



March 9 2017

Hamis Threatens to Retaliate Strongly for Israeli Attacks Responding to Rocket Fire into Israeli Territory

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منذ نهاية الحرب على غزة عام 2014 سعى الجيش الصهيوني لفرض معادلة جديدة مقابل كل صاروخ يسقط من قطاع غزة على الأراضي المحتلة، تتمثل في استهداف ما يحلو له من المواقع والأهداف العسكرية التابعة للمقاومة متذرعاً بأنها "ردّة نعل".

إسرائيل تعرف أن المعادلة التي تعمل عليها لها خطوط حمراء تتمثل بعدم الوصول لأضرار بشرية لدى الفلسطينيين، وتعرف أيضاً أن معادلة اللعبة قد تتغير في حال تجاوز تلك الخطوط وقد يحدث تصعيد عليها غير محمود.

وبرغم ذلك فإن المعادلة القائمة باتت مرغوبة لدى المقاومة الفلسطينية ويات الرأي العام في قطاع غزة يرى بضرورة أن يكون هناك رد عليها مؤنسية بدرجة أساسية.

وبخلاف التقديرات السابقة التي تحدثت عن أن المقاومة تستطيع أن تمتص أي استفزازات صهيونية في قطاع غزة إلا أن التوجه العام حالياً بات يندرج بأننا سنكون أمام مرحلة عدم الصمت والرد، وفرض حل يوقف هذه السياسة الهجومية.

إن كانت دولة الكيان تريد مزيداً من التحدية على جبهة غزة فليها أن تعي أن المعادلة ستختلف، وربما تأخذ منحى التصف، وموقع عسكري بموقع عسكري، وهدف بهدف.

ربما تكون المقاومة صممت في هذه المرة، نتيجة ظروف ومعطيات خاصة بها، إلا أن الاعتقاد السائد الآن بأن أي اعتداء في العوات المقبلة سيقابل بحزمته مختلفة ومغايرة عن السابق.

في السابق كانت المقاومة في قطاع غزة تتعامل بحكمة وتعالج حالات الانفلات الصاروخية داخلياً وتغض الطرف عن الاعتداءات الصهيونية بهدف الحفاظ على التحدية ومواصلة البناء والاعداد، إلا أن استقلال دولة الكيان لاعتل هذه الحوادث في ضرب مقدرات للمقاومة جعلها أمام تحدٍ حقيقي وكبير يضاهي عمليات التوغل الحدودي داخل قطاع غزة التي كانت في السابق والتي انتهت بفرض المقاومة معادلة جديدة أفضحت لإيقظها.

التحدي الأخير الذي باتت المقاومة في مواجهته، يندرج أننا أمام سيناريو مواجهة مشابهة لمعادلة التوغلات وصولاً لكسر هذه المعادلة، حتى وإن تصاعدت الأمور وأصبحت أكثر سخونة.



Article published on the al-Majd website, affiliated with Hamas' security forces, a day after the IDF responded to rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. The response was regarded by Hamas as serious and disproportionate. The article is entitled, "Will the new equation in Gaza be a rocket for a rocket and a [military] post for a [military] post?!" (al-Majd, February 28, 2017).

Hamis Threatens Strong Retaliation for Israeli Attacks

1. In his speech on the anniversary of the killing of Hezbollah's three high-ranking 1. **On February 27, 2017, a rocket fire was fired into Israeli territory, landing near a community in the western Negev. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked five Hamas terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, February 27, 2017). The Palestinian ministry of health reported three wounded (Ma'an, February 27, 2017).**

2. The Israeli response to the rocket fire led to strong reactions from Hamas spokesmen and the Hamas-affiliated media. In Hamas' opinion Israel's response was disproportionate and intended to force a "new equation" on Hamas. Hamas reiterated the threat that it would not permit Israel to enforce such an "equation,"

even if it led to an escalation unwanted by Hamas. Some of the reactions from Hamas spokesman and media were the following:

a. **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** said Israel was responsible for any escalation, which, he said, harmed the "resistance" [i.e., Hamas] and the residents of the Gaza Strip. He also said that **continuing attacks on "resistance" posts and facilities were "deliberately intended to ignite the Gaza Strip."** He added that **the "resistance" would not allow Israel to enforce new rules of engagement on Hamas** (Shehab, February 27, 2017). In a press release published on a Hamas website on February 27, 2017, he said "Hamas accuses the Israeli entity of full responsibility for the dangerous, continuing escalation in the Gaza Strip targeting the Palestinian resistance and our Gazan civilians. **We cannot accept the continued attacks on the [military] posts of the resistance, its facilities and territories.** [We also cannot accept Israel's] intention to escalate the situation in the Gaza Strip and force new equations on the resistance, **regardless of the price**" (Hamas website, February 27, 2017).



