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Analysis

## 'Blood of martyrs' the only endgame for nihilistic Hamas

By: [Allan Levine](#)

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LEFTERIS PITARAKIS / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Palestinian boy walks past the damaged wall of a house following an Israeli missile attack Tuesday in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip.

Common sense would dictate that Hamas should halt its rocket attacks on Israel immediately and agree to a ceasefire.

Even Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, thinks so. "What are you trying to achieve by sending rockets?" he asked on Palestinian television.

He did not mention Hamas by name, but the point of his question was self-evident.

In this most recent exchange of rockets and missiles -- the third time such a major battle has occurred since Hamas assumed control of Gaza in 2006 -- Israel accepted the ceasefire proposal negotiated by Egypt, but Hamas did not.

"Our battle with the enemy is to be continued and we'll be loyal to the blood of the martyrs," Hamas' military wing, al-Qassam Brigades, declared on July 15. The Hamas rocket attacks continued as did the Israeli response and the death toll, almost all Palestinians, increased.

And so it goes in a 66-year old conflict between Jews and Arabs that will seemingly never end and will continue to cause the needless deaths of civilians on both sides. Israel has the superior military power to wipe out Hamas, but will not do so because such an action would result in the deaths of even more civilians. Instead, it warns residents of Gaza about impending attacks and accepts what arguably no other country in the world would: A hostile enemy on its border who has fired more than 10,000 deadly rockets on its people and territory. Just imagine, what would be the United States' response if Mexico began shelling Texas daily?

Whatever else has happened in more than six decades of bitter conflict in the Middle East, it always comes back to one basic fact: On Nov. 29, 1947, the United Nations voted in favour of the partition of the British Mandate for Palestine into two -- one independent state for about 500,000 Jews, but with a sizable Arab population of 400,000, and one for the 725,000 Arabs and the

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10,000 Jews residing in that territory. Jerusalem was to be maintained as an international area.

The Jews accepted the partition, while the Arabs did not. Before the UN vote, Jamal al-Husseini, vice-president of the Arab Higher Committee, the Palestinian Arab political organization, had declared to the UN General Assembly: "We are solidly and permanently determined to fight to the last man against the existence in our country of any Jewish state, no matter how small it is. We will drench the soil of our beloved country with the last drop of our blood." He was true to his word.

The inability to crush Israel in 1948 led to three more major conflicts between Israel and Arab states in 1956, 1967 and 1973. Each time, the Arabs were unable to achieve their goal of driving Israel into the sea. The remarkable Israeli victory in the Six-Day War of June 1967 resulted in an expansion of Israeli territory in all directions including the West Bank and Gaza. Two decades later, during the first intifada or uprising, Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, was founded with the expressed intent -- as it outlined in its 1988 charter -- to "obliterate" Israel. "(Peace) initiatives, the so-called peaceful solutions, and the international conferences to resolve the Palestinian problem," the charter added, "are all contrary to the beliefs of the Islamic Resistance Movement."

In subsequent years, Hamas carried out numerous suicide bombing terrorist attacks in Israel. From September 2000 to August 2005, for instance, during the second intifada, 151 such attacks by Palestinians were launched against Israel that killed 515 people and injured more than 3,500. Of these, according to research done by Efraim Benmelech, an economics professor at Harvard, and Claude Berrebi, a research economist for the RAND Corporation, Hamas was responsible for 39.9 per cent of these suicide attacks. Moreover, in the five most deadly attacks, Hamas terrorists, aged 22 to 29, were responsible for four that killed 92 people.

The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 and Hamas's success in an election in early 2006 might have been a turning point. But instead, Hamas in a symbolic move destroyed any infrastructure left behind by the Israelis -- including 3,000 greenhouses -- and permitted its military wing to begin its rocket launching campaign that has continued unabated to the present time.

This current impasse has made two facts clear. The first is that "Hamas will not recognize Israel," as Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook, deputy chairman of the Hamas political bureau, declared in April; adding that, "this is a red line that cannot be crossed."

And second, as Jeffrey Goldberg, the national correspondent for The Atlantic magazine asserted last week: "Dead Palestinians represent a crucial propaganda victory for the nihilists of Hamas. It is perverse, but true. It is also the best possible explanation for Hamas's behaviour, because Hamas has no other plausible strategic goal here."

*Allan Levine is a historian and Winnipeg writer.*

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