

Hamas Turned Gaza into Launching Pad for Terror

Israel demonstrated its willingness to take dramatic risks for peace with the Palestinians when it unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in the summer of 2005. Israel's positive initiative was, unfortunately, met with increased violence. In June 2007, Hamas took control of Gaza through a violent coup against the reigning Fatah party. With a goal of destroying Israel, a position which has gone unchanged since its founding in 1987, Hamas has consolidated its power and turned Gaza into a launching pad for terrorist activity.

In response, Israel was forced in late December 2008 to launch Operation Cast Lead, a three-week operation aimed at stopping the rocket fire and deterring future attacks. Israel's actions in Gaza specifically targeted Hamas while taking extraordinary and unprecedented efforts to avoid civilian casualties. Israel facilitated humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza throughout the entire operation even while its soldiers and civilians were being attacked.



Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian terrorists have fired more than 7,000 rockets and mortars in Israel since it withdrew from Gaza in 2005.

Israel's Gaza Withdrawal was a Historic Move Toward Peace

In August 2005, Israel took a bold step toward peace by unilaterally withdrawing from Gaza, an area that came into Israeli hands during the 1967 Six-Day War. In a dramatic move that caused great trauma among the Israeli public, Israel dismantled all 21 settlements in Gaza and relocated roughly 8,500 residents. Israel hoped that the Palestinians would use this opportunity to develop their economy, build government institutions and move toward peace.

However, Hamas further consolidate its control of Gaza and step up attacks on Israel. After

Hamas' success in January 2006 elections, the international community represented by the Quartet—the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations—said Hamas needed to adhere to a set of three requirements: recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements.

Instead of taking such steps, Hamas and other terrorist groups in Gaza increased their attacks, firing more than 7,000 rockets and mortars into Israel since 2005.

Hamas Carries Out Violent Coup in Gaza

In June 2007, Hamas carried out a bloody coup against the Fatah party. The two groups were in a unity government at the time Hamas forcefully took over the area, leaving Fatah, the party of Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas, in charge only of the West Bank. After the coup, Abbas fired the Hamas-led government and established a technocratic government led by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad.

In June 2008, Egypt separately persuaded Hamas and Israel to accept a cessation of hostilities. Despite Hamas' commitment to stop firing rockets and mortars, an average of two attacks per day continued. Hamas refused to extend the lull in fighting in December, and resumed full-scale rocket fire.

Hamas Expands Weapons Smuggling, Military Infrastructure

Since the 2007 coup, Hamas increased its weapons supplies by smuggling tons of

explosives and weapons into Gaza. Hamas increased not only the amount of weapons, but also the sophistication of its arsenal. Beyond the crude Qassam rockets Hamas has indiscriminately fired at Israeli border towns such as Sderot, the terrorist group targeted larger population centers such as Ashkelon, Ashdod and Beersheba with longer range and more destructive Katyusha rockets. Hamas is now believed to possess rockets that can hit Tel Aviv.

Smuggling has become so prevalent in Gaza that Hamas began regulating the tunnel industry by requiring tunnel owners to obtain licenses and pay fees.

Hamas and other groups use a vast underground tunnel network under the Egypt-Gaza border to smuggle into Gaza hundreds of shoulder-fired RPG anti-tank missiles, thousands of assault rifles, millions of bullets, tons of high-quality explosives and a dozen anti-aircraft missiles.

Smuggling became so prevalent in Gaza that starting in late September 2008, Hamas began regulating the tunnel industry by requiring tunnel owners to obtain licenses and pay fees to Hamas. In addition to upgrading weapons, Hamas advanced its military capabilities by imitating Hizballah, creating formal quasi-military units and instituting more extensive training for troops.

Israel Forced to Defend Itself

Because of Hamas' continued rejection of the Quartet requirements and continued violence, Israel was forced to take additional steps to protect its citizens, including tougher military action and restricting movement across the borders between Israel and Gaza. Throughout Israel's operation in Gaza, it continued to facilitate humanitarian aid into Gaza and allowed patients needing medical care to cross into Israel. Hamas bears full responsibility for the Palestinian hardships resulting from the attacks ordered by the group.

Israel's actions in Gaza specifically targeted Hamas command centers, security installations, rocket-launching sites, weapons stockpiles and smuggling tunnels. In its efforts to avoid civilian casualties, Israel transmitted specific warnings to Gazans about impending actions against Hamas targets. Unfortunately, Hamas located its terrorist infrastructure in civilian population centers to make it more difficult for Israel to target and to increase the likelihood of civilian casualties when Israel acted.



Palestinians have used tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border to smuggle arms into Gaza.

Congress, Administration Strongly Back Israel's Right to Self-Defense

Congress has steadfastly stood by Israel as it has taken necessary measures to defend its citizens. During Israel's actions in Gaza, the House and Senate overwhelmingly passed resolutions strongly supporting Israel's right to defend itself. A broad coalition of lawmakers and other top American officials also made a series of statements supporting Israel's efforts to defend its citizens from Hamas' terrorizing rocket attacks.

President Barack Obama also has strongly backed Israel's right to defend its citizens. Two

days after his inauguration, Obama said America “will always support Israel's right to defend itself against legitimate threats. For years, Hamas has launched thousands of rockets at innocent Israeli citizens. No democracy can tolerate such danger to its people, nor should the international community, and neither should the Palestinian people themselves, whose interests are only set back by acts of terror.” Additionally, Obama, like his predecessor, has opposed any dealings with Hamas until it meets the three requirements established by the international Quartet – rejecting violence, recognizing Israel and accepting previous agreements.

Working to Prevent Hamas' Rearmament

The key to preventing further hostilities is to ensure that Hamas is not allowed to continue smuggling mostly Iranian-supplied weapons into Gaza. In the aftermath of the conflict, the United States and several European powers agreed to step up efforts to interdict and stop Iranian gun-running destined for terrorists in Gaza.

The United States and Israel also signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) pledging joint efforts to stem the flow of weapons to Hamas and terrorists in Gaza. The agreement recognizes that Hamas' acquisition and use of arms against Israel were “the direct causes of recent hostilities” and that a durable and sustainable cessation of hostilities depends on denying weapons to terrorist groups and countering Iran's destructive activities. The agreement also strongly underscores American support for the security of the Jewish state and the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship to America's national security.

American Israel Public Affairs Committee



Palestinian rockets from Gaza have struck schools, synagogues, malls and homes, including the one in Ashkelon above.

Israel's actions in Gaza have led to a major decrease in rocket and mortar attacks.

Unfortunately, this reduction appears to reflect a tactical decision by Hamas, not an ideological shift against the use of violence.

As Israel works closely with the United States and other allies to prevent Hamas from rearming, Israel is committed to working to ensure that the Palestinian people in Gaza continue to receive needed humanitarian supplies. Israel also said it will work with the PA, Arab states and the international community to ensure that rebuilding in Gaza helps empower those seeking peace, and not Hamas and its allies who call for Israel's destruction.