



# PERSPECTIVES

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## Why Israel Must Have Victory in Gaza

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** While Israel cannot achieve total military victory against the Hamas, there are many kinds of victories it can achieve during the long period before the Palestinians change enough to make peace possible. Concerning the current Gaza battle, victory means forcing the Palestinians to stop regularly firing missiles into Israel; and this is a victory that is existential for Israel.

We need to start with a simple view of the Gaza problem. The problem was that Palestinians were firing rockets from Gaza to nearby Israeli cities and settlements. Israel needs to stop the firing – or else it will get worse. That’s why Israel went to war last Saturday. Israel will have won the war if after it is over there is no further steady stream of rocket attacks. On the other hand, if when the war is over the rocket firing soon continues it will mean that Israel lost.

Many people have had the correct insight that Israel cannot achieve victory over the Palestinians, but they are confused into thinking that Israel cannot win any victory. Israel cannot win a complete victory over the Palestinians like the victory the US achieved over Germany and Japan in 1945; mainly because Israel cannot usefully occupy and rule the Palestinians for the long run, nor for long enough to be able to change their society into one that is ready to live in peace with Israel. And of course Israel cannot destroy the Palestinians.

Therefore after any war, Palestinian enemies will still be there seeking ways to attack Israel, and Israel will have to live with the continued existence of the Palestinians on our borders. That is the correct insight about no possibility of victory.

However, there are three ways Israel can win an important and critical victory over the Hamas. One is if Hamas is being hit so hard that it does not think it can accept further losses and therefore calls for a ceasefire and agrees that it will see that there are no more missile attacks on

Israel from Gaza. This is very unlikely, especially because Hamas does not appear to be troubled by the pain of the citizens of Gaza. But if they did this it would be a victory even if it only stopped the missiles for six months, provided that Israel was prepared to attack Gaza again as soon as they started firing missiles again.

We often will have to make do with temporary victories. Our basic task is to defeat each and every kind of attack that the Palestinians devise. Each of our victories will lead, some time later, to a new Palestinian attack which must be defeated in turn. This will not continue forever, but it will continue until the Palestinian society or politics changes and/or the political environment that now supports the Palestinian war against us changes. Those changes will happen and when they do there will be a chance to achieve peace. In the meantime we must go from victory to victory.

A second way Israel can win this battle is if its attacks so weaken and embarrass Hamas that it loses its control over Gaza. This is too difficult an objective to be used to guide Israel's policy. It may be a by-product of Israel's pursuit of victory; it should not be the goal.

The third way Israel can achieve victory, the one that is the only practical goal for Israel, is to fight until we achieve enough control in Gaza so that missile attacks from Gaza are as difficult for the Gazans as suicide bombings from Judea and Samaria are for West Bankers.

Israel does not occupy Judea and Samaria, but it operates there enough so that it prevents almost all suicide bombing attacks – despite continued Palestinian attempts. This kind of victory will be very difficult to achieve in Gaza. It will require many months with intermittent hard fighting and many casualties on both sides. These great costs are only justified because this victory is necessary for Israel's survival.

Two questions can be raised. First, can Israel really achieve this victory? Second, is it really necessary; isn't there an easier way to achieve victory, that is, to stop the missile fire?

I am no military expert, but this is not a hopeless battle. When Operation Defensive Shield was begun most experts thought that it was a hopeless cause. Israel achieved unprecedented success, developing its tactics as it went along. In some ways Gaza is much harder -- the civilian population is denser, and Hamas has accumulated more and better weapons than the West Bankers had. But some factors make Gaza easier. It is smaller and the terrain is flatter. It is mostly or all in range of Israeli artillery in Israel.

Nevertheless, it doesn't matter whether the job is easier or harder; it has to be done. Therefore Israel must do it. Otherwise, Israel can't survive in this region.

Might there be an easier way? Nobody can be sure. One can imagine all sorts of clever tactics designed to enable the Palestinian Authority to replace Hamas, or to bring in foreign forces to prevent Hamas from firing missiles, or to get a wonderful UN Security Council resolution, or whatever. Unfortunately the evidence is that none of this will work, and any false try will be very damaging.

No foreign force will stop Hamas from firing missiles at Israel – even if they try. Hamas is very determined and willing to take casualties to fire missiles at Israel. No foreign force will be as determined or as willing to take casualties as the Gazans are. It doesn't take much to launch 20 missiles a week. Therefore international forces will not be able to prevent missile firings.

Controlling Gaza enough to prevent missile firings is just too big and dirty and dangerous a job for anybody to do except Israel; as is preventing arms smuggling across the borders. And Israel is the one country that has learned – in Judea and Samaria – how to do what is needed, which involves coordinated efforts by military and covert forces.

Achieving the control of Gaza necessary to prevent missile firings will have a second powerful advantage for Israel. It will demonstrate to everyone that Israel is still – or again – capable of doing whatever is required to win the battles it needs to win to protect the country. It will show what some have come to doubt, that we are prepared to take whatever casualties, and whatever international condemnation, that we have to take to achieve our military missions, and we will undertake whatever military mission is necessary to protect our country.

When we demonstrate these things, perhaps several times because of previous lapses, we will face many fewer attacks.

We should not kid ourselves that this prescription will be easy or free from danger. The Palestinians have prepared many new ways to kill Israeli troops that enter Gaza, and some of them will succeed until Israel figures out how to cope with them. And despite our best efforts there will be many Palestinian civilian casualties and much suffering by the Palestinian population. There may well be a new attack by missiles from Lebanon forcing Israel to fight a two-front war again – and for much of the country to live for some time under attack by missiles. But we will either stop missile firing now, or we will have harder challenges in the future.

Israel can win because it must win, regardless of the cost. There is no substitute for this victory.

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