



Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, reiterated Hamas' position that military buildup and the campaign against Israel are its top priorities, even at the expense of the economic development and welfare of the local population

July 30, 2020

## Overview

On July 27, 2020, Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, was interviewed by the Qatari daily newspaper *Lusail*. He claimed that as part of the "deal of the century" **Hamas had been offered \$15 billion to construct a sea port and an airport, and for other economic projects.** He added that the objective was to turn the Gaza Strip into a separate, thriving territory (a kind of Middle Eastern Singapore). However, he said, **Hamas had rejected the offer. That was because in return it was required to dismantle its military wing** (as well as the military wings of the other terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip) and to **remove all its arms from Gaza** (including rockets and heavy weapons). He said it was in Hamas' interest to lift the [so-called] "siege" of Gaza, but **not at the expense of abandoning its principles, the most central of which were continuing its military buildup, refusing to recognize Israel, realizing the [so-called] "right of return" and establishing a Palestinian state "from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river."**



Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, interviewed by the Qatari daily newspaper *Lusail* (*Lusail* on YouTube, July 27, 2020).

► Haniyeh was interviewed at a time when **economic hardships in Gaza are increasing** because of COVID-19. According to a report on the Gaza-based Sawa news website, **the rate of unemployment in Gaza is 60% and there are more than 300,000 unemployed.** Also, according to the report, because of the limitations placed on exports in the wake of COVID-

19, **manufacturing decreased by 30% and the economic situation is deteriorating** (Sawa, July 17, 2020).

► Haniyeh was sending the message, to both internal and external target audiences, that despite the economic hardships and the great temptation of \$15 billion, **Hamas is not prepared to abandon its fundamental principles. Those principles dictate the priority of its military buildup and the ongoing terrorist campaign against Israel over the needs of the civilian population.** A similar message was sent by Khaled Mashaal, who preceded Isma'il Haniyeh as chairman of Hamas' political bureau, who said after Operation Cast Lead that " **most of Hamas' funds and efforts are invested in the resistance and military preparations...**"



**Cartoon published after Isma'il Haniyeh's statement. The rifle is drawn to form the Arabic word "No" and the caption reads, "The resistance refuses to trade its weapons and Jerusalem for \$15 billion" (Facebook page of Alaa al-Laqta, July 28, 2020)<sup>1</sup>.**

► Hamas' fundamental positions, which are a function of its ideology, **enforce poverty and hardship on the local population and prohibit any genuine chance for an economic recovery in the Gaza Strip.** Putting the emphasis on military buildup and continuing to fight Israel obligates Israel (and Egypt) to **closely monitor all the sea lanes and overland routes leading to Gaza.** Hamas' response to close supervision was an anti-Israeli propaganda campaign that targeted the West (and sometimes the Arab states), **blaming Israel for a "siege" of Gaza and the destruction of its economy.** Hamas continued waging the campaign even **while dealing with the coronavirus, blaming Israel for a "siege" which [allegedly] led to the destruction of its public health system.**

<sup>1</sup> Alaa al-Laqta lives outside the Gaza Strip but regularly publishes cartoons in the Hamas-affiliated Filastin al-A'an. His cartoons support Hamas-affiliated positions.

## Isma'il Haniyeh's Interview with the Qatari Newspaper Lusail about the "deal of the century"

- ▶ On July 27, 2020, **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, was interviewed by the Qatari daily newspaper *Lusail*. He said he wanted to relate to the "deal of the century." He claimed that two months ago **Hamas was offered \$15 billion [by agencies he chose not to name], supported by the "great powers."** The money was aimed for **constructing a sea port and an airport, and for other economic projects.**
- ▶ Haniyeh claimed Hamas gave an affirmative answer to the offer **but in return was required to dismantle its military wing (and military wings of the other organizations operating in the Gaza Strip)**, and merge them with the existing police force. In addition, **all weapons would be removed from the Gaza Strip**, including rockets and other "heavy weapons." Haniyeh added that the objective of the offer was **to create a political entity in the Gaza Strip** ("similar to Singapore") divorced and separate from the Palestinian national movement, and **to destroy the Gaza Strip front, currently, he said, "a hot military front."**
- ▶ **Haniyeh said Hamas had rejected the offer outright.** He said it was in Hamas' interest to lift the "siege" of the Gaza Strip and realize projects like a sea port and an airport, **but not at the expense of abandoning its fundamental principles.** Hamas, he said, would not give up the weapons in its possession ("the weapons of the 'resistance' "); would not recognize Israel; would insist on "Palestine from the river to the sea," where a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital would be established; would insist on realizing the [so-called] "right of return" and the release of the [Palestinian terrorist] prisoners in Israeli jails.

