



Hamas rocket attacks can't undermine move to peace between Arabs and Israelis

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The new round of violence in Israel and Gaza has led some to argue that this crisis signals the failure of the historic Abraham Accords. On the contrary – the current fighting illustrates the strategic importance of the accords and the critical need to expand them.

Warfare erupted out of a typical escalatory framework – a protest over Palestinian evictions in Jerusalem, a kerfuffle on the Temple Mount, then thousands of Hamas rockets fired from Gaza, and the inevitable Israeli air strikes in response.

Why does Hamas launch these indiscriminate rocket barrages against the Jewish state? There is no tactical purpose to the attacks, no specific military targets they seek to destroy, no fire support for a ground operation or other such ways rockets are traditionally employed. For Hamas, rockets are simply terror weapons; they send Israelis fleeing to bomb shelters, inflict material damage, and kill some Israeli civilians (so far at least ten).

Hamas' strategy and the Arab response

Hamas is betting on exploiting the strategic effects of Israel's response. Since the terrorists hide among Gaza civilians, they know that no matter how carefully Israel calibrates its counterattacks, no matter how many warnings are issued to steer clear of targeted buildings, there will probably be some loss of innocent life. And yes, there has been.

The Hamas human shield technique works best for them when Palestinians are tragically caught in the crossfire, or killed by Hamas rockets that fall short, which they also blame on Israel. Then, on cue, come the protests, the international outrage, and calls for revenge. Senior Hamas official and U.S. designated terrorist Fathi Hammad even encouraged Palestinians in Jerusalem to start decapitating Jews. This was too much for Hamas, which walked the comments back.

However, like its rockets, Hamas is falling short of its strategic goals. The Biden administration has stood up for Israel, resisting progressives in the Democratic Party who want to weaken the special relationship between the two countries. The White House is firmly backing Israel's right to self-defense, which not only legitimizes the airstrikes but paints Hamas as the aggressor, which of course it is.

Some Arab countries have decried the recent clash in Jerusalem but have been less outspoken about the Gaza conflict. There is dissension in the Arab world over how severely to criticize Israel in the face of clear aggression from Hamas. The United Arab Emirates even warned Hamas that its actions are endangering planned UAE infrastructure projects in Gaza.

The logic of the Abraham Accords explains why the response to this conflict is different. The accords recognized that the Palestinian issue has been a roadblock to regional peace for decades. Palestinian opponents of normalization with Israel only had to foment a crisis – like the one we are now seeing -- to derail whatever progress was being made and push things back to square one.

The Abraham Accords pitch was that the Arab states could no longer afford the luxury of waiting for a political resolution of the Palestinian issue. It recognized growing Arab frustration with Palestinian stubbornness; Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said in 2018 that it was time for Palestinians to "agree to come to the negotiations table or shut up and stop complaining." Meanwhile the regional economic and political ground was shifting. Arabs could either accept the existence of Israel, or risk growing economic irrelevance and Iranian domination.

The Arab states' choice is clear

The accords sought to knock the Palestinian issue out of the spotlight to encourage progress on other critical regional issues, particularly economic development and cooperation. The advantages for the Arab states were clear. Especially with declining energy prices during the Trump years, it became more important for countries in the region to seek more diversified economies. Arab countries that did not recognize Israel would be shut out from the burgeoning market opportunities the country represents. Also, there was increasing concern about Iran's push for regional hegemony and nuclear capability, which makes Israel a natural strategic ally.

The Abraham Accords were designed to remove the veto power over peace held by the most radical Palestinian factions, and the Hamas attacks demonstrate how important this is. The rocket barrages promote chaos, not progress. Hamas uses Iranian-supplied weapons, just like Tehran's other proxies in Yemen and Syria. And the radicals are trying to coerce the international community using the same discredited playbook of their violent past. In the long run they are as much a strategic threat to the Arabs as to the Israelis.

For the Arab world the choice could never be clearer; join with vibrant, modern Israel in the Abraham Accords and reap the benefits of peace and prosperity, or side with Iranian-backed Hamas terrorism and take your chances. And those moderate Palestinians who are willing to accept peace with Israel are welcome as well.

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