

Today Gaza, Tomorrow Iran?

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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As again a ceasefire comes and goes between Hamas and Israel, "to be followed by negotiations," one cannot evade the feeling of déjà vu. It is not only the ritual announcements but the modus operandi of the war that comes across as already experienced. During this month-long war, as in 2008-2009, the aggression began with a pretext and unfolded with brutal force against civilian targets. First Gaza was cordoned off (for 18 months back in 2008, this time for 7 years), its border closed, its people penned up inside what Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino from Justitia et Pax in the earlier conflict called a "concentration camp"; then the assault began.

In addition to the officially designated military targets (rocket launchers and tunnels), a host of other locations said to be housing militants and/or munitions came under massive artillery fire and aerial bombardments.

In the 2008 conflict, all important Palestinian institutions were destroyed, 16 government offices, 25 schools, medical facilities, 20 mosques, 1500 stores and workshops and 4100 private homes. The Palestinian Human Rights Center counted 1417 Gaza residents among the dead, including 236 combatants and 255 security personnel. Other sources reported 416 children killed and 106 women, up to 6000 wounded, among them 1855 children and 795 women. Also at that time, UN installations came under fire, including UNWRA schools where civilians had sought refuge. These installations carried clearly visible UN blue and white markings, and UN authorities had repeatedly informed the Israelis of their locations and functions as refugee shelters. Not only civilians but also UN personnel were among the dead.

This time around, the precise figures will be available only after the smoke has cleared, remaining bodies have been recovered and the wounded rescued. As of the August 4th ceasefire announcement, at least 1,875 Palestinians and 64 Israeli soldiers and 3 civilians had died. The Palestinian dead included 430 children and a further 9,600 Palestinians were wounded. UNICEF estimated that 373,000 Gaza children, traumatized by the war, needed immediate psychological help.

Up to 10,000 homes were destroyed, in addition to schools, hospitals, water and energy infrastructure, etc. About 65,000 were homeless. Ban ki-Moon, visiting what remained of the UN headquarters in 2009 was "just appalled" at the "outrageous and totally unacceptable attack" against the UN. This time, he said, "the massive deaths and destruction in Gaza have shocked and shamed the world," and insisted on ending "the senseless cycle of suffering." Christopher Gunness, spokesman of UNRWA, earlier charged that the killing of

civilians in a school in Beit Lahiya might constitute “war crimes,” and this August the same man broke down in front of TV cameras. UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay told the General Assembly on August 6 that “any attacks in violation of these principles [of international law] ... may amount to war crimes.” Flags flew at half-mast throughout UN facilities.

The behavior of political leaders in the US and Europe initially echoed that of their predecessors six years ago; Israel’s “right to self-defense” had priority over all else, but officials should “do their very best to protect civilians.” It was only after Israel’s government had rejected pleas for moderation that official criticism of Israel’s aggression escalated to outright condemnation and the US apparently resorted to ultimatums, which opened the way for a 72-hour pause.

Strategic target: Iran

These parallels between the two wars, in form and content, are obvious even to the superficial observer. What is not so evident is the strategic thinking behind Israel’s periodic punitive missions against the people of Gaza. Anyone with an elementary grasp of modern warfare must acknowledge that Hamas and the armed factions in Gaza represent no existential threat to Israel – no matter how many rockets may reach Israeli territory or how many militants may crawl through underground tunnels. Israel enjoys total military superiority, both in conventional terms of weaponry and numbers of armed forces, and in respect to its nuclear capability.

The same cannot be said of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is the actual target. This statement also smacks of déjà-vu, since I have written about it on previous occasions. (See <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-target-is-iran-israel-s-latest-gamble-may-backfire/11747>)

At the risk of sounding repetitious, it is worth reviewing the concept in light of recent events.

To understand how Iran figures as the ultimate target, one has to consider Netanyahu’s Palestinian policy in the context of his regional strategic outlook.

Current Israeli policy emerges from the strategic doctrine known as the “Clean Break.” It was elaborated under the auspices of the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies in Jerusalem, and written by a task force under Dick Cheney, which included neocons Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser and wife Meyrav, among others. One of a series of strategic blueprints that Cheney et al commissioned from 1992 on in the wake of the end of the Cold War, this paper applied the broader doctrine of Anglo-American global hegemony to the Middle East region. The fundamental premise, announced in its title, was that Israel must make a “clean break” with the 1993 Oslo Accords, and revert to “a peace process (sic) and strategy based on an entirely new intellectual foundation, one that restores strategic initiative and provides the nation the room to engage every possible energy on rebuilding Zionism, the starting point of which must be economic reforms.” (<http://www.iasps.org/strat1.htm>).

The document, which deserves to be read in full, details how Israel should secure its northern border:

“Syria challenges Israel on Lebanese soil. An effective approach, and one with which America can sympathize, would be if Israel seized the strategic initiative

along its northern borders by engaging Hezbollah, Syria and Iran, as the principal agents in Lebanon....”