## Propaganda Campaign Echoing Haniyeh's Message

Following the interview, the **Hamas-affiliated media began a campaign** echoing Haniyeh's message and targeting internal and external audiences. It stressed Hamas' refusal to accept a bargain where in return for significant economic development in the Gaza Strip it would have to give up its weapons and aspirations to establish a Palestinian state on the entire area of the State of Israel. **That means that under no circumstances will Hamas be**

**tempted to join "Trump's plan," not even for the temptation of significant economic development.**

► On July 27, 2020, a rally was held in Gaza City, attended by hundreds of Palestinians. Its objective was to support Hamas' **refusal to disarm in return for money** (alresala.net, July 27, 2020). **Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** said people attended the rally to express their support for Hamas' positions and its determination to preserve Palestinian "rights" and "principles." He said Hamas would not allow the Palestinian cause to be harmed and would not waive its "rights" or abandon its "[military] capabilities" or the "weapons of the resistance." **Hamas, he said, adhered to the path of the "resistance project" and referred to itself as "the return and liberation project"** (al-Aqsa TV, July 27, 2020).



**Rally held in Gaza in support of Isma'il Haniyeh (Safa, July 27, 2020).**

► **Hamas spokesman Taher al-Nunu** said **Haniyeh's statement in answer to the "international appeal"** [possibly a reference to the United States] showed **it opposed trading Palestinian rights for money**. He said that when Haniyeh spoke about Hamas' refusing to lay down its arms, he was speaking for all Palestinians. Al-Nunu said the "weapons of the resistance" remained in the hands of Hamas, which would continue its military buildup until "liberation and victory." He added that anyone who thought that after years of [so-called] "siege" it would be possible to force the Palestinians into a "new equation" was mistaken. He said that in Hamas' perspective, the "path to liberation" would be through the weapons in the organizations' possession [including rockets and UAVs] and by means of the development of the "resistance's" capabilities (al-Aqsa, July 27, 2020).

## Khaled Mashaal's Revealing Statement about Hamas' Strategic Priorities

Since Hamas took control, Gaza **has been plagued by severe economic hardships, which only worsened with the COVID-19 pandemic.** The Gaza Strip suffers from a high level of unemployment, a decline in the functioning of the civilian infrastructure (public health, the supply of electricity and water, sewage treatment), and a low level of civilian services. Hardships have increased despite the great amounts of financial aid consistently funneled into the Gaza Strip by various states (especially Qatar) and institutions. **The hardships are the direct result of Hamas' order of strategic priorities,** at the top of which are its military buildup and an uncompromising campaign against Israel, which employs violence and terrorism in an effort to achieve its aspiration to destroy Israel and establish a Palestinian state on all of Israel's territory.

► Senior Hamas figures do not often relate to **the critical role Hamas' ideology and belligerent strategy play in the poverty and economic hardships in the Gaza Strip.** Instead, **Hamas wages a propaganda campaign blaming Israel and the so-called "siege" for all of Gaza's hardships.** During the current coronavirus crisis Hamas has often blamed Israel for destroying the public health system in the Gaza Strip and endangering the lives of the local Gazan population.<sup>2</sup>

► **A rare reference to Hamas' strategic priorities was made by Khaled Mashaal, who headed Hamas' political bureau before Isma'il Haniyeh, about a year after Operation Cast Lead** (when the restoration of Hamas' military wing was on the agenda). In a speech at a conference held in Damascus to raise funds, he said that **talking about construction and reconciliation [with Fatah] was only for foreign ears.** He said that "... **...outwardly, [statements in the Gaza Strip] refer to reconciliation [between Hamas and Fatah] and rebuilding, however, what is not revealed is that most of Hamas' funds and efforts are invested in the resistance and military preparations... We are intent on the resistance...**" (Filastin al-Yawm, November 12, 2009)

---

<sup>2</sup> For further information, see the April 23, 2020 bulletin, "What is the true reason for the shortcomings of the medical system in the Gaza Strip?"



