Beijing's suspicions are trained, Washington has invited China to be an observer of its war games – the most recent of which in August spanned 22 countries. But there are now hundreds of US military exercises in Asia every year. China is almost always absent. There can be little question that US-China relations have deteriorated since 2009.

Yet it is worth remembering the overtures with which Mr Obama started out, even travelling to Beijing in 2009 to offer it a de facto “G2” partnership to manage common challenges such as climate change and Iran. The Obama team still feels the sting of how rudely China slapped him down. Nor should China forget how much it benefits from the fact that most of the Pacific remains an American lake. The US navy can claim to have underwritten the most transformative period of growth in human history.

And while China’s naval reach – its so-called “area of denial” – extends further each year, it has no treaty allies on which to call. China may soon overtake the US as the largest economy in the world. But in the short term its growing self-confidence is raising demand among neighbours for a stronger US presence. Mr Obama probably holds more cards than Xi Jinping, his new Chinese counterpart. There is every reason for Mr Xi to improve the tone. China, after all, is the biggest free rider on US largesse.

Which brings us back to the Middle East. It has recently become fashionable to speculate that the US could one day persuade China to share its security burden in the region. The US gets barely a 10th of its imported oil from the Middle East and that is set to shrink to zero by the time Mr Obama leaves office. China, on the other hand, gets half its oil from there, which will rise to three-quarters by 2020. In practice, oil prices are global and the US will always have an interest in stability in the Middle East.

Yet as Mr Obama knew in 2009 the region can never be stable without an Arab-Israeli settlement. Mr Obama made a bid for that once and was humiliated by Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister. Nor, of course, could the pivot to Asia

survive war with Iran.

In 2012, Mr Obama strikes a much flintier leader on the world stage. If he can build “strategic trust” with China in the Middle East, the habit could take hold elsewhere. One might say that the road to Xanadu goes through Tehran and Jerusalem. If he cannot, then he faces a tough four years of trying to cope with a rising China amid flat or falling US defence budgets and the constant threat of war in the Middle East.

It is a challenge every bit as consequential as the fiscal cliff.