In addition, proxy Israeli forces might attack Syria from Lebanon, going after Syrian sites in both countries. The document proposes Israeli cooperation with Turkey and Jordan to shape the regional environment by weakening Assad and “can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq.” Regarding Palestine, it said: “Israel has a chance to forge a new relationship between itself and the Palestinians. First and foremost, Israel’s efforts to secure its streets may require hot pursuit into Palestinian controlled areas, a justifiable practice with which Americans can sympathize....”

In 1996, when Netanyahu became prime minister, he adopted the “clean break” doctrine as his own, but it was not until the neocons returned to power in Washington, and following the shock of 9/11, that it became operational. In 2003, the AngloAmerican war against Iraq did succeed in removing Saddam Hussein from power. In 2005, the Hariri murder laid the ground for “regime change by other means” in Lebanon and set Syria up for attack. The following year, Israel waged war on Lebanon, hoping to eliminate Hezbollah, as specified in the document. and in 2008 it bombed a site in Syria which it claimed was a nuclear installation.

Nuclear negotiations and conventional wars

In light of the “clean break” doctrine, every Israeli aggression in the region assumes a strategic intent, whether successfully achieved or not. Attacks against Hezbollah and Hamas have repeatedly occurred as preludes to contemplated moves against the ultimate enemy image, which is Iran. And the timing of these attacks dovetails with strategically significant developments in the relations between Tehran and the West, explicitly regarding the nuclear issue.

For example, the 2008-2009 Gaza war broke out following two years of international debate around the question of whether or not the US and/or Israel should defeat Iran’s presumed nuclear ambitions by bombing designated sites. The National Intelligence Estimate that appeared in late 2007 stated that Iran had not any military nuclear program since 2003, which should have had the effect of defusing Israeli plans for attack. However, following the report, Israel requested bunker busters from the US. In a New York Times article (http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/washington/11iran.html?_r=1&th=&emc=th&pagew)

David E. Sanger reported that then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates and other officials convinced Bush not to deliver them, on grounds that it could ignite regional war. Forces in the region that they expected to react if Iran were hit, included Shi’ite communities in the Arab Gulf states, as well as Hezbollah and Hamas.

It stands to reason that if Israel were to pursue an attack against Iran, it would seek to remove or at neutralize the most significant Iranian-backed forces in the region first, i.e. Hezbollah and Hamas. In fact, it was this consideration that was probably decisive in the Israeli decision to go to war in Lebanon in 2006, as well as the motivation behind its aggression in Gaza at the end of 2008. Significantly, one leading neocon in the US made the point explicitly. John Bolton, former US ambassador to the UN, said on December 31, 2008 that the Gaza campaign was a stepping-stone toward war against the Islamic Republic. As FOX news reported, he stated: “I don’t think there’s anything at this point standing between Iran and nuclear weapons other than the possibility of the use of military force possibly by

the United States, possibly by Israel.” He added: “So while our focus obviously is on Gaza now, this could turn out to be a much larger conflict. We’re looking at potentially a multi-front war.” Ten days later Daniel Luban wrote on antiwar.com that the neocons viewed the Gaza war as a proxy war against Iran.

There is good reason to believe Israel’s current war against Gaza aimed at preparing the terrain for finally launching its military campaign against Iran’s nuclear installations. Several factors contribute to this suggestion. Iran has been and remains Israel’s perceived strategic adversary number one. At various inflection points in the international debate about Iran’s nuclear program, Israeli’s leadership has reiterated its commitment to prevent Tehran from acquiring the capacity to produce nuclear weapons. This does not mean preventing their production, but denying Iran the technological know-how to be able to do so, if desired. The same reasoning was behind the years-long campaign by Israeli special operations to identify, target and eliminate Iraqi scientists who might possess such expertise.

For as long as it appeared that talks between the West (P5+1) and Iran were stalled and the sanctions regime not only continued but was progressively expanded, Israeli war threats were on hold. Then, with the minor, but significant breakthroughs in the most recent round of talks, the alarm bells went off in Tel Aviv. In November 2013 when negotiators announced an interim deal, Netanyahu denounced it as a “historic mistake” whose result would make the world “a much more dangerous place.” He said Israel would not feel bound by it.

In January and February 2014 during Knesset joint committee meetings on defense, it emerged that Netanyahu and Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon had ordered the IDF to make preparations for a possible strike on Iran during 2014. (<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.580701>) Speaking to AIPAC in March, Netanyahu made clear that his view was that Iran should be deprived of all nuclear programs. He said that “letting Iran enrich uranium would open the floodgates. That must not happen. And we will make sure it does not happen.” Ya’alon, according to the same Haaretz article, had told a Tel Aviv university crowd that he now favored a unilateral Israeli strike, given that he believed the US would not go ahead.