**Khaled Mashaal (right) at the Arab Parties' conference: "...outwardly, [statements in the Gaza Strip] refer to reconciliation [between Hamas and Fatah] and rebuilding, however, what is not revealed is that most of Hamas' funds and efforts are invested in the resistance and military preparations..." (Filastin al-A'an, November 12, 2009).**

- ▶ **Hamas' strategic order of priorities also dictated Hamas' conduct in its contacts last year for an Egyptian-mediated arrangement with Israel** following the violent return marches held along the Israeli-Gaza Strip border. During the contacts senior Hamas figures made it clear that **Hamas was prepared to agree only to a minimalist, short-term lull, during which it would receive humanitarian aid and "practical measures" would be instituted to "ease the siege."** Hamas never stopped insisting that **it opposed a long-term lull that would lead to a cessation of "resistance" activities** [i.e., violence and terrorism].<sup>3</sup> Interviewed by the Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese TV station al-Mayadeen, Isma'il Haniyeh said **Hamas had no interest in a long-term lull agreement in which it would have to abandon its fundamental principles or disarm.** He said regardless of contacts for an arrangement, **Hamas continued to implement its strategy of military buildup, and would not agree to abandon it.**<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ **Throughout its control of the Gaza Strip, on the ground Hamas has implemented the strategic order of priorities described above.** The large sums of money funneled into Gaza have not been used to improve the civilian infrastructure or respond to the economic hardships of the local population, but **have been diverted to its military buildup.** That has included a significant increase and upgrading of its rocket arsenal; investing substantial resources in the tunnel project (including attack tunnels leading into Israeli territory, smuggling tunnels between Gaza and Egypt, and a network of tunnels inside Gaza). The military buildup also included constructing new units and increasing its order of combat;

<sup>3</sup> For further information, see the December 12, 2019 bulletin, "Hamas's perception of the lull agreement with Israel, recently discussed in Cairo."

<sup>4</sup> For further information, see the March 8, 2020 bulletin, "Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, again related to Hamas' perception of the prospects for a lull arrangement."

reinforcing its elite *nukhba* and naval force units; reconstructing the units that were damaged and improving the capabilities of its security forces. That was done while **its civilian infrastructure and economy were neglected, adding to the suffering of the local population.**

► The extent of its military buildup was mentioned in a speech by **Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau**, in the Gaza Strip on November 4, 2019, where he boasted that Hamas' military force was far larger than it had been during Operation Protective Edge. He claimed that the military capabilities of Hamas (and the other terrorist organizations) **included thousands of rockets that could allegedly turn Israel's cities into ruins and ghost towns; thousands of anti-tank missiles, hundreds of tunnels, hundreds of control and command rooms and hundreds and even thousands of ambushes to attack IDF forces if they should enter the Gaza Strip.**<sup>5</sup> Isma'il Haniyeh also boasted, when interviewed by al-Mayadeen, that **Hamas' military force was several times larger than it had been in 2014 [i.e., during Operation Protective Edge], and that its ability to strike Israel was currently far greater than it had been in the past** (al-Mayadeen, March 3, 2020).



**Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades operatives show al-Jazeera reporters a workshop where J-80 rockets are produced (YouTube, August 16, 2014). The J-80 is a long-range rocket used to attack Tel Aviv and central Israel during Operation Protective Edge. The J is for Jaabari, the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades commander killed on November 14, 2012.**

---

<sup>5</sup> For further information, see the November 10, 2019 bulletin, "Yahya al-Sinwar gave a belligerent speech warning Israel that Hamas and the Palestinian people would not accept the continuation of the 'siege' of the Gaza Strip, saying, 'We can no longer bear it and our patience is at an end.' "



**Pictures from a Hamas-produced video of an [attack] tunnel being built by Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades operatives. The video shows constructing tunnels and lining their walls with concrete slabs (Safa, June 8, 2015). Hamas allotted exaggerated amounts of cement to the construction of the tunnels despite the shortage in Gaza at the time.**

► To place obstacles in Hamas' path to military buildup, which is based on the smuggling of weapons and raw materials intended for military use, **Israel has been forced to institute close supervision of the sea lanes and overland routes leading to Gaza.** In addition, **Egypt also closely supervises the movement of Palestinians leaving and entering the Gaza Strip through the Rafah Crossing.** Egypt has also neutralized the extensive system of tunnels leading from the Gaza Strip to the Sinai Peninsula, which was used to smuggle weapons and infiltrate terrorist operatives. Hamas' response to the increased control of the routes into the Gaza Strip has **been a propaganda campaign to accuse Israel of imposing a "siege" on Gaza.** Hamas considers "breaking the siege" its most important challenge, and the demand to lift the "siege" serves as the excuse for its propaganda campaign against Israel, accompanied by threats to use force to lift it.