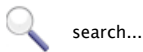


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**Netanyahu's Gaza war: Changing Aims but Predictable Consequences**

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Seyed Hossein Mousavian & Shahir ShahidSaless

Israel kept changing its narrative on this conflict as its war machine continued to devastate Gaza and the civilian death toll among Gazans grew unceasingly.

At the beginning of the war [we were told](#) that Israel wanted "to lay a significant blow on Hamas' terror capabilities and infrastructure." This was certainly a loose description of Israel's real goal in this war. Those who follow the Israeli-Palestinian dispute well know that other than the Izzaddin al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, to name a few, Al-Quds Brigades, Al-Nasser Salah al-Deen Brigades, Abu Ali Mustapha Brigades are also involved in the conflict with Israel.



At the centre of Israel's justification of its collective punishment approach in Gaza was the threat to Israel from the Palestinians' rocket capability. However, it is an open secret that this capability is now indigenous and that they now possess the know-how required to make their own rockets and, as Israel understands, this knowledge cannot be obliterated by tanks and missiles.

When the Israeli army crossed the border a vast network of tunnels was discovered. Then suddenly the war aim changed to destroying the tunnels. No one had even dreamed of this aim before the war started. As the conflict develops we cannot rule out yet more aims appearing.

What we have witnessed, however, is that Israel seeks to destroy the infrastructure of Gaza as a whole instead of just Hamas's. When Gaza's electric plant was hit, Gaza was practically left without power and water while the sewage system also collapsed. It is also reported that the health system and the hospitals are also significantly damaged and are on the brink of collapse. These developments lead us to wonder whether Israel's real aim is to make Gaza uninhabitable for several years.

Given the Iranian support for Hamas and other resistance groups in Gaza, Netanyahu, counting on the support of the Congress and the Israel lobby, was also seeking to exert pressure on Obama and his administration to derail the nuclear talks with Iran. The message to the Obama administration is clear, think twice before striking a deal with Iran. At the onset of the war Netanyahu [remarked](#), "Hamas and Islamic Jihad are being financed, armed and trained by Iran... This Iran cannot be allowed the ability to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons." Manifesting his sense of confidence he added, "The prediction of Iran as a nuclear threshold state – by the way this is a relatively new term used by the Israeli officials which is subtitled for nuclear state - cannot be allowed to come true, it cannot. This cannot be and it will not be."

Netanyahu's audacity in beginning these unimaginable operations, with no regard for international laws and humanitarian principles, was based on a number factors. The Arab world, which traditionally rallies around Palestinians against Israel, is in turmoil and the Arab League, in practical terms, is crippled and dysfunctional.

Additionally, in the wake of the ever evolving geopolitical realities in the Middle East, some Arab countries, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, welcome, albeit subtly, the IDF operations in the hope of seeing Hamas destroyed. They even hardly offer lip service to the Palestinians' sufferings. A glaring example is Cairo keeping the Rafah border crossing closed most of the time even amid heavy shelling of Gaza by Israel. The 12-kilometre crossing links the Gaza strip, under crippling Israeli siege since 2007, to Egypt.

Netanyahu also realized that under new regional dynamics the US has fewer allies than ever and its influence has considerably diminished across the Middle East. Netanyahu, rightly so, knew that the US would not be in a position to

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stop Israel's war machine regardless of the scale of atrocities it would inflict on Gazans.

Obama's proposal for a ceasefire was abruptly rejected by Israel and a war of words ensued between Obama and Netanyahu. The US president demanded that Israel end its offensive immediately and accept Turkey and Qatar's mediation for a permanent ceasefire. Netanyahu responded saying, "Qatar and Turkey are the biggest supporters of Hamas. It's not possible to trust them." Obama's sharp reaction was that, "Israel is not in a position where it can choose its mediators." Apparently, President Obama was wrong!

The US failure to secure a firm ceasefire in the Gaza, as a result of the objections from Egypt and Israel, reflects the new geopolitical reality in the region.

Whether Israel's rejection of Washington's diplomacy is a prevailing trend remains to be seen. But it is apparent, now more than ever, that the interests of the US and Israel have started to diverge at a quickening pace and maybe even conflict. The outcome of such an eventuality is that Israel would take the liberty of advancing its interests without any consideration for international laws and norms as well as the consequences of its acts for US interests.

Against this backdrop, you do not have to be a genius to realize that Israel's current acts only result in the radicalization of the Palestinian movement, possibly the emergence of the third Intifada, and the strengthening of jihadi movements in the region as a whole.

Even the Arab states who side with Israel, either with their obvious acts and policies, or by remaining as mute spectators, must know that they are just adding fuel to the flame of jihadi extremism that will eventually come back to haunt them.

**Ambassador [Seyed Hossein Mousavian](#) is a research scholar at Princeton University and a former spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiators. His latest book, "[Iran and the United States: An Insider's view on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace](#)" was released in May 2014.*

**Shahir ShahidSaless is a political analyst and freelance journalist writing primarily about Iranian domestic and foreign affairs.*

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