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"The War in Gaza: Tactical Gains, Strategic Defeat?" by Cordesman

Sunday, January 11th, 2009

[The War in Gaza: Tactical Gains, Strategic Defeat?](#)

By Anthony Cordesman

January 9, 2009

[After summarizing Israel's significant tactical achievements in Gaza during the two weeks since its invasion, Cordesman puts the whole situation in proper strategic perspective:]

. . . . the growing human tragedy in Gaza is steadily raising more serious questions as to whether the kind of tactical gains that Israel now reports are worth the suffering involved. As of the 14th day of the war, nearly 800 Palestinian have died and over 3,000 have been wounded. Fewer and fewer have been Hamas fighters, while more and more have been civilians.

These direct costs are also only part of the story. Gaza's economy had already collapsed long before the current fighting began and now has far greater problems. Its infrastructure is crippled in critical areas like power and water. This war has compounded the impact of a struggle that has gone on since 2000. It has reduced living standards in basic ways like food, education, as well as medical supplies and services. It has also left most Gazans without a productive form of employment. The current war has consequences more far-reaching than casualties. It involves a legacy of greatly increased suffering for the 1.5 million people who will survive this current conflict.

It is also far from clear that the tactical gains are worth the political and strategic cost to Israel. At least to date, the reporting from within Gaza indicates that each new Israeli air strike or advance on the ground has increased popular support for Hamas and anger against Israel in Gaza. The same is true in the West Bank and the Islamic world. Iran and Hezbollah are capitalizing on the conflict. Anti-American demonstrations over the fighting have taken place in areas as "remote" as Kabul. Even friends of Israel like Turkey see the war as unjust. The Egyptian government comes under greater pressure with every casualty. The US is seen as having done virtually nothing, focusing only on the threat from Hamas, and the President elect is getting as much blame as the President who still serves.

One strong warning of the level of anger in the region comes from Prince Turki al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia. Prince Turki has been the Saudi ambassador in both London and Washington. He has always been a leading voice of moderation. For years he has been a supporter of the Saudi peace process and an advocate of Jewish-Christian-Islamic dialog. Few Arab voices deserve more to be taken seriously, and Prince Turki described the conflict as follows in a speech at the opening of the 6th Gulf Forum on January 6th, "The Bush administration has left you (the incoming Obama administration) a disgusting legacy and a reckless position towards the massacres and bloodshed of innocents in Gaza... Enough is enough, today we are all Palestinians and we seek martyrdom for God and for Palestine, following those who died in Gaza." Neither Israel nor the US can gain from a war that produces this reaction from one of the wisest and most moderate voices in the Arab world.

This raises a question that every Israeli and its supporters now needs to ask. What is the strategic purpose behind the present fighting? After two weeks of combat Olmert, Livni, and Barak have still not said a word that indicates that Israel will gain any grand strategic benefits, or tactical benefits much larger than the gains it made from selectively striking key Hamas facilities early in the war. In fact, their silence raises haunting questions about whether they

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will repeat the same massive failures made by Israel's top political leadership during the Israeli-Hezbollah War in 2006. Has Israel somehow blundered into a steadily escalating war without a clear strategic goal or at least one it can credibly achieve? Will Israel end in empowering an enemy in political terms that it defeated in tactical terms? Will Israel's actions seriously damage the US position in the region, any hope of peace, as well as moderate Arab regimes and voices in the process?

To be blunt, the answer so far seems to be yes. To paraphrase a comment about the British government's management of the British Army in World War I, lions seem to be led by donkeys. If Israel has a credible ceasefire plan that could really secure Gaza, it is not apparent. If Israel has a plan that could credibly destroy and replace Hamas, it is not apparent. If Israel has any plan to help the Gazans and move them back towards peace, it is not apparent. If Israel has any plan to use US or other friendly influence productively, it is not apparent.

As we have seen all too clearly from US mistakes, any leader can take a tough stand and claim that tactical gains are a meaningful victory. If this is all that Olmert, Livni, and Barak have for an answer, then they have disgraced themselves and damaged their country and their friends. If there is more, it is time to make such goals public and demonstrate how they can be achieved. The question is not whether the IDF learned the tactical lessons of the fighting in 2006. It is whether Israel's top political leadership has even minimal competence to lead them.