Michel Chossudovsky elaborated on the implications of the Ha’aretz article, demonstrating that if Israel did not get the green light from Washington that it desired, it could go ahead to fire the first shot, as a “proxy” for the US. Even if the Obama government remained critical, still the Pentagon’s war plans would not change. (See <http://www.globalresearch.ca/an-attack-on-iran-is-still-on-the-pentagons-drawing-board-israel-prepares-to-launch-the-first-strike/5374475>)

Pro-Netanyahu lawmakers in Washington proved that this was the case. Texas Senator Ted Cruz told the Spring National Leadership Meeting of JINSA (Jewish Institute for National Security), that if Iran were to continue progress on its nuclear program, “I have real confidence that the nation of Israel will act to preserve her national security, even if this administration will not act first.” Though declining to reveal details of his May meeting with Netanyahu in Israel, he recommended, “We should act rather than forcing Israel to act.” (<http://dailycaller.com/2014/06/10/cruz-israel-strike-against-iran-could-happen-in-a-matter-of-months/>)

At the annual Herzliya Conference in Tel Aviv in June 2014, Israeli leaders acknowledged the seriousness of the P5+1 talks. Israeli-Iranian relations, or rather tensions, were a central concern at that conference. Brigadier-General Itai Brun, the chief analyst for military

intelligence, mooted the signing of a “permanent nuclear deal” between Iran “and the world powers” before the end of the year, and acknowledged Iran was abiding by current agreements. The Israeli minister responsible for nuclear affairs, Yuval Steinitz, said he feared any agreement whereby Iran would still maintain a “threshold” capacity. Expressing opposition to the interim deal, he said he did not support extending the talks, but would prefer that to any agreement that kept the same “holes” as the interim deal. (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/06/09/uk-iran-nuclear-israel-idUKKBN0EK1D620140609>) Anthony Cordesman urged Israelis at Herzliya not to strike Iran unilaterally, and recommended that they not assume a deal with Tehran would fail even before any such agreement came into being. US Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro promised attendants that the Obama government was committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and to guaranteeing their program would remain peaceful. Yet Ya’akov Amidror, former Israeli National Security advisor, insisted that Iran would not give up and that therefore Israel had to remain prepared. (<http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140608/DEFREG04/306080015/US-Analyst-Warns-Israel-Unilateral-Attack-Iran-Better-Damn-Well-Successful->)

Further talks with Iran were to conclude by July 20, but the deadline was extended for another four months. Perspectives for real progress were real. Tom Donilan of CFR characterized the negotiations as the most important since 1979! Commentators in Germany noted that Israel was losing trust in its American ally and feared Washington would compromise with Iran. In the US, though virtually ignored by the major press, pro-Netanyahu groups launched a vigorous campaign to pressure Congress to pass yet more stringent sanctions. Meanwhile the war had broken out.

Gaza as a test case

There is another viewpoint from which to consider the Gaza war as preparatory to an anti-Iran move, and that is psychological. Many observers were shocked to see how far Netanyahu and his military would go even despite the increasingly harsh reprimands from Washington, whether in leaked telephone conversations or in public statements. Though belated, the criticism issued by German President Gauck, by UNHCR Commissioner Navi Pillay, who spoke of war crimes, by the State Department, etc. finally drew the red line. Was this a test to see how far an Israeli military campaign could proceed before the friendly superpower would say “enough”?

The link between Israel’s Gaza campaign and its Iran policy emerged in press reports. As Tom Rogan put it in the National Review, Israeli operations were not only directed at Hamas; “They’re about broadcasting specific capabilities,” to wit: “The IDF is demonstrating its capability for large-scale operations: the kind of air campaign necessary to attack Iran’s nuclear infrastructure.” He added, this was Netanyahu’s way of warning the US, Russia and Europe that he would not tolerate what he considered a “weak” agreement with Iran. (<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/382344/its-not-just-about-hamas-tom-rogan>) And TIME magazine also noted that “some analysts believe that Israel uses confrontations like this one to send a message to Tehran....” (<http://time.com/2977228/israel-iran-hamas/>)

In an interview to Breitbart News published on July 16, as the war was raging and the nuclear talks had not yet been extended, Michael Oren, a former Israeli ambassador to the US, spoke openly of the perspective of “taking on” Iran next. Considering “the possibility that Iranian nuclear negotiations go into a prolonged state, and expire,” he said, “I don’t think Israel wants to be fighting in Gaza at the same time that we take on Iran.” He thus

argued against reoccupying Gaza. Oren reiterated that Israel had always said it would act unilaterally against a perceived Iranian threat, and Breitbart commented, "The possibility of an Israeli pre-emptive strike without American approval may have increased during the Gaza conflict, as the US has called for a ceasefire rather than offering full support from the outset to Israel's response to Hamas strikes." (<http://www.breitbart.com/Big-Peace/2014/07/16/Oren-Israel-May-Take-on-Iran-when-Nuclear-Talks-Expire>)

Now that yet another ceasefire has collapsed, the dangers of broader conflict are increasing. To prevent further escalation to catastrophe, the "clean break" doctrine for Israeli regional hegemony has to be trashed, and a radically new approach must replace it. This requires political upheaval on a major scale. Michel Chossudovsky's recommendation to the Israeli people is more relevant than ever: "Remove Netanyahu, call for peace in the Middle East, implement 'regime change' in Tel Aviv."

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