Notice from Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum after the Israeli attack. The Arabic reads, in part, "...[We also cannot not accept Israel's] intention to force new equations on the resistance, regardless of the price" (Hamas website, February 27, 2017).

b. **Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military wing**, threatened that **the next time Israel attacked, Hamas would respond and not remain silent.** He added that Israel understood only the language of force and that **"the resistance, especially the [Izz al-Din] Qassam Brigades, would have something to say to any future aggression, such as what happened yesterday [February 27]. If the resistance promises, it keeps it promise.**

Wait and see" (Twitter account of Abu Obeida, quoted by the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website, February 28, 2017). The Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website also issued commentary, stating that a change could occur in the rules of engagement on the ground since Operation Protective Edge. According to Hamas-affiliated commentator **Hamza Abu Shanab**, the "resistance" was adopting a different approach and **the next time would not allow Israel to continue its aggression**. He claimed that next time the Palestinian resistance and the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades **would have different responses [for Israel]** (Hamza Abu Shanab, the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website, February 28, 2017).



Statement issued by Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades spokesman Abu Obeida, posted to the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website, February 28, 2017).

c. On February 28, 2017, the day after the Israeli Air Force response, **the al-Majd website, which is affiliated with Hamas' security forces**, published an article. It threatened **Hamas might abandon its policy of restraint, and its new approach would be "a rocket for a rocket and a military post for a military post, an attack for an attack."** According to the article, **every act of "Israeli aggression" would be responded to differently from the past**, until Israel abandoned its new equation and returned to the previous rules of engagement. That would be the case despite the fact that **Hamas was aware of the risks of such an escalation, which were liable to have results Hamas did not want** (See the Appendix for a translation of the article).

d. Other Hamas spokesmen and Hamas-affiliated media **also sent warnings to deter Israel**. A senior operative in one of the Gaza Strip terrorist organizations

said Hamas was prepared for a new campaign because **in 2015 it had completed its military buildup** (al-Akhbar, Lebanon, March 3, 2017). **Ibrahim al-Madhoun**, a Hamas-affiliated political commentator in the Gaza Strip, wrote that Hamas had **"thousands of young men eager to change the equation of the struggle, regardless of the cost."** He said an Israeli attack in the Gaza Strip was **very complex**. Israel, he said, was also aware **that there was "no reason [for such an attack]"** (Twitter account of Ibrahim al-Madhoun, March 4, 2017).



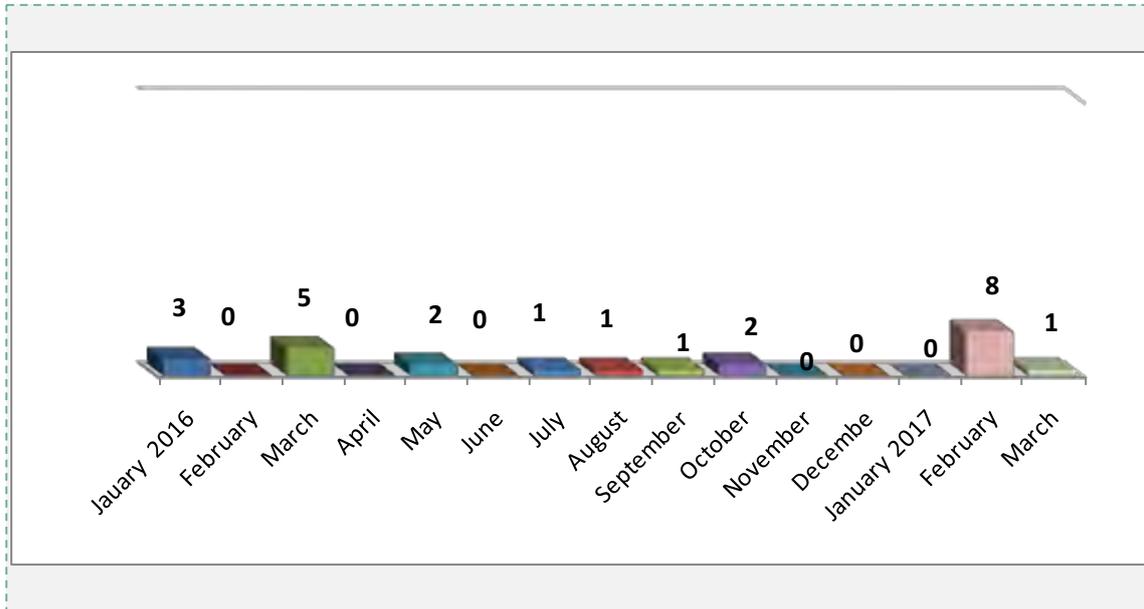
Hamas cartoon of the results of escalation to Israel. The Arabic reads, "The Israeli escalation [along] the Gaza Strip border" (Twitter account of Palinfo, March 4, 2017).