POSTED BY JOSHUA AT 12:02 AM | [PERMALINK](#) | [PRINT](#) |
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1. DANIEL said:

I find it intriguing that the person who posted this article has left out the article Synopsis. For the sake of intellectual honesty, I believe this part should have been included in order to maintain the logical flow of thought and to present the reader with a complete analysis. Notwithstanding that a link has been provided, yet I still see no reason why only part of the article should be copied and pasted. A link would have been sufficient. I think it is important to include this Synopsis at least for those readers who do not bother to follow the link. So here it is:

"Synopsis:

The Israeli-Hamas War, and there is little else that it can be called, has now lasted two weeks. Israeli jets have flown some 800 strike sorties, and the IDF has pushed deep into Gaza. Israel also continues to report tactical gains. The IDF spokesman reported that the fighting on the war's 14th day continued the second phase of the ground operation throughout the strip, "with infantry, tank, engineering, artillery and intelligence forces operating in large numbers throughout the Gaza Strip, with the assistance of the Israel Air Force and Israel Navy." He summarized the result as follows:

"The Navy, Air Force and Artillery Corps continued to assist the ground forces throughout the Gaza Strip, striking Hamas targets, groups of gunmen and terrorists identified in rocket launching areas and located near the forces.

...The IAF attacked a number of targets, based on IDF and ISA intelligence, including the house of Yaser Natat, who was in charge of the rocket firing program in the Rafah area, and the house of Muhammad Sanuar, the commander of the Hamas "Han Yunus Brigade". In addition, the IAF struck approximately 60 targets throughout the Gaza Strip, including:

A mosque used as a weapons storage facilities and as a meeting place for Hamas terror operatives

A Hamas Police structure

Fifteen tunnels used by Hamas terror operatives against IDF forces, some of which were located under houses

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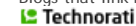
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Ten weapons storage facilities

A number of armed gunmen

Fifteen launching areas and underground launching pads used to fire mortar shells at IDF forces

. . . The Israeli Navy operated in front of Deir El Balah in the Central Gaza Strip, targeting Hamas rocket launching sites.

The IDF will continue to operate against the Hamas terror infrastructure in the Gaza Strip according to its operational plans in order to reduce the rocket fire on the south of Israel."

No one should discount these continuing tactical gains, or ignore the fact that Hamas' rocket and mortar attacks continue to pose a threat. Nearly 600 rounds hit Israeli territory between December 7th and January 9th. It is also clear that there are no good ways to fight an enemy like Hamas that conducts attrition warfare while hiding behind its own women and children. A purely diplomatic response that does not improve Israel's security position or offer Palestinians hope for the future is equivalent to no response at all.

The fact remains, however, that the growing human tragedy... (Now go back and read the rest of the article copied and pasted in the main post)"

Cordesman however, has not given justice to the Israeli strategic objectives behind this war that will definitely be achieved once the war ends. It is obvious Israel is making an un-equivocal statement that it will not tolerate an Iranian controlled Hamas ruled enclave on its southern borders by conducting the war on this scale. There is no doubt that when the war ends, a new political reality will emerge in the region which would very much serve Israeli national interests. Without giving any supporting data, Cordesman contends "At least to date, the reporting from within Gaza indicates that each new Israeli air strike or advance on the ground has increased popular support for Hamas and anger against Israel in Gaza." The Institute for Near Eastern Studies conducted a poll of Gazans just after the war erupted. It found more than 60% of Gazans believe that Hamas has made an error by refusing to extend the truce. Furthermore, reports indicate that Palestinians and Arabs view Hamas as an organization which has only succeeded in creating dissension and divisions among the Palestinians and the Arabs. The future of Hamas as a viable political organization is now very bleak as a result of its mismanagement of the so-called Palestinian cause and particularly in its refusal to come out clearly in recognizing the State of Israel.

