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The Need for a Decisive Israeli Victory Over Hamas

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: A decisive Israeli victory over Hamas – which means pursuing the enemy into its hideouts in Gaza urban areas and refugee camps and bringing about its surrender – is critical to rolling back the march of Islamic fundamentalist political power in the Middle East. Israel must reach a decisive victory over Hamas, and this victory must be "seen" and tangibly "felt." The defeat of Hamas must be palpable, conspicuous and concretely visible.

Since the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, Hamas has improved its capabilities of considerably harming Israel in a relatively short period of time. Every Grad missile that hits Beersheba and Ashdod testifies to this fact. The range of Hamas' missiles has increased from 12 kilometers to at least 40 kilometers in less than two and a half years.

The meaning of the enhanced Hamas capabilities in launching rockets is clear. Within two years or less, Hamas will be able to close down Ben-Gurion Airport, Israel's only large international airport. A number of rockets even within proximity of the airport will lead to a cessation of all flights by foreign carriers. Reduced air traffic will have a major effect on the Israeli economy, as well as pose a strategic danger to the country.

Hamas' enhanced ballistic capabilities have far greater political and ideological significance. Since the US occupation of Iraq, which removed the power balance against Iran, there is a widespread feeling amongst Israel's enemies

that fundamentalism is in an upsurge and winning. Radical Islamic Iran and the movements it supports, Hizballah and Hamas, are thought to be on the ascent, while the power of the United States, Israel, and moderate countries are perceived to be in interminable decline.

The facts supporting this perception are well known: Iran continues with its nuclear program unabated; Osama bin Laden is still at large; the Moslem Brotherhood registered relative success in the last Egyptian elections in 2005; Israel conducted an unsuccessful war against Hamas in 2006; Hamas politically and militarily defeated the Palestinian Authority in June 2007 by taking control of Gaza; Hamas breeched the border between Gaza and Egypt in January 2008 and demonstrated the ineptitude of the Egyptians; and Hizballah defeated Hana Siniora's government in Lebanon in the spring of 2008. Further afield, but of significance to an Arabic-speaking public, extremist Islamic forces vanquished moderate groups in Somalia.

This long line of Islamic successes contributes to the euphoria of Islamic radicalism. It is not surprising that moderate Arab states, the United States, and many European countries want and expect Israel to hit Hamas hard in this offensive.

The danger of the development of Hamas' military capability and other Islamic successes points to what should be Israel's primary goal in this offensive – a decisive blow to Hamas' organizational and military capabilities. This would be an important and long-overdue first step in rolling back the forward march of fundamentalist political Islam in the region.

The achievement of a decisive military victory requires Israel to enter Gaza City and the refugee camps with full force. Israel has to dispel the belief that it is reluctant to engage the enemy in urban areas. Israel must make it clear to Hamas that there is no bunker in Gaza that is beyond IDF reach.

In the 2002 Defensive Shield operation, the IDF indeed engaged the enemy in the West Bank. Since then, the IDF has succeeded in reducing terror in Judea and Samaria by 95 percent. Politically, the offensive brought the Palestinian Authority to the realization that the option of terror was no longer viable. The relative calm in Judea and Samaria during the present offensive in Gaza is the result of the military decisiveness of Defensive Shield and of the continuous IDF forays since then.

Winning the campaign against Hamas must be "seen" and tangibly "felt." Israel and the West need the Arab world to watch scenes on their television screens whereby hundreds of Hamas terrorists are taken prisoner. Israel must show

the surrender of at least some of the Hamas leadership as they raise white flags in defeat. The defeat of Hamas must be palpable, conspicuous and concretely visible.

Through such decisiveness Israel will be able to replicate the achievements of past military victories. After the Six Day and Yom Kippur wars, Arab states understood they would be unable to destroy Israel through war, and Defensive Shield made Fatah and the Palestinian Authority realize that terror would not bring Israel to its knees.

Today, Israel has a unique opportunity to begin this critically-needed educational process amongst Israel's extreme Islamist enemies, who comprise the last swath of opponents refusing to accept the existence of the State of Israel.

The question remains whether Israel's leadership has the courage and the nerve to persevere in the battle, despite the possible high cost and in spite of international criticism.

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