Developments behind Hamas' Threats

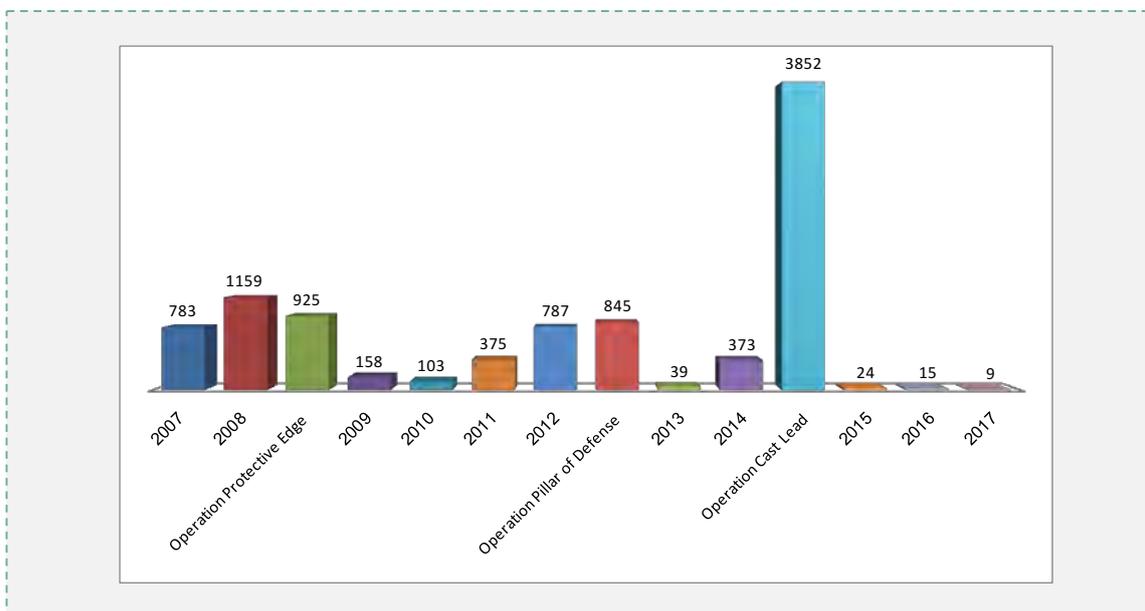
3. In ITIC assessment **various recent developments on the ground and in the internal Palestinian arena are behind Hamas' threats:**

a. **The recent considerable increase in rocket fire into Israeli territory.** Since the beginning of February 2017 **nine rockets have landed inside Israel**, the **highest number during any month since Operation Protective Edge** (although lower than during the years prior to the operation). While the rockets were not fired by Hamas, which continues its policy of restraint, **IDF responses to the rocket fire focus on Hamas targets**, since Israel regards the organization as the **sovereign ruler of the Gaza Strip**.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Hits in Israel since January 2016



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits in Israel's South



b. **Recently Israel's response to the rocket fire has been perceived by Hamas as disproportionate.** Israel's latest response (to the rocket fire on February 27, 2017) was considered by Hamas to be **a change from Israel's responses customary since the end of Operation Protective Edge.** From Hamas' point of view, the change has been accompanied by threatening rhetoric

in Israel and a heated internal Israeli discourse about a possible future confrontation with Hamas. The combination of a strong Israeli response and threatening rhetoric was clear to Hamas in an interview with Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman (Ynet, March 2, 2017). He stressed that Israel responded "strongly to every rocket," but added that every response was weighed on its own merits.¹



The Hamas-affiliated al-Ra'i website reports the Ynet interview with Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman. The headline reads, "Lieberman: Our response to rocket [fire] will not be dictated by Hamas' [fluctuating] moods" (al-Ra'i, Gaza Strip, March 2, 2017).

c. **The rise in the level of tension between Hamas and the Salafi jihadist organizations in the Gaza Strip:** The tension is the result of Hamas security forces' detention of Salafist operatives, undertaken **to enforce the Hamas' policy of restraint on them**, and at the same time to improve Hamas' relations with Egypt. The Salafist networks **regard rocket fire into Israel as a means to ease the pressure exerted by Hamas**. If Israel responds strongly and Hamas fulfills its threats, **it will increase the ability of the Salafi jihadist networks to ignite a Hamas-Israel conflict by firing rockets, even if neither Hamas nor Israel is interested in such a scenario.**