The so-called front states that have done little more than verbal support for the Hamas cause will surely come under fire from Muslim and Arab masses and they will appear as the main culprits behind the demise of Hamas. They will also be blamed for the unjustified and senseless losses of life and property since they have provided the encouragement and instigation for Hamas through the Palestinian leaders under their control to persist in such escalation. Iranian Supreme leader Khamenei has just announced to would be Iranian volunteer fighters that there is nothing they could do and he advised them that they should go back to their homes. Now, if that is not betrayal of Hamas on the part of its staunchest ally, then I don't know what betrayal is. In addition, Syria's position in some possible future talks with Israel will be much weaker. As Hamas disappears from the arena, there will be less pressure on Israel to offer concessions to the Syrians. In addition, there will be more incentives to follow the Israeli/Palestinian track rather than the so-called Syria/Israeli one.

If these gains are not strategic, then I would kindly ask Cordesman to provide a lecture on strategy.

[January 11th, 2009, 4:44 am](#)

2. NORMAN said:

If Israel fails in achieving it's goals , It can use that to convince it's people that peace on equal footing is their only chance to survive and that military power has no chance in achieving peace for Israel.

Any thoughts?.

[January 11th, 2009, 5:21 am](#)

3. CHRIS said:

It appears that the number of Qassam rockets has been declining so maybe it will all end fairly soon.

[January 11th, 2009, 10:30 am](#)

4. JOE M. said:

Chris,
You are shockingly naive (again) if you think this attack has anything to do with Palestinian rockets. Also, there is nothing that can stop Palestinians from

shooting rockets now, with the lone exception that we don't know how large their supplies of rockets is(though they don't seem hard to make, and will come back in due time). This is a battle about the existence of resistance to Israel. Israel can not tolerate any rejectionist group to become powerful/popular (they have worked too long and hard to gain their "legitimacy"). And in this way, Israel is digging it's own grave by murdering so many palestinians. It will just formalize resistance even more.

Norman,

Israel will not achieve its goals. 1) their goals are unclear, 2) they can't stop rockets, 3) resistance groups will emerge more popular than ever. But this will not change Israel's tactics in any way, because it has put too much effort into solidifying itself militarily. they simply can't accept an explicit defeat, they believe they are facing an "existential threat". So, regardless of what happens militarily, Israel will claim it succeeded enough. Then, we will watch what happens to Israel politically. The right will move together more (religious, nationalist and fanatic right-wing parties will come even closer together) and the center will try to present itself as the "peace" (more like desperation) camp (Labor and Kadima may even become a single party and argue for "negotiations") and the moderate center will still dangle around as the new maretz or something...

But these forces are becoming increasingly intractable for Israel, and it is possible that the state simply implodes or pulls itself apart. And Avram Burg is looking more and more accurate every day (though, from a very arrogant perspective, and using too narrow of a view. But on the right track).

[January 11th, 2009, 11:31 am](#)

5. [QUNFUZ](#) said:

"Prince Turki has been the Saudi ambassador in both London and Washington. He has always been a leading voice of moderation. For years he has been a supporter of the Saudi peace process and an advocate of Jewish-Christian-Islamic dialog. Few Arab voices deserve more to be taken seriously"

It's this kind of thing that really makes me sick. Jewish-Christian-Islamic dialogue? But Bibles are illegal in Saudi Arabia, and so is the very presence of Jews! There's no religious dialogue, only a craven excuse for normalisation with the settler state. 'Voice of moderation'? Saudi Arabia is the least 'moderate' state on earth. What the author means is 'voice of collaboration.'

[January 11th, 2009, 12:02 pm](#)

6. [QUNFUZ](#) said:

O here we go again. The general idea of the article is fine, if obvious. But the usual rubbish about "moderate Arab states". Does this really help anyone understand or achieve anything? And the IDF is "Lions led by donkeys." I wouldn't describe these spoilt war criminals as lions. I'd describe them as war criminals.

[January 11th, 2009, 12:08 pm](#)

7. [CHRIS](#) said:

Joe M,

You wrote:

You are shockingly naive (again) if you think this attack has anything to do with Palestinian rockets.

