

Middle East 'Spies': A New Front for Gaza 's Conflict

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The reverberations of the Israeli war on Gaza are still felt throughout the Middle East . One could in fact speak of a silent war being waged in the region.

Now that Israel 's clear intentions in Gaza - discrediting Hamas and ultimately ousting them from their democratically elected position - resulted in utter failure, Israelis are hoping to exploit regional conflicts to rein in Hamas and other such organizations through alternative means.

In the past several years, Israel has suffered what may seem like insurmountable losses in their barrage of military conquests. In July and August of 2006, Israel unleashed its military fury against Lebanon for several weeks, with one major objective: to permanently "extract" Hezbollah as a fighting force from South Lebanon and undermine it as a rising political movement capable of disrupting, if not overshadowing, the "friendly" and "moderate" political regime in Beirut.

While the Lebanese suffered blows from which it may take years to recover, the Israeli war in South Lebanon was recognized largely as an astounding military failure, defeat even for Israel , as several thousand fairly ill-equipped Hezbollah fighters forced Israel 's multi-billion dollar military machine to retreat.

While at the time, Hezbollah had strong backing by the poor and destitute population of Lebanon , including Palestinian refugees, support from official Lebanese institutions was, at best, lacking. But the war changed all of that. Today, Hezbollah is regarded by many as the guardians of Lebanon and enjoy an unprecedented level of moral and popular support.

Israel repeated its costly mistake in Gaza late last year and earlier this year. True, Palestinians in the Strip haven't suffered the human casualties of the recent Gaza massacre since 1948. Thousands lost their lives, limbs, homes, entire families, entire neighborhoods. Concurrently, Israel and her backers were convinced that such vicious blows would certainly press a desperate population to turn on their elected government, whom Israel and the US claimed, got them into this mess in the first place.

And what a painful lesson it was. One would think that after 60 years of constant interaction with the Palestinian people, Israel would know them better. By now on might think that their durability and integrity would have been taken into strong consideration before taking such rash actions. In spite of the overwhelming death toll resulting from Israel 's butchery, Hamas garnered even stronger support and loyalty from the people of Gaza , but more, from Palestinians everywhere, the Arab and Muslim world, indeed from many places throughout the world that could no longer remain silent. Words of encouragement, admiration and

backing echoed from Latin America to South Africa to even the United States itself.

But Israel and its allies are changing tactics. And they are getting a lot of help from their neighbors. This time, they are concentrating their efforts outside of these strongholds of resistance, and going after Hezbollah and Hamas members from remote positions. Out of the blue, this week the news was inundated with reports of “spies” being apprehended in various Arab countries and other tales.

On April 10, Agencies reported that Egyptian security forces had detained 15 people over accusations that they had helped in smuggling rockets into the Gaza Strip via border tunnels, security sources claimed.

On April 12, Palestinian security officials claimed that they had uncovered a bomb-making factory underneath a mosque in the West Bank . An interior minister claimed, “Many of the bombs were ready to use and many of them were of industrial grade.”

The same day, it was reported that an Egyptian man was caught and apprehended in Sinai who was smuggling \$2 million to the Hamas leadership in Gaza .

On April 13, Israeli news interviewed Shimon Peres, who commended Egypt ’s efforts at apprehending individuals active in the Iran-backed Hezbollah infrastructure in Egypt . Peres was quoted as saying, “Sooner or later, the world will realize that Iran wishes to take over the Middle East , and that it has colonial ambitions.”

Imagine that; such comments coming from a leader of a nation who up until this point, refuses to define its borders with designs on swallowing up all of historic Palestine . Colonial ambitions indeed.

The following day, on April 14, Egyptian officials accused Hezbollah Leader, Hassan Nasrallah of fomenting sedition and state media branded him an “Iranian agent.”

One has to wonder if these sudden discoveries are related to attempts aimed at undermining various Islamic opposition groups in the region. Egypt ’s Muslim Brotherhood movement, for example, is already on the defensive, trying to shield itself from what is considered Iran-Hezbollah’s designs to ‘destabilize’ Egypt . Speaking to Al Jazeera, Abdul Munaim Abu al-Futuh, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood group’s guidance bureau stated, “We have no relations with any of those (arrested).” One can only expect the situation to worsen, and could only hope such regime-induced panic doesn’t destroy the small semblance of democracy that these nations still possess.

In Jordan , similar discoveries are also being made, Hamas members sentenced, others apprehended.

The timing of these crackdowns, the nature of the accusations and the war of words that ensued as a result makes one question the nature of these arrests, whether they are genuine security measures, or political dealings, a new symptom of the ongoing cold war in the region.

Following the war in Gaza , and earlier in Lebanon , the Middle East ’s new conflict has been that of defining the new discourse which will ultimately dominate the region’s politics: that of resistance or ‘moderation’.

The US , Israel and their ‘moderate’ allies in the region have clearly drawn lines in the sand, a notion that when reviewing recent developments simply cannot be denied.

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