¹ The interviewer asked Lieberman if it was not the duty of the leadership to prevent war. He answered, "That is the right question, what will prevent war? Only when Hamas internalizes the fact that every step it takes, every rocket [fired] will make Hamas lose, will there not be war. This is exactly what is necessary, the determination and understanding of the other side that everything they do and in every confrontation they lose more..." Asked why Israel did not respond to the rocket fired on March 1, 2017, he said that "it has been my military strategy since I [became defense minister] **we respond strongly to every rocket, every provocation.**" However, he added that "we don't have to let Hamas call the tune and **we don't have to accustom them to a certain or permanent pattern of response.** We weigh everything..." (Ynet, March 2, 2017) (Translated from the Hebrew by the ITIC; ITIC emphasis).

d. **The results of the elections recently held in the Gaza Strip for the new Hamas political bureau:** The radical members of the new political bureau **bring increased influence from the military wing**. That influence in turn **increases the weight of military considerations in decisions made by Hamas** and may upset the system of checks and balances in place within Hamas until the recent elections. **The recent threats may express the change in the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip**, and indicate the new elected leadership's **greater readiness** to take risks and **pursue aggressive policies against Israel**, despite the danger of deterioration.

Conclusion

4. **In ITIC assessment the threats issued by Hamas were intended to deter Israel from responding to rocket fire with what Hamas considers disproportionate force.** In ITIC assessment, Hamas does not want a deliberate escalation, and is still influenced by the factors restraining it since Operation Protective Edge.² However, the developments noted above have eroded the factors and increased the explosive potential **which may develop further because of the rockets fired by the rogue organizations**. In such a scenario Israel may respond to the rocket fire in a way that Hamas regards as disproportionate, which may goad it into **fulfilling its public promises to create a "new response equation."** That is liable to lead to an escalation which neither side wants at the present time.

² In ITIC assessment, **one of the main factors restraining Hamas is the difficult economic situation in the Gaza Strip** and Hamas, as the sovereign power, has to take it into consideration. On one occasion, a senior operative in one of the terrorist networks in the Gaza Strip, interviewed by the Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar, said "the 'resistance' in the Gaza Strip completed the rebuilding of its military inventory in 2015, and since then has been prepared for a new campaign." However, he added that **"the main [factor] restraining [Hamas from a new military campaign] is the situation of the residents of the Gaza Strip"** (al-Akhbar, Lebanon, March 3, 2017).

Appendix

"Will the new equation in Gaza be a rocket for a rocket and a [military] post for a [military] post?"

(Translation of article posted to the al-Majd website, affiliated with Hamas' security forces, on February 28, 2017³)

Since the end of the war against the Gaza Strip in 2014 [i.e., Operation Protective Edge], the Zionist army has sought to enforce a new equation [regarding] every rocket fired from the Gaza Strip that falls in the occupied territories [i.e., in Israeli territory]. According to [this new equation], the enemy targets the posts and military facilities of the resistance [i.e., Hamas and the other terrorist organizations], claiming [the attacks] are in "response" [to rocket fire].

Israel knows that **the equation it worked for has red lines, one of which is no loss of Palestinian life**. Israel also knows that **the rules of engagement may change if those lines are crossed, possibly resulting in an escalation with unwanted outcomes**.

Nevertheless, **the existing equation is no longer acceptable to the Palestinian resistance. According to public opinion in the Gaza Strip, a response is necessary because [the new equation] is fundamentally harmful**.

As opposed to previous assessments, which refer to the resistance's ability to absorb the Zionists' acts of provocation in the Gaza Strip, **the current general trend of thought is that we are at the beginning of the first stage of not remaining silent [to Israeli aggression]**. It will then be followed by other stages, and **enforce a solution that will end [Israel's] thoughtless, irresponsible policies**.

If the country of the [Zionist] entity wants the lull on the Gaza front to continue, it has to be aware that **the [existing] equation is liable to change, and that [Hamas] may choose to respond with a policy of a rocket for a rocket, [an attack on] a military post for [an attack on] a military post, a target for a target**. The resistance may have restrained itself this time [i.e., to the Israeli response on February 27, 2017] because of circumstances and considerations. However, the current opinion is that

³ ITIC emphasis throughout.

every future act of aggression will be met with a response different from those of the past.

In the past the resistance in the Gaza Strip acted judiciously, dealt internally with rocket fire carried out by rogue organizations and ignored Zionist aggression, **all in order to preserve the lull and continue building and preparing**. However, [Israel's] exploiting of the events in order to harm the resistance's capabilities **presented the resistance with a great, genuine challenge**. That challenge is the equivalent of [the challenge cause by IDF] invasions into the Gaza Strip which were carried out in the past. [The invasions] **ended when the resistance enforced a new equation on Israel**.

The latest challenge for the resistance is that we are now facing a confrontation scenario similar to the equation of invasions [which ended]. [It will continue] until the new equation is broken, even if that the situation escalates and heats up.