-

I really don't appreciate personal insults. The strength of your argument does not come from the vitriol of your insults... About the rockets, or any violence by Hamas against Israel: I do believe that if Hamas said we will no longer engage in violence against Israel, Israel would have few reasons to attack it. That's what peace is, making clear a desire to no longer to attack or destroy the other party, but rather, aiming to coexist. So, I do think this is about the rockets, or the suicide bombings.

[January 11th, 2009, 12:17 pm](#)

8. [AVERROES](#) said:

Qunfuz,

Well said. Just look at the odds. These criminals are using jet fighters, chopper battleships, navy, heavy artillery, monstrous tanks facing a virtually unarmed people who have been besieged, hungered, and battered for years.

I think the donkeys are those rulers in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, and I think that one lesson out of this war is that these rulers must be overthrown and changed.

[January 11th, 2009, 12:31 pm](#)

9. [QUNFUZ](#) said:

Chris - I don't Joe's was much of an insult - he was pointing to the naivety of your argument. And you might find people more willing to put up with your naivety and orientalism (what was that about the problems of the Arabs meeting the modern world?) if Palestinians weren't being murdered on such a scale by American bombs. Gaza is occupied territory. The occupied have a right to resist. The occupier, however, does not have a right to defense. This is according to the principles of international law and lawfulness. True that the settlers were removed from Gaza, but Gaza remains occupied, surrounded by a fence, with no sovereignty. And even if there was no fence around Gaza, if there were no Israeli incursions, if the Gazans had their own working airport and port and passport, the Palestinians in the West Bank, and the Palestinians in exile, and the Palestinians with Israeli passports who live in 'unrecognised villages' in a state that declares itself as the homeland of the Jews, not of its citizens, would not have had their respective problems addressed.

I've made a resolution to speak plainly. So here it is: I, like the vast majority of Arab people and an increasing number of Jews and Westerners, do not recognise Zionist Israel's right to exist in the land of the Palestinians. I recognise the existence of several million Hebrew-speaking Israeli Jews who were born in Palestine and consider it home. It is neither possible nor morally right to drive out or kill all these people. Therefore, as soon as there is a serious attempt to settle the conflict, either on the basis of a one-state or two-state solution (I don't think the two-state solution is viable for anything beyond a cooling-off period, but I'll support it if it is seriously offered), I will support peace. But, as far as the Palestinians are concerned, there has never been a serious Israeli or US peace offer. There has only been ethnic cleansing, apartheid, occupation and massacres.

And the latest ceasefire, on point of fact, was violated by Israel, not Hamas.

Why should Palestinians stop firing rockets at the people who live in their homes while they are herded into camps, at the people who starve them, who think of them as untermenschen? They shouldn't. They should fire more, and better. Any power with a conscience should be aiming to arm the Palestinians better, as the world should have armed the great fighters of the Warsaw ghetto.

But that's enough. I must work.

[January 11th, 2009, 1:23 pm](#)

10. [QUNFUZ](#) said:

http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/01/10/no_other_option/

Coffee House
No Other Option?!

By Sam Bahour - January 10, 2009, 4:11PM

I watch in shock, like the rest of the world, at the appalling death and destruction being wrought on Gaza by Israel; and still it does not stop. Meanwhile, we see a seemingly never-ending army of well-prepared Israeli war propagandists, some Israeli government officials, and many other people self-enlisted for the purpose, explaining to the world the justifications for pulverizing the Gaza Strip, with its 1.5 million inhabitants. Curious about how Israel, or any society for that matter, could justify a crime of such magnitude against humanity, I turned to my Jewish Israeli friends today to hear their take on things. One after another, the theme was the same. The vast majority of Jewish Israelis has apparently bought into the state-sponsored line that Israel was under attack and had no other option available to stop Hamas' rockets. More frightening is the revelation that many Israelis-including one person who self-identifies as a former "peace activist"-are speaking of accepting the killing of 100,000 or more Palestinians, if need be.

I have a problem with this logic.

I am a Palestinian American based in Al-Bireh, the sister city of Ramallah in the West Bank. I can see how an observer from abroad could be blind to the facts, given the blitz of Gaza war propaganda orchestrated by the Israeli military. But I know better. Like all other Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, I am not an observer from abroad. We live every day under the bitter burden of Israeli military occupation and we know that this question, presented as rhetorical-did we really have an option? -has a rational answer. Allow me, from my vantage point as an economic development professional, to touch on some of the other options that could have been chosen. Moreover, many of them will be forced on Israel anyway, sooner or later, whether after the next "war," or in the coming days under the ceasefire agreement and the Egyptian-sponsored implementation mechanism being discussed as I write this. Meaning: all this death and destruction could have been easily avoided.

Dear Israeli citizen, short of ending the occupation, you could have:

1. Opted to agree on how to disagree: There are two bodies of law that deal with international relations in this world, International Law and the Law of the Jungle. Until today, your government-and maybe you-refuse to accept the global consensus that the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are all militarily occupied territory. The occupying power is Israel-as attested in dozens of United Nations resolutions over the past four decades. By ignoring this fact that Israel is an occupying power, thus removing (unsuccessfully, of course) any internationally recognized baseline for the conflict, you have created an environment that can only be described as the "Law of the Jungle," where might is right and where, as we see in Gaza now, anything goes. You could have accepted international humanitarian law, as stipulated in the Fourth Geneva Conventions regulating occupations, and avoided many of the seemingly impossible positions you find yourself in today: from the albatross of the settlement enterprise to the reality of missile attacks from the Gaza Strip.

2. Opted to allow for an international presence in the occupied territory: For over 30 years - yes, 30 years! - the Palestinians have begged the international community to create and maintain a serious presence in the occupied territory, something to stand between us and protect the civilians on both sides. Israel repeatedly refused to consider this. Instead your government chose to deal with the Palestinian territory as if it was its own, always behaving in line with its meta-objective: getting a maximum of Palestinian geography with a minimum of Palestinian demography. You could have avoided dealing directly with the natural reaction of any occupied people to resist their occupation, by allowing international players to get involved and serve as a sort of referee between you and those you are occupying militarily.

3. Opted to accept lawful non-violent resistance to your occupation: For over 40 years, Palestinians have tried everything to remove the Israeli boot of occupation from our necks (all documented, for anyone interested enough to do the research): tax revolts, general strikes, civil disobedience, economic development, elections, and on and on. Your response every time was to rely on violence, on control; your message was that you respect nothing other than your own desires. Your children on the front line in Gaza may be too young to recall, but you might remind them, so that they will at least be informed as they march ahead to your drummers: Let them know you deported duly elected mayors back in the 1980s; let them know that you closed down entire Palestinian universities for years on end; let them know that you have imprisoned over 650,000 Palestinians since your occupation began, creating a virtual prison university for the resistance movement and stunting any possibility for a new leadership to arise; let them know that even after Oslo you prohibit, to this day, Palestinians from building fully independent utilities-not only in Gaza, but in the West Bank as well. You could have tried a little harder to understand that people under occupation do not throw flowers and rice at their occupiers and resolve to surrender to a slow death.

4. Opted to accept the results of Palestinian democracy: For Palestinians, and believe it or not Israelis too, the best thing that happened in the recent past was when Hamas was chosen in peaceful elections to take over the governance of Palestine. Prior to those elections, where was Hamas? They were in their underground bunkers carrying out atrocities that were disrupting your daily agenda-and mine-with absolutely no accountability whatsoever. When they accepted the Oslo process and ran for office and were duly elected, they stopped, for all intent and purpose, attacking inside Israel (by which I mean, inside the Green Line). Your citizens become significantly safer! Your government (and the U.S.) responded by refusing to accept the results of our elections and imposed sanctions on the elected Palestinian government. This was long before any violent infighting took place in Gaza between Hamas and Fatah. How did the Palestinians react to your intransigence? They pressed Hamas to replace its Hamas-only government with a unity government that had all the significant Palestinian political factions represented. You were thus presented with an accountable body that encompassed all Palestinian political flavors. Your government again responded by refusing to accept the results of our elections and continued with sanctions against the Palestinian government, repeating over and over the mantra that "there is no partner." Beyond that, the Israeli government intensified its campaign of assassinating and arresting Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank and introduced a whole new range of draconian punitive measures against the Palestinian public at large. Like what, you ask? Well, one such measure was that your government began blocking foreign nationals-people like me-from entering or doing business in the occupied territory, thus hindering any real chance to create a new, forward-looking reality. You could have accepted Palestinian democracy instead of propping up your own version of a failed Palestinian leadership.

5. Opted not to interfere in Palestinian internal politics: When Hamas violently struck at Fatah in Gaza-for reasons that have been well documented elsewhere-your government chose to punish all 1.5 million Palestinians by installing a hermetic seal on Gaza and allowing only a trickle of normal traffic to go in or out, meeting only a small fraction of Gaza's needs. Lest you

suspect me of indulging in empty clichés, I shall explain. International agencies have estimated that Gaza's daily basic needs amount to 450 truckloads a day. For 18 months prior to your aggression on Gaza, your government allowed 70 truckloads a day on average. Yes, seventy! And these were allowed to enter only when the border crossings that you control were open, which was only 30% of the time. You could have chosen not to use food, medicine, education, cement, water, electricity, and so forth, as tools of repression. If you saw yourselves accurately as the occupying power you are, you could have kept in place a lawful security regime on the borders without creating a humanitarian disaster which led to irrational acts (such as missiles being lobbed over the border) by those you tried to starve into submission. You could have made a firm distinction between your political desires and your humanitarian obligations as an occupying power.

This list could go on and on.

The fact of the matter is that you had a long list of options open to you! So many, indeed, that it boggles the mind that your government has apparently been able to blind you to all of them...so that today, as the bombs shriek over Gaza, you can say, and evidently sincerely mean it: We had no other option.

Nevertheless, even with all these options effectively invisible to you, there is nothing on this earth-not law, not politics, not even a desperate and lengthy campaign of rockets creating widespread fear and even some civilian deaths on your side of the border-there is nothing that can justify, by Israel or any other country on this earth, the decision to opt for a crime against humanity as your chosen response. Nothing!

You accepted your government's path to separate unilaterally from occupied Palestinians; you accepted an illegal barrier to be built on confiscated Palestinian lands; you accepted a unilateral disengagement that simply redeployed your occupation from the heart of Gaza to its perimeter, on land and sea and in the air, rather than actually removing it; you accepted the continuing expansion of your settlements and their systematic harassment of their Palestinian neighbors while talking peace; you accepted, and sadly continue to accept, a consensual blindness to the fact that the majority of Palestinians live as refugees, far from your occupation (practically, not geographically), and feel much more rage than you have lately been creating in the Gaza Strip. I urge you to stop acquiescing in this policy of managed unreality. I urge you to open your eyes and wake up. If not for our sake, then for your own.

You may not see us over the Separation Wall you built; you may not see us from the cockpits of your F-16s or from the inside of your tanks; you may not see us from the command and control center in the heart of Tel Aviv as you direct your pilots to launch their ton of munitions over our heads. Still, I can assure you of one thing. Until you wake up and demand that your leaders choose a different path, a path toward a life as equals and neighbors instead of trampler-on and trampled-on, you and your warrior sons and daughters will continue to see us-all of us, living and dead-in your nightmares, where we will continue to demand peace with justice.

Sam Bahour is a management consultant and entrepreneur living in Ramallah; he is co-editor of "Homeland: Oral History of Palestine and Palestinians," and blogs at epalestine.blogspot.com.

[January 11th, 2009, 1:39 pm](#)

11. ALIA said:

Chris,

You say you are a student. Then behave like one! Study with an open-mind and learn from the facts not from a prejudiced preconceived state of mind-

As I remember it, during your last visit to Damascus, you had no meaningful contacts to learn anything from, and you keep repeating the tired arguments of the Orientalists. What do you hope to achieve for yourself in the final analysis.. little ego victories on an internet forum?

Had you been a better sort of student I would have been more than happy to introduce you to people you could learn something from, for now keep it up with the sorry AP.

[January 11th, 2009, 1:41 pm](#)

12. QUNFUZ said:

A couple of texts for Chris: Avi Schlaim: The Iron Wall and Ilan Pappé: The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

[January 11th, 2009, 1:50 pm](#)

13. SHAI said:

Qunfuz, Sam Bahour is right. His article should be read by every single Israeli citizen.

[January 11th, 2009, 1:53 pm](#)

14. IDAF said:

More on the strategic defeat from Zvi Ba'arel..

[Where have our friends gone?](#)

By Zvi Ba'arel

Haaretz

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan asked to speak with his Israeli counterpart Ehud Olmert just before the start of Israel's offensive in Gaza. Olmert avoided Erdogan because he did not want to tell the Turkish premier about the coming attack. He did not want to be in Menachem Begin's situation when Begin spoke to Egyptian president Anwar Sadat one time in 1981 and did not tell him Israel was about to attack Iraq's nuclear reactor. As a result, Erdogan was enraged and insulted. Turkish sources say Erdogan's campaign of insults against Israel in recent weeks is a reaction to this.

"Israel is the biggest provoker of terror in the world," the Turkish justice minister accused. Erdogan no longer wants to talk to Olmert, ties between Ankara and the Israeli ambassador have been cut off, an Israeli basketball team was attacked by fans in Ankara and Israeli tourists are advised to hold off on trips to Turkey. "Being in Ankara feels like being in a hostile Arab country," an Israeli official stationed in Turkey told Haaretz.

In Jordan, Prime Minister Nader al-Dahabi gave a speech in parliament asking to "re-evaluate ties between Israel and Jordan," the first time this has happened since the two countries made peace. No denials or corrections were issued. "Jordan and Israel have important mutual interests," an Israeli foreign ministry official said indifferently. Do they? Does that argument take into account Jordan's delicate position regarding the Palestinians, Hamas or its general public? How does that official respond to the Jordanian ambassador's return to Amman?

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Qatar, which is on the list of moderate countries, still allows in Israeli representatives and holds talks with Israel, but it is now closer to the Syrian-Iranian axis than the Saudi-Egyptian one. Of all the cease-fire initiatives, Qatar favors the one by Syria, which supports Hamas. Qatar favors this over the Egyptian proposal. Saudi Arabia, another moderate, has started to talk about "turning its back" to its peace initiative unless the international community stops Israel.

Just three weeks ago the regional leaders were euphoric. Turkey spoke about continuing mediation between Israel and Syria, and its president was about to visit Jerusalem; Syria talked about direct negotiations with Israel; Jordan was steadfast in its traditional position of guaranteed friendship with Israel; the foreign ministers of Qatar and Israel acted like best buddies; and Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal said his country had no intention of abandoning the Saudi peace initiative just because the Israeli right was benefiting from it.

Such scenes have disappeared. Even our friendly partner, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, has cut his ties. Israel is again in a familiar situation: a threatened state, not speaking to any of its neighbors and not willing for anyone to waste its time with talks.

Short-term tactics - that's all Israel is capable of. On the issue of relations with Turkey? They'll need us when the U.S. Congress debates the massacres of the Armenians. Upset Jordanians? They get water from us and signed a free trade agreement with the United States thanks to us. Qatar? It leans on our U.S. ally for support. Now it wants to join the axis of evil? And Syria too is turning its back on us? We've told everyone there is no partner for peace. Our key industry is war, not peace or talks with our neighbors. We want only want Arabs as enemies.

For a moment it seemed like we convinced ourselves that ties with the Arabs were not important until it turned out we needed Egypt's help to solve our "problems" with Hamas, and that Qatar helped solve the crisis in Lebanon. And Jordan is able to keep the border safe and until only recently we wanted so badly to meet with the Saudi king.

And there's one more small, pestering problem keeping us from enjoying our indifference toward our neighbors. Who has gained so far from the situation? So far it is Hamas, which can claim to have undermined greatly Israel's ties with Turkey, Jordan and Qatar. And it has only just begun.

[January 11th, 2009, 2:24 pm](#)

15. IDIT said:

Chris

Keep up.

You are a light in this dark and hatefull blog.

[January 11th, 2009, 2:39 pm